

Rev. Dan Welch Reformation (Observed)/Confirmation Sunday

Text: Psalm 46 October 25, 2020 **10:30 AM**

Lydia, Ethan, Katlyn, Madyson, Wyatt, Owen, Cavin, Zachary, Aleisha, Allison, Dylen, Gracey, Grace, Caden, Kolby, Hannah, and Jaxon: You made it! Finally! After all the extra months of waiting we are finally able to all be here today for you to take this special step in your faith-life! In a few moments you'll come forward and publicly confirm that which you have learned not only in our class that we had together (which seems so long ago now!), but also the faith in Christ which you learned you're your other teachers here at First Lutheran and from your family members over the years! It's a wonderful, memorable moment! A definite high point in a year with a lot of low points for everybody. There's no getting around that.

Sometimes I think, will the wonders and the troubles of 2020 never cease until it's finally December 31st? A record early snowfall of 7.9 inches this past Tuesday! That was followed by sleet, thunder, lightning, and yellowish/orangish skies two days later. It turns out wildfires in Colorado, combined with ice crystals in the air were the reasons behind those spooky looking skies.

In addition to the terrible western wildfires this year, during the last five months we have witnessed all kinds of protests against police along with destruction, and violence in cities across the country. Then adding to all the other challenges of living in 2020, we are in the midst of a highly contentious political season. The biggest story of the year by far, though, has been the global pandemic. In so many ways that I don't need to get into, this has greatly changed the way we live our lives including why we are having our Confirmation service this morning rather than last April when we were in the heights of the Covid Lockdown.

So, what do you say when things fall apart? Not only with all the things I just mentioned during this crazy year, but also in your own personal life at any given time. Maybe a friend or loved one is going through a really tough time right now. Maybe it's **you** going through that difficult time either at home, at work or at school. What do you say when things fall apart for someone else? What do you do when it is **your** life that's falling apart?

This morning let's work through these questions by turning to Psalm 46 to discover clearly how we should respond when things fall apart:

¹ 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.

Does this Psalm sound familiar to you? It might. It’s the psalm on which Martin Luther based his famous hymn we sang at the beginning of service, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” It’s a tune I like to call the “fight song” of the Lutheran Church! I’ll talk about that more in a little bit. But what I’d like to focus on right now is how the psalm writer here describes all sorts of natural disasters, nations locked in turmoil against one another, interpersonal conflict, and all kinds of other stuff that happens simply because we’re imperfect people living in an imperfect world. What happens when we realize that the events described in Psalm 46 are actually happening today all around us or even, **to us**? Interpersonal conflicts, emotional anxiety, family dysfunction, economic turmoil, geological distress, international chaos, and on and on and on. Meanwhile, there are all sorts of questions that run through our minds: “Where is God? How do I make any sense out of what’s going on in my life and in the world around me? As a Christian, how am I supposed to respond during times like this?”

Right away in this psalm the author makes a bold statement for us regarding the position people of faith are to take when things fall apart: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. *Therefore, we will not fear*” (vv 1–2a). ***We will not fear.*** Period.

Then the author describes three scenes. Did you catch them? The first scene is in verses 2–5, describing hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters. “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” (vv 2–3). The earth is giving way, the mountains are falling into the sea, the rivers and the oceans are in chaos, the earth is shaking and trembling. But right in the middle of this scene, what do we see? “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” (vv 4–5). A river. The kind of river that, when people see it, they’re *glad*. The kind of river that you’d find in the presence of God Himself. The kind of river that warms the heart of God. The kind of river that, when the people of God see it, they rejoice. The kind of river that, even in the middle of the chaos, people stand and say, “God is within her! She will not fall! God will help her at the break of day!”

The second scene is in verse 6: “The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.” Geopolitical conflicts are raging. Military forces are clashing. Terrorists are still striking. Interpersonal attacks are being waged one after another after another. And yet right in the middle of all the chaos and the turmoil, what do we see? “The LORD of hosts”, that is the God of Angel armies, “is with us; God of Jacob is our fortress” (v 7). A fortress. The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. A place of safety and security. A hiding place where we can rest secure.

