

Sermon for November 1, 2015 - Reformation

Psalm 46

Theme: A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

- 1) *We will not fear,*
- 2) *because the LORD is with us,*
- 3) *and He will be exalted on the earth.*

For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. According to alamothe. A song. God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. ⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. ⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah ⁸ Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. ¹⁰ "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." ¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

It was a David and Goliath moment – only with a more powerful Goliath, a weaker David and (arguably) greater stakes!

The date: April 18th, 1521. The place: Worms, Germany. On one side of the room sat the most powerful man in the world: Charles V. He ruled most of Europe and an ever increasing portion of the Americas and Africa. Next to him stood a papal legate representing the Antichrist himself. These spiritual Goliaths were ready for battle – mocking the LORD with the heresy of work-righteousness that enslaved God's people.

But there, in the middle of the room, stood the LORD's chosen David – a lowly shepherd of souls named Martin Luther. Again – think of the contrast! Charles V, backed not only by the mightiest militaries in the world but also by hell itself, faced Luther who had neither sling nor stone in his pocket!

But, like David of old, Luther had an ace up his sleeve: the LORD himself! Scripture passages like the 46th Psalm gave Luther such confidence and hope in God's protection that, shortly before this showdown took place, Luther wrote the hymn: "A Mighty Fortress is our God."

And so Luther, armed with nothing more than God's Word and promises, made his good confession. Unless proved wrong from Scripture, He refused to recant (or take back) anything he taught. "Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me."

And, as history shows, the LORD did help him. True, from a human perspective, Luther lost the battle. Charles declared him an outlaw – allowing anyone to kill him on sight. But God protected Luther and, through his teachings, won the war – allowing his Gospel to be restored to the world.

Brothers and sisters in Christ: our own American society is becoming more and more intolerant towards our Christian confession. We feel increasing pressure to compromise our faith. We may even be a little fearful of the future.

Let us, therefore, look to the Psalm Luther looked to when he was tempted to compromise his confession and give up his faith, under the theme: **A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.** *1) We will not fear 2) because the LORD is with us 3) and He will be exalted on the earth.*

Part One: We will not fear

Our sermon text begins: *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging.*

Every time I read these verses, I can't help but think back to 2004 when a single giant wave killed approximately a ¼ million people throughout South East Asia. Just think about that: one wave killing the equivalent population of Brown County! When the mighty sea swells in anger, nothing can stand in its path. When the earth quakes with its full force, what cities aren't destroyed? Hurricane Katrina, the 2010 earthquake near Haiti, the 2011 earthquake and Tsunami in Japan - even the strongest of men shudder at the thought of disasters like these.

But they shouldn't terrify us Christians. Why? Because God is our refuge and strength. The LORD promises to protect us both from and in every natural disaster. Truth be told, Jesus said that all floods, earthquakes, wars, and every other disaster you can name are signs that He is coming soon to deliver His dearly loved believers from this wicked world. Whereas unbelievers face these disasters in terror, afraid to die and meet their Maker because of their sins and unbelief, Christians remember Jesus' promise: *When these things begin to take place, stand up and lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near."*¹

"A mighty fortress is our God." He promises to protect believers from all evil. Even if we were hurt or killed in a natural disaster, God has, nevertheless, kept his promise because "*precious in the sight of the Lord, is the death of his saints.*"² Concerning the death of believers, the LORD says: *The righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.*³

God is our refuge and strength: this is why we should neither fear when the forces of nature rage against us physically, nor when the devil and world rage against us spiritually.

By God's grace we don't face the threat of physical persecution for our faith that many Christians face in other countries; but make no mistake: the devil and world rage against us. Just as Luther was on trial before the princes and powers of this earth, so we are on trial every day – tempted to lust, covet, doubt, anger and unbelief. Sometimes these temptations feel as powerful as a tsunami wave - trying to sweep us away from Christ and destroy our soul. Other times we feel like we are caught in a whirlpool of sin and guilt dragging us to despair. But against these waters, the LORD is our fortress and refuge. Through faith in the forgiveness of sins He won for us on His Cross, Christ pulls us out of these waters and sets us on the high Rock of himself, where these troubled waters can't reach us.

