

Immanuel Lutheran Mail Ministry



Psalm 46 *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. ⁵ God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. ⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots 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 of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Psalm 46 is the first of a series of three psalms which were written as songs of praise to the Lord for delivering His people from their enemies. And while we don't know specifically which time of deliverance the Psalmist is referring to in this Psalm, we can certainly think of many occasions for which this Psalm would be a fitting description. Because throughout Israel's history, we see episode after episode of the Lord having mercy on His people and delivering them from the jaws of death.

I want to diverge from our sermon text for a bit and relate to you one such deliverance from Israel's history. It was from the Assyrian emperor by the name of Sennacherib. About 700 years before Christ, Sennacherib led a force of several hundred thousand soldiers from Assyria, to the northeast of Israel, down to Egypt in an attempt to conquer Egypt—Egypt being to Israel's southwest. Naturally, that led them right through the region in which the people of Israel dwelt, and sort of as just a small side-conquest, Sennacherib sent a portion of his troops to conquer and claim Jerusalem. He saw Jerusalem as it was: a city set up on a hill that rose up above the surrounding countryside, a fortified and proud city—Sennacherib could not just leave that proud fortress alone. He had to bring it to its knees.

Now the leader in Jerusalem at the time was King Hezekiah, who we read about in our Old Testament scripture reading. Soon before Sennacherib came to roost, Hezekiah had just carried out his own reformation efforts among the people of Judah. He'd torn down the pagan altars dedicated to false idols that dotted the Judean countryside. He had cleaned out the temple as we read from 2 Chronicles and had it rededicated to the service of the Lord. It was in the face of fierce opposition from his own people that he proclaimed that they should no longer worship their own household gods; there was only one true God! And they should worship Him at the temple in Jerusalem.

So it was around this time, Sennacherib sends troops to taunt King Hezekiah and to make fun of Hezekiah's God. (cf. 2 Kings 18:19-35) A general acted as the spokesman for the Assyrian army and he spoke to all the people saying, "Don't be tricked into believing your God can save you. In fact, wasn't your king tearing down your God's altars all around the countryside?" (Those weren't altars to the One true God, but the Assyrians didn't know that.) And then he tells outright lies, saying in essence, "It was your God who commanded the King of Assyria to destroy Jerusalem! We have a long history of

conquering other countries and humiliating their gods; no god has been able to save anyone from us. Your God is no different than those we've already conquered. What makes you think He can save you?"

And King Hezekiah was worried, and who could blame him? But he didn't panic, he didn't give in—he looked to God's Word for answers. He turned to the prophet Isaiah to ask him what God would have them do. And Isaiah said, "Don't budge. Don't move a muscle." God would save the city, the king, and the people—not because they deserved it, but because God was a God of grace.

Well, Sennacherib's messengers reported back to him that Hezekiah was unwilling to surrender, and Sennacherib wrote back this ultimatum: ***"Do not let your God in whom you trust deceive you by promising that Jerusalem will not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. Behold, you have heard what the kings of Assyria have done to all lands, devoting them to destruction. And shall you be delivered? Have the gods of the nations delivered them, the nations that my fathers destroyed?"*** (2 Kings 19:10-12)

Hezekiah received that letter, went to the temple and spread it out on the floor, saying, "Lord, do you see this? Are you going to let Sennacherib mock You this way? Yes, the Assyrians are powerful. But You can save us!" Then Isaiah came and told Hezekiah that God had heard his prayer. Jerusalem would be delivered. And it happened. Sennacherib had a force of 185,000 soldiers outside the wall of Jerusalem, and the angel of the Lord swept through the camp and decimated it. In disgrace, Sennacherib fled and returned home where he was assassinated by his own sons while he was praying to his own idols.

Sennacherib was on the receiving end of the some truths that God proclaims in our text. ***"The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; [God] utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."*** The most powerful force on earth at the time, brought to nothing before the Lord. Now it's on the basis of this Psalm of deliverance that Martin Luther wrote the great Reformation hymn, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God." And we're going to steal a line from that hymn to serve as our theme today. It's a statement that was clearly true in King Hezekiah's day, it was also clearly true in Luther's day, and it's still true for us today. Our theme is: **For Us Fights the Valiant One.**

Now when we walk outside these doors after the service this morning, I'll hazard a guess that there won't be 185,000 pagans waiting to try and kill us. But we certainly have our fair share of threats. There are the natural threats that we all face, like the hurricanes here in Florida, thankfully not much of that so far this year. Then there are the invisible threats, like the virus that keeps our country at bay, and that has affected us. Then there are additional human threats: the enemies of the cross in our country that would love nothing more than to censor what I say from this pulpit and to brand us Christians as bigots and fools and all sorts of other discrediting insults. Nevertheless, even in the face of such enemies, God says we are not to be afraid. The Psalmist says: ***"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling."*** This Psalm is describing cataclysmic change. And certainly, everything in our world is rapidly changing. Geography, climate, political correctness, society, morality—it's all rapidly changing. But we need not get worked up over all that, we don't need to fear any of it, because we have that very present help in all trouble. God—who swears, ***"I the LORD do not change."*** (Malachi 3:6)

Well it's easy to talk about not being afraid, it's another thing to actually live without fear. Doubt and fear are the inevitable results of the sin that dwells within us. We do often live in fear of disasters and viruses and death and enemies of Christ. Maybe some of us are better at hiding that fear than others, but fear has gripped us all.