The third scene is in verses 8–9: “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.” There are some interesting words here that describe the mighty, holy, unbridled power of God, doing things that God in His wisdom sometimes does without our comprehension. Breaking spears, destroying kingdoms, bringing desolation upon this earth. And sometimes, God’s mighty, holy, unbridled power intersects with our lives, and there’s some collateral damage. But right in the middle of all of this, what do we hear? A voice. “Be *still*, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (v 10). ***Be still, and know that I am God.***

Which of these three scenes do you see in your life right now? Natural calamities, like health problems? How about interpersonal conflicts? How about just the unexplainable, holy, unbridled power of God, where sometimes stuff just happens in this world and you can’t understand why? How are you doing with this scene playing out in your life? In the middle of the chaos and the anxiety and the uncertainty, how is your faith? Or maybe better I should ask, ***Where*** is your faith? ***In whom*** is your faith?

Without knowing it or intending it, Martin Luther found himself in the midst of conflict that rocked the world. Raising ninety-five theses, topics for debate really, just asking for open discussion, wound up changing the face of Europe and the planet—and confronting Luther with the threat of death and, worse, excommunication from his Church, the official word that his soul would spend eternity in hell. Where could he put his faith? In whom?

Well, no matter which of the psalmist's scenes is being played out in **your** life, no matter what frightens you or gets you down, God comes to you and me this morning as He came to Luther, with these words: "Be still. I am your refuge and your strength. I am your fortress. I am that calm, tranquil stream." As the writer to the Hebrews says, "I will never leave you or forsake you" (13:5). Or to paraphrase God's word to us: "I will stand by your side no matter what. I sent my Son, Jesus, to make this happen. His life, His death, and His resurrection took away the sin that had separated you from Me, so now and forevermore I am with you." This Table—this body and blood—is the guarantee of this promise. The waters of Baptism are the guarantee of this promise. And with God's promise, we can depend on the Lord's presence every day of our lives. We can say, as the writer of our psalm says, "The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (v 11).

This is the promise that enabled Luther to stand against powerful religious authorities and armies. His Lord of hosts, his Jesus, was with him. A mighty fortress was **his** God—and is **ours**. It's no wonder this song has been called the "Battle Hymn of the Reformation" It's a bold proclamation of the truth that God, in Christ is with us no matter what. And He's with us always!

Remember how we sang it today in stanza 2?

With might of ours can naught be done, Soon were our loss effected;

But for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected.

Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is,

Of Sabaoth Lord, And there's none other God;

He holds the field forever.

Oh, there will be times in the coming weeks and months when we will witness the three scenes of Psalm 46 playing out right in front of us. Natural calamities, like health problems. Interpersonal conflicts of many kinds. Then there will be terrifying things that happen in this world for reasons we just can't understand at that moment. Here's the question: **How will we respond when things fall apart?** (Short pause) God Himself comes to us in this psalm and encourages us with these words: Do not be alarmed. Do not worry. **Do not be afraid.**

These words today are most especially for you today Lydia, Ethan, Katlyn, Madyson, Wyatt, Owen, Cavin, Zachary, Aleisha, Allison, Dylen, Gracey, Grace, Caden, Kolby, Hannah, and Jaxon: When things are falling apart: **Do not fear. Be still.** Remember these words: **God is your refuge and strength.** Your Lord is with you, most especially He is with you and for you in His Word and His Supper. Stay close to Him now and always so that you will forever have a calm,

peaceful river that is our God. In Him, you will always have a strong and mighty fortress. You will have His voice speaking to you: "Be still and know that I am God." "I am with you always!" "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God!" Amen! Rev. Dan Welch Reformation (Observed) Psalm 46 October 25, 2020 **8 AM**

Will the wonders and the troubles of 2020 never cease until it's finally December 31st? A record early snowfall of 7.9 inches this past Tuesday! That was followed by sleet, thunder, lightning, and yellowish/orangish skies two days later. It turns out wildfires in Colorado, combined with ice crystals in the air were the reasons behind those spooky looking skies.

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Here's the main point. When things are falling apart: ***Do not fear. Be still.*** Remember these words: **God is your refuge and strength.** Your Lord is with you, most especially He is with you and for you in His Word and His Supper. Stay close to Him now and always so that you will forever have a calm, peaceful river that is our God. In Him, you will always have a strong and mighty fortress. You will have His voice speaking to you: "Be still and know that I am God." "I am with you always!" "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God!" Amen!