

Rev. Dan Welch Reformation (Observed) Psalm 46 October 30, 2022

What do you say when things fall apart? What do you say to a friend or family member who comes to you and is looking for answers, looking for help. Maybe it's because of conflict he or she is having with a friend or family member or spouse. Or maybe the dispute they are ensnared in is with someone at work or school or church. And as you're sitting there listening intently as they are describing things, there's a tremendous amount of anxiety in the room, you can practically feel the tension in the air. They ask you for advice. What is the answer? How can their situation be resolved? What do you say? (pause) What do you say when things fall apart for someone? What do you do when it's *your* life that's falling apart?

Maybe it's not even a *relationship* issue, but a health issue. Someone you love has been fighting their battle with cancer or heart disease or depression. And obviously when you're sitting together with your friend or loved one talking about how things are going, there's a lot of anxiety in the room. A lot of unanswered questions: the what-ifs, the how-longs, the how-bads. What do you say?

This morning let's work through these questions by spending some time in Psalm 46. We spoke it together earlier and the choir put it to music a few moments ago. This Psalm shows us in a crystal-clear way how we can and should respond when things fall apart.

The writer of this psalm describes all kinds 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 these?"

Right away in this psalm the author makes a bold statement for us concerning 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 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.” Russia, Ukraine, China, North Korea. Geopolitical conflicts raging. Military forces clashing. Terrorists striking. Hard-line, ideological, hate-filled, power mongers seeing how far they can go before they reach the breaking point. Interpersonal attacks are being waged one after another after another around the world and in our own lives. Even in the places you would ***least*** expect them to be. And yet right in the middle of all the chaos and the turmoil, what do we see? “The LORD of hosts is with us; the 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 the unexplainable, where some really awful 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, Luther found himself in the midst of conflict that rocked the world. Raising ninety-five questions, 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, God comes to each of us 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 popes 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! It’s *our* Battle Hymn too, yours and mine. Listen again to words of 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. 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.***

Here’s the point. When things are falling apart, there will be opportunities for us as Christians to speak these words to one another: ***We will not fear. Be still.*** There will be opportunities for us to sit quietly in our favorite chair and read these words over and over again: God is our refuge and strength. Do not be afraid. In the middle of this chaos, we have a calm, peaceful river that warms the heart of God. We have a strong and mighty fortress. We have a voice speaking to us: “Be still. For I am your God.” “I am with you always!” Amen!