But in the midst of all these troubles, as the world around us and maybe even we melt in fear and anger, this Psalm presents Christians with a different picture of reality: ***"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns."*** Throughout human history, people have been drawn to the water. For ages lakefront property has been in high demand. There's something very calming about being out on a boat in the middle of the water. It's easy to forget your problems for a while when you are walking along the beach and hear the waves lapping up on the shore. And that's really the picture of this Psalm. Outside the city walls of God's Church, the world may be in turmoil, but inside, we have the peaceful river that calms our fears.

I think you all know what that source of peace and tranquility is; that's our Savior. When we are able to look at Him and be reminded of the surpassing peace of God which He's awarded to us, everything else just doesn't seem as important anymore. I'm reminded of the Apostle Paul's words to the Philippians: ***"I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 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."*** (Philippians 5:11-13) Paul could say this because he understood that already while still in the world He also stood in the presence of God. Where God's Word is being preached, where the Lord's Supper is being given, there God was present proclaiming that peace belonged to Paul. And so it is for us too. We can hold onto this one unchangeable truth, that through Christ's death on the Cross we have been forgiven. With that abiding truth, we can afford to put all other distractions back in their place.

Speaking of distractions, we all know that this week our nation is holding an election. And as you watch the public discourse, boy, it sure sounds like the Psalmist could be describing us specifically. ***"The nations rage, the kingdoms totter."*** Our country is raging and tottering with such hatred and violence, but instead of getting swept up in all that, let's listen to God's discourse instead. ***"He utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. And here God speaks, "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"***

Be still and do not fear, because **For Us Fights the Valiant One**. We need look no further than the cross of Christ to see the glorious truth of these words. When the devil raged against God, when the kingdoms of this world conspired together with him against Jesus Christ and put Him through a sham trial and nailed God to a cross, do you think they believed they had won? I know they did, but they forgot that they were fighting against the Valiant One. This was God Himself, and He would not be defeated in His quest to pay for your sins. He used that cross of humiliation to gain us the victory. By it He did the very thing the devil was hoping to prevent, and forgave us all our sins and won for us eternal life.

Time and again throughout history, we see the devil still working through the Kingdoms of this world to try to defeat God. In King Hezekiah's day, just at a time when the devil knew the people of Israel were starting to turn back to God, he sent the most powerful force on earth at the time and was defeated. In Martin Luther's day, when a lone monk was standing up for the saving Word against the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church. He was outnumbered, yet he was not outgunned, because He had the most powerful weapon of all: the Word of God. And for Luther fought the Valiant One. God ensured that His Word would remain so that centuries later, people like you and me could gather here and rejoice in the full and free forgiveness which is given to us as a gift of grace.

And still today, the Valiant One is still fighting for us. No matter what happens in any election, no matter how dark things seem to be getting, no matter how much the nations rage or the kingdoms totter, no matter if the earth gives way and the mountains are moved into the heart of the sea—there is nothing that can harm those who are in Christ Jesus. The world can torture and kill, but God has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the devil. All the raging powers, including even the struggles and pain they cause for us, they cannot stand against the crucifixion of Jesus, His resurrection, and your Baptisms which connect you to Him.

And rest assured, there will be a day when these things come to an end. After all, the Psalm promises, ***"He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. Be still, and know that I am God."*** There will come a day when all of this will cease, the day in which God decides to come again in His good time. He has promised to return to take you to Himself, and He will do it.

And so in the meantime, while you're still here enduring the tremors of the world, I would invite you to come into the presence of God, just as King Hezekiah did. You can take the insults of the world and of the devil and spread them out before the Lord. And then you can turn to Him and claim His promise to deliver you from the evil that you are unable to handle by yourself. With His help, you do not need to be intimidated by the threats of the devil, because the victory is now and forever yours. It has become our inheritance by the strength of God's hand.

Therefore, our response to these things can be just like that of the reformer Hezekiah and his people. We can sing a song of victory and proclaim, ***"The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."*** Or in the words of the reformer Martin Luther, ***"For us fights the Valiant One."*** And in Him we will not be put to shame. Thanks be to God. Amen.

Pastor Sam Rodebaugh
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