

“We Will Not Fear”

Liturgical Date: Last Sunday of the Church Year (Proper 29 C)

Primary Text: Psalm 46 (also a reference to St. Mark 4:35-41)

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, the Last Sunday of the Church Year, is Psalm 46. The title of today’s sermon is “We Will Not Fear”. GOD SPEAKS TO US WORDS OF CONFIDENCE, PEACE, AND ASSURANCE SO THAT WE MAY RELY ON HIS STRENGTH IN TIMES OF TROUBLE AND TRIAL.

Psalm 46 is one of the most beloved and well-known Psalms, especially to us Lutherans. Most of us probably know that this is the Psalm which became the basis for Luther’s most well-known hymn and the hymn that is known to many Protestants as the theme-hymn of the Reformation: *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*.

It is appropriate that this Psalm has inspired music, because this was its original form. In our hymnal we are given the text of the Psalm itself, but not the heading before it. You can see it in your Bible. The Psalm is titled, *“To the Choirmaster. Of the Sons of Korah. According to Alamoth. A Song.”* The “Sons of Korah” were the descendants of Levi and they were the temple musicians. The “Choirmaster” tells us that this was a liturgical song that would have been sung in the temple. While we do not do this here, many churches chant the Psalms responsively. If anyone want to volunteer to lead us in that, that would be great (seriously). Many of the Psalms were songs, much as this one and “Alamath” indicates that this was sung originally by soprano voices. And songs can have a powerful impact on us.

They can ease our fears, bring us comfort in times of grief. God knows this and provides His very own prayerbook and songbook for us in the Psalms.

And we all face our share of challenges, do we not? Perhaps you are facing a challenge to your health, or have a loved one that is undergoing a battle with cancer, declining health due to aging, or some other sickness or disease. Maybe it is a battle with addiction, mental health, or feelings of persistent guilt. Many families face divisions through divorce and family strife. Or it could be that you are in a season of financial struggle.

We may feel alone with some our challenges and fears, but that is not the case. People all over the world and throughout history have faced challenges. Many, and maybe some of you here, have experienced going through a natural disaster like a tornado, hurricane, or earthquake. Verses 2-3 of Psalm 46 speak of, *“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.”* Wars rage (v6) on in various parts of the world and death tolls mount. In our nation’s history we have experienced numerous armed conflicts and the cost has been high as memorial and tombstone markers attest to (just look out over Arlington). We turn on the news and sometimes it seems that the world is burning out of control. And we don’t have to look beyond our own borders for things that may cause us fear and discouragement. Political division seems to be at all time high, with an impeachment inquiry going on that support or opposition to is split almost completely on political party lines (please try to get along at Thanksgiving!). Yes, verse 6 tells us that “kingdoms totter” and we wonder if our country could become less stable with so much division.

And it is to these fears, these calamities that God speaks powerfully and clearly. Just as He spoke to Martin Luther as he faced opposition from

very powerful forces that had essentially declared “open season” on his life. Just as He has spoken to countless Christians through the ages that faced fear and tribulation. Just as He speaks to you today: “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*” Our oldest son, Tyler, chose this verse as his Confirmation verse almost 15 years ago. And we believe that he chose wisely as when he has faced numerous challenges, fears, and battles we have reminded him of this verse.

And when we fear. When we face uncertainty. When we face something we don’t see how we are going to overcome, the Lord God tell us to come to Him. He is our refuge, strength, and very present help. How specifically can we call out to God? Put simply, we talk to Him. He invites us to do so. It is called prayer. Psalm 50:15 tells us these wonderful words, “*And call upon me in the day of trouble: I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify me.*” Of course, we don’t only want to pray when we are feeling scared or needy. But isn’t wonderful that God tells us to talk to Him in those times? Sometimes you may find it hard to find the right words. But God hears your prayer. He has promised to. He knows your heart. And if the words are hard to find, He gives us *His* very word. In a time of fear or challenge, simply prayer these words that we read right here in Psalm 46. And Jesus gives us a model prayer as well. In the sixth petition of the Lord’s Prayer we pray for God to lead us not into temptation (which is testing) and in the seventh petition to deliver us from evil. When you can’t find the words, don’t fear because God gives us plenty of His Words to speak back to Him.

And as I said, God knows your heart. Verse 10, which one of our recent confirmands, Summer, chose as her Confirmation verse states, “*Be still, and know that I am God.*” This is a good word. We can become

restless, panicked, frantic when we are facing fears and uncertainty. In these times of feeling like pushing the “panic button”, we need to stop and rest in the sovereignty, grace, and provision of God. He’s got this. He is in control. In the New Testament in St. Mark Chapter 4 we read of a great storm that arose as Jesus and His disciples were crossing the Sea of Galilee. This was some storm, as many of the Disciples were seasoned fishermen who had seen their share of them. They panicked. They were afraid. And Jesus was just sleeping through it! And when Jesus awoke, Mark records that He spoke three words. The first was “peace”. The next two were the very same words we read in verse 10, “be still.” The storm immediately ended. Although He appeared oblivious to the storm at first, Jesus was in control the whole time. When we face those storms, we often need to “be still”, and in trusting the Lord, peace comes. We to are inclined fear, like the Disciples did in that boat, because of small faith, but God increases our faith.

In Psalm 46 we hear about some catastrophic sounding events in the world, but verse 2 says, “we will not fear.” Conflict and political upheaval? God speaks. He is our fortress. He brings an end to calamity and strife. *“He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear.”* (v9)

I want to back up for a moment to verses 4-5 as they give us a beautiful Gospel promise. Verse 4: *“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.”* Of course, the Holy City of God is Jerusalem. But as you may know there is no river that flows through Jerusalem. There are springs, so perhaps it refers to that. But there is a deeper meaning here. The Church Father Ambrose sees this river as the Holy Spirit and indeed God’s presence is among us by the work of the Spirit. Verse 5, *“God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God*

will help her when morning dawns.” This tells us that God is in the midst of His city, His help is coming.

And in the Bible we do read about a Holy City that will come down from heaven. This will happen after night falls on the present sinful age and the morning dawns on the new perfect and eternal one. We have been studying about many things that will occur before and when Jesus returns on the Last Day. We have been hearing in our readings these past few weeks about the End Times. And when that New Jerusalem comes as the habitation of God’s people, the Bible tells us that there is a river there. A river that flows from the very throne of God. A river whose water is living. Jesus has come and will come again. He brings forgiveness, salvation, and eternal life. No challenge facing us can overcome that. This is why, as the Psalm tells us, we will not fear. Not because the devil and this sinful world won’t throw everything it can at us, but because as Christians we know the One who is the Creator, ruler, and sustainer of all things. The One who conquered sin, death, and the devil: Jesus Christ.

Finally, the last verse of Psalm 46 brings a conclusion that is a repeat of verse 7. As we close not only this sermon, but yet another Church Year I leave you with some powerful words from Paul Kretzmann in his commentary on this verse. First the verse: *“The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”* Kretzmann writes, *“That is the confident Amen of the Christian Church and of every believer, in the trust of a world-conquering faith; for ‘the kingdom ours remaineth’ with Christ on our side, we remain victors.”*

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.