

## **We Will Not Fear!**

Reformation Sunday – 10/25/20 – Mt. Calvary Luth.  
Text: Psalm 46:1-11 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 1-2a **“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear...”**.

### **Introduction**

✘ This passage; this Psalm 46 is well known to us Lutherans. It is the text that forms the basis of the great Reformation hymn *“A Mighty Fortress is Our God”*; the hymn that we just sang. Written by Martin Luther, this hymn has been a great comfort for Christians and has often been called the *“The Fight Song of the Lutheran Church”*. Not only does it recognize the real problems we face in this world because of the devil and our sinful flesh, it also provides the answers to those troubles; pointing us to the comfort and the security promised and found in Jesus as our refuge and fortress.

→ When Luther wrote his hymn he stabbed a Scriptural finger not only into the devil’s eye but also directly at the heart of the Roman Catholic Church and the government of his day because neither one was willing to accept what Luther and his fellow reformers were teaching.

✘ In fact, both the church and the government brought an uproar of trouble upon Luther and his friends.

→ You see the world at that time, not unlike our world today, was filled with plagues and death; with corruption and a focus upon man’s self-determination and power. Plus the devil’s daily presence was recognized far more by people at that time than what we have today with people conveniently sticking their heads in the sand and pretending that there is no devil or hell at all.

→ This text from the Bible before us today allows us to do no such thing. It recognizes all of these troubles and enemies – earthly and spiritual, at the same time that it clearly declare for us all the one and only God; who is “the LORD of hosts” (v.7); who is indeed *“A Mighty Fortress”*; “our refuge and strength” (v.1) in whom we can and must place our trust and through whom we can rest eternally safe.

### **I. God - our refuge in the midst of natural disasters.**

✘ And boy do we need a refuge and fortress in our lives, right? Just as it is described in Psalm 46, we have trouble all around us. It begins in verse two by describing things as if “the earth gives way” – mountains falling into the heart of the sea; waters roaring and foaming; and mountains trembling.

→ We certainly have our share of natural disasters too; hurricanes and tropical storms, tornados, mudslides, earthquakes, hail storms and right now it’s as if the entire Rocky Mountains are ablaze in wildfires.

→ Which of course sparks fears of all kinds: will we have a home to go back to after our evacuation; will this flood or these storms ruin our family memories; or ruin our retirement plans or employment or affect our health or maybe even put our lives in peril?

✘ The psalmist says that even when it seems as if the entire world is falling apart around us, “we will not fear” (v.2).

→ Oh sure, it’s easy for Christians to say that we will not fear, but let’s be real. Doubt very easily creeps in once we see others in stress or when the devil plants that uneasy seed in the

back of our minds because we face disaster. And the inevitable and resulting sin then causes fear within us.

→ This natural world is groaning before us every day in admittedly very ominous ways. Some of us are better at hiding our fear than others. But folks, none of us can fully overcome fear in the face of all the disasters that we face.

✘ However, in this psalm, God provides Himself as the answer to our fears. He is “our refuge and strength” (v.1); our “very present help” when we find ourselves in the face of “trouble” (v 1). Luther tells us in his hymn that “He’s by our side...with His good gifts and Spirit” (LSB #656:4).

→ Yes, right in the middle of trouble, that’s when the psalm paints for us an alternate picture in verses 4-5: look and see that there is “a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High”. This is talking about the place where God promises to be found – where His Word is properly preached and His Sacraments are properly administered.

→ These are the “good gifts”; the treasures where Jesus has promised to connect Himself to His people in the midst of trouble. What the psalmist and Luther together are doing is redirecting our focus away from trouble and instead to God in worship and in His church as our refuge and strength.

✘ You see, we who are in Jesus continually dwell in the “city of God” because through Jesus “God is in our midst” (v.5). Sure, the world may be captivated by the troubles of natural disasters and forget about God in fear. But in the constant presence of God we know that we “shall not be moved”. Our eyes focus not on the things of death but on the things of eternal life.

→ It’s the calming, saving waters of baptism that place us into the saving reality of Jesus’ death and resurrection so that we “do not fear” the trouble and death around us here in this life. We know that nothing can ever separate us from the loving care of our God and our place in His holy city (v.4).

✘ St. Paul describes this Christian contentment in a very helpful way in Philippians 4:11-13: “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content,” he says. “I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”.

→ Paul can say this because he understands that even while he stands in this world, he also stands in the presence of God, for the holy place of God is wherever God’s Word is proclaimed and His Sacraments are properly administered according to that Word.

→ Yes friends, it is here in Christ’s Church that we share these promises. For sure the world around us is in chaos. But once we enter into the presence of God, He speaks to us through His “good gifts” of Word and Sacrament and He is the one who restores our peace and sanity.