Yes, when the devil, world and our sinful flesh rage against us, we need not fear. The LORD is with us - directing us to find refuge and refreshment and in the calm, living water of his Word, as we read:

Part Two: Because He is with us

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. ⁵ God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day.

The river and the city of this Psalm are mentioned elsewhere in Scripture. Revelation 21 and 22 pictures the city of God coming from the heavens and having a river in it. What is the city of God? It is the Church, the total sum of all believers on earth and in heaven. At the end of time, Christ will gather all his saints together to enjoy the perfect paradise he is now preparing for us. We will live with Him, under his protection, drinking the water of life.

But understand this: we don't have to wait until heaven to live with Christ in His city, drinking the water of life. Every believer is a member of that city right now. Even though we don't see Him, Jesus is with us, as He promises: "*where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.*"⁴ And, "*I am with you always, to the very end of the age.*"⁵ Right now we can be refreshed and gladdened by the river of life. How? By looking to Jesus in faith, who once said: "*If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.*"⁶

Jesus, is the river that makes the Church (the city of God) glad. How? By channeling His grace to us through the Gospel in Word and Sacrament. By these means of grace we are connected to Christ and washed clean from all sin. In this water our guilt-parched souls find relief and we are refreshed to carry on the work of exalting his name on the earth.

Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall. This earth is in constant turmoil and will continue to be a mess until Christ's return. Wars and rumors of wars will continue until the time *he* (the LORD)

lifts his voice, [and] the earth melts. God will put an end to all the turmoil when He comes again on the Last Day

And how should we live, knowing that Christ is coming again soon? St. Peter tells us: *You ought to live holy and godly lives as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.*⁷

The LORD Almighty is with us. Notice that the Psalmist did not write the LORD Almighty “will be” with us, but rather the LORD almighty **is** with us. He **is** our fortress from every spiritual and physical evil. By means of Holy Baptism we have been adopted into His family. Through faith in Jesus’ redemptive work we stand forgiven and at peace with God. And, as St. Paul says: *If God is for us, who can be against us?*⁸. The devil, world and our own sinful flesh may try, but they will not succeed because *the God of Jacob is our fortress.* And He will not allow anything to prevent His name from being exalted on this earth.

Part Three: *And he will be exalted on the earth.*

⁸ *Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth.*

When you page through the chronicles of history – observing the great disasters that have happened in this world, understand that the LORD’s hand is in it all – guiding and directing history so as to humble the nations. He works in all things to the glory of His name – for the spread of His Gospel and the eternal welfare of His Church. This will be most clearly seen at the end of time when. . .

⁹ *He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire.*

When Christ comes to redeem his scattered Church, war will cease. There will no longer be any hostility, prejudice or hatred among his people. And why? Because sin will be gone. Every believer will be united with the *great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb,*⁹ living at peace with God and each other. Together with them we will sing God’s praises for all eternity.

Because of this, God now calls out to every Christian who is either worried or afraid, saying:

¹⁰ *"Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."*

What a wonderful promise! News reports seem to imply that there is much to worry and stress over. What is happening to our country? What is happening in our world? But through all the chaos God wants us to be still. He is in control and is working in all things to the glory of His saving name – just as He did for Luther as He stood before the imperial council in the city of Worms. God protected Luther – allowing the continued proclamation of His Gospel.

And the LORD will protect us too as we exalt his name by sharing that Gospel with our family, friends and neighbors. Sure, confessing Christ is scary – especially when our witness meets with hostility, slander or persecution. But God promises to work through our confession – even if it's rejected. His name will be exalted on this earth. The Last Day will prove it.

And so, dear Christian, as you live your life to God's glory – don't be afraid to confess your faith in Christ – even if the whole world seems against you. Take heart in Scripture's promise that gave Luther such great joy: *The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*
Amen

¹ Luke 21:28, NIV84

² Psalm 116:15, NIV84

³ Isaiah 57:1-2, NIV84

⁴ Matthew 18:20 NIV84

⁵ Matthew 28:20 NIV84

⁶ John 7:37-38 NIV84

⁷ 2 Peter 3:11b-13 NIV84

⁸ Rom 8:31, NIV84

⁹ Revelation 7:9 NIV84