

Psalm 46

October 31, 2021

Grace and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! Amen.

“A mighty fortress is our God.” They are the opening words of Psalm 46, and they are the words of Martin Luther’s most famous hymn sung earlier. Luther found such great comfort in the psalms and perhaps his most beloved Psalm of all was the 46th. In 1527 the Black Plague was sweeping across Germany and much of the European continent. Luther’s own son nearly died from it. Amidst his distress, Luther found himself contemplating the promises of Psalm 46, which is “an encouraging psalm of trust in the invincibility of the Lord.”ⁱ The encouragement and strength he garnered from Psalm 46 equipped him with the fortitude and insight to pen the beloved classic hymn which will echo through Christ’s church this morning. It is said that “during this dark and tumultuous period, when terribly discouraged, he (Luther) would turn to his co-worker, Philipp Melancthon, and say, ‘Come, Philipp, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm.’” Luther wrote this about the 46th psalm:

We sing the psalm to the praise of God, because He is with us and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends His church and His word against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil, and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and sin.ⁱⁱ

Half a millennium later, while the world is vastly different, it is still the same. A global pandemic continues, the mountains still shake, the waters still roar and foam, the nations are often in an uproar and the whole earth seems to totter. The fallen condition of humanity and creation itself at times seems perilously close to being out of control. Where are we to turn during such turmoil, devastation, disease, and heartache?

The answer the psalter calls us to is to seek refuge in the Lord – our strength, our comfort, our hope, our very present help in trouble. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. It is a refrain the people of God are to return to and sing aloud proclaiming to the world there is hope. When all other defenses we build up for ourselves come crumbling down or when every other avenue we place our trust in winds up being a dead end; there will forever remain one constant, God. Somewhere amid all that is going on the Lord of hosts is with us. God is at work unrelenting and unceasing in God’s efforts to overcome evil, illness, and the ugly effects of sin.

Reformation Sunday calls us to remember this. It calls us to put everything into God’s hands including our own salvation. It calls us to humbly admit that on our own we cannot obtain salvation, that work solely has been accomplished through the redeeming work of God in Jesus Christ through his death and resurrection. It is a gift of sheer unconditional grace and love. It is a day that reminds us God continually is at work in the world, in Christ’s church and in our lives. Transforming. Reforming. Breathing new life.

We have seven amazing youth before us this morning who shortly will affirm their baptisms, the promises God made to them in those life-giving waters, and their faith in God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Their lives bear witness that God is at work. Their words tell the story Christ is alive. Be still and listen.

Listen to the openness and honesty with each story. The struggles they share. The heartaches they have experienced. The joys they tell of. God's steadfast love and presence they give witness to. These are amazing youth, and these are wonderful testimonies of the ongoing activity of the Holy Spirit in the lives of God's people. God is speaking through each of them just as God spoke through the Psalmist, through the prophets such as Jeremiah, through the Apostle Paul, through reformers such as Martin Luther.

- "God promised me that he would always be there for me and strengthen me, no matter what." – Auron
- Chloe speaks about the power of prayer and says it "helps me get through some rough times in my life" and "tells me that God is listening, and he is helping me through the way."
- "Jesus is on my side and is with me no matter what, and that makes me feel better and make it so that I won't fear anything because he's with me." – Cole
- "Faith is important to help you through struggles." "It is something to rely on." "Faith is bigger than my fear." – Layla
- "I know that God is always there with me even though I cannot see him. He is in the wind, in the sky, in the air that we breath. He is always there for us to get us through tough times." – Dylan
- "He [Jesus] is our connection to God, and he loves us always, even when we are not at our best. He does not judge me, but simply accepts me for exactly who I am. His actions in the Bible show to all of us ways we can put faith into words." – Miley
- Referring to his favorite Bible verse, Philippians 4:13, Tate is strengthened through the word of God and reminded he writes, "you are able to overcome many challenges with the help of Christ." Further he reminds us all that, "through baptism God promises that we are a child of God."

Excellent work faithful servants of Christ! Within your words are echoes of Psalm 46 reminding us the Lord of hosts is with us. He is our refuge and strength. A very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear. Be still and know that I am God. Amen.

ⁱ Steven Lawson, "Luther and the Psalms: His Solace and Strength" (<http://www.ligonier.org/blog/luther-and-psalms-his-solace-and-strength/>)

ⁱⁱ Ibid.