## **II. God is our refuge against worldly enemies.**

✘ Natural disasters though are not the only place that we face trouble. Sometimes those seem to be the least of our troubles, right? For we live in a spiritually fallen world as well. All of humanity is corrupted by sin. And that causes great anxiety and fear as we are attacked by the deceitful tricks of mankind every day.

→ Verse six says for example that “the nations rage, (and) the kingdoms totter”. We don’t have to go far to see this in our own time. For even within this nation in which we live our leaders; our citizens rage at one another in political conflict and social unrest and deep division.

→ Because of our sin, every one of us on every side of every conflict must bear the blame for our own lack of love for each other; for our unwillingness to extend compassion and forgiveness

and mutual respect. Yes, in our sin, our very existence indeed “totters” on the brink of destruction.

→ All around us there are so many murders, abortions, sexual sins, thefts, and acts of greed. People violently protest against the very foundation of what is good, right, and salutary.

- ✘ So much of the problem is that sin doesn't even understand itself to be sinful because it looks inward to its own desires; to its own self-interest. And you see sin seeks to remove anything that threatens sinful desires rather than working to remove the deadly sin itself.

### **III. God is our refuge against the powers of evil.**

- ✘ Yet there is still one more source of fear and trouble that we cannot leave unaddressed. It is the reason why people and nations rage against each other in sin. It is the devil and his demons.

→ Yes, he...they are very real and very active among us in this world; seeking to bring despair and death to God's Creation. As Luther acknowledged in his day and in his hymn, “Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us” (LSB #656:3).

- ✘ Satan is constantly on the attack in our society through secularism and generic spiritualism.

→ In secularism Satan seeks to remove God from all things; from schools; from entertainment; from our homes; from the entire world.

→ And in spiritualism the devil deceptively works to fill that void with every manner of false gods; using lies like we see when the Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses try to tell people that they are “Christian”; or when Oprah Winfrey proclaims her brand of being “a spiritual person” as a faithful alternative to Christ; or any of a host of additional cafeteria faiths out there to pick from like Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and the ever-dangerous self-made god of me/myself/I.

→ Yes, Satan's success is growing as our country continues to fall away from God and into the devil's deadly lies.

### **IV. God – our refuge!**

- ✘ Yet friends, just as it was in the midst of natural disaster, so it is in the midst of the turmoil caused by evil human powers and the devil and his demons. The psalmist today redirects our gaze in verse seven to the proper place: “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress”.

→ In the first stanza of “*A Mighty Fortress*” Luther provides one of the most powerful sermons on this Psalm 46. It reminds us that our God is a “mighty fortress ... a trusty shield and weapon” (LSB 656:1).

→ There is nothing; nothing in this world that can harm those who are in Christ Jesus. Yes, the world can torture and kill, but God has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the devil through the death and resurrection of His only Son.

- ✘ All the raging powers, including the struggles and pain they cause, cannot stand against Jesus' saving work on the cross in our place; against the epic victory of His resurrection over death; and the unifying and transforming power He has already worked in our Baptism by intimately connecting us to Himself for eternity.

→ In verse nine, the psalmist assures us that the LORD our God, “makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and shatters the spear; He burns the chariots with fire”. All

those things that the world and mankind think of as a reason to cower in fear – they all simply go away on the day of Jesus’ glorious return.

## Conclusion

- ⌘ Instead, verse 10 offers us tranquility in a life of faith and confidence. “Be still” it says. Literally, the original Hebrew calls us to “cease striving” to overcome the troubles of this world and the powers of sin and Satan by our own human power and will. Instead it tells us to “know that I (Yahweh) am God” and not you or me or any other earthly power or devil.
  - ➔ When we do that all troubles and fears melt away, for then God is “exalted among the nations”...and...“in the earth” (v.10).
- ⌘ Yes, then we have the peace and the confidence of knowing that no matter how chaotic things may seem, God stands above all things; promising us a place of comfort and safety in the midst of and above all evil and trouble.
  - ➔ This was the safety that Luther found in Scripture and then boldly proclaimed without fear before the Pope and his church even when they wanted to burn him at the stake. And why? Because Luther had the gall to turn people away from trusting in the things of Popes and princes and demons to trust and believe and find safety only in Jesus!
- ⌘ Yes, only in Jesus do you and I and all believers have a mighty fortress. As Luther’s hymn helps us confess, “But for us fights the valiant One...Jesus Christ it is...” (LSB #656:1). “He’s judged, the deed is done” (LSB # 656:3). “Our vict’ry has been won; the Kingdom ours remaineth” (LSB #656:4).
  - ➔ Today, tomorrow and until we close our eyes in this life and are raised in the never-ending joy of the holy “city of God”, Jesus alone is our refuge; our strength and our Savior!
  - ➔ Thanks be to God that He worked through the Reformation to bring such clarity back to His children and His Church; the clarity of the “one” Gospel “word” of Jesus that destroys and removes the works of sin, death, and devil before us all. Amen.