

**November 1, 2009  
Reformation Sunday**

*"God Is Our Refuge and Strength"*

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**PSALM 46**

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**G**od is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. <sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, <sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah <sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. <sup>5</sup> God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. <sup>6</sup> Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. <sup>7</sup> The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah <sup>8</sup> Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. <sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. <sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." <sup>11</sup> The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

On the front cover of your bulletin you will notice a stained glass picture of Martin Luther attaching a piece of paper to the door of a church. This piece of paper contained 95 theses or concerns detailing how the Roman Catholic Church was wrong when it taught people their sins could be forgiven and paid by little slips of paper purchased from the pope in Rome called indulgences. What seemed like something small, a tempest in a tea pot, quickly turned into something huge as people all over Germany and Europe began questioning what Rome was teaching. They developed a keen interest in getting back to the truths of the Bible with the important teaching we see on the banners before us this morning. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- not by works, so that no one can boast."

The pope wanted to squash Martin Luther just the way you might swat a mosquito that has just sucked some of your precious blood. Luther lived in genuine fear that he would be burnt at the stake as a heretic as other heretics had been burnt to death by Rome. In the midst of all that turmoil and trouble and fear of death, Martin Luther found refuge and strength in the Lord and his love for him, just as we do today during the difficult days that we face. He wrote a hymn based on Psalm 46 and his convictions that the Lord was his refuge and strength, a hymn we just sung, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."

Christians of all ages have found their refuge in the words of Psalm 46. Shortly after Julie Dalby's knee surgery, I read Psalm 46 to her. A few days later she said that the lady next to her in the hospital room commented on how much comfort she had found in the words of this Psalm. This morning we want to take a closer look at this psalm. It brought much comfort and strength to Martin Luther during the difficult days of the Reformation. It will always bring comfort and strength to us in our difficult days as well.

**What a refuge**

What a blessing it is to know that in the worst storms of life, we have the Lord as our Refuge and Strength. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will

not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah.” We don’t know what the word “Selah” means, but some have suggested it is a pause, a way to reflect on the words. As we reflect on the words we realize that we may never experience mountains falling into the sea unleashing tremendous forces of nature including tsunamis that send huge waves rolling over beach front towns and cities. But we have seen the World Trade Center twin towers fall to the ground, and we know how that event has totally changed our world. A careless driver runs a red light at Lakeview and 135-an 82 year old woman dies and leaves her husband behind to cope with her loss. The economic recession prevents people you know personally from getting jobs or being underpaid at their current place of employment. Look across the landscape of the city or area in which you are living. Satan is having his way with so many people and destroying their lives. In the midst of all this turmoil and upheaval that we call life on this earth, “God is our Refuge and Strength, an ever present help in trouble.”

Picture yourself hiking in the mountains of Colorado at this time of the year. A storm moves in. You feel the temperature dropping and you know that there will be snow, lots of snow that can trap you, bring on hypothermia and even death. But then you see a shelter, a hole in the rock, a small cave, where you can find Refuge. You gather the dry wood, start a fire under the rocky ledge, roll out your sleeping back and pull out your stove for some warm soup. You are as snug as a bug in the rug you ride out the storm.

God is your Refuge and Strength. He has a place for you in the love that he has for you through Jesus his Son that will help you through the worst storms of life. We know we do not deserve this love. There is nothing in your life or mine that can pay for the sins we have committed that cry out for God to reject us forever. But we have Jesus. “He became sin for us, who knew no sin that we might become the righteousness of God in him.” Righteous before God, we have access to his unfailing love 24/7. He is an every present help in time of trouble.

Martin Luther didn’t know about this very special love that was his through Jesus. In the early years of his life he tried to earn God’s love and favor by the righteous life he tried to live. But then he discovered by God’s grace that he was righteous before God, not by what he did, but by the perfect life, and perfect death and perfect resurrection Jesus accomplished for him. He came to know that he was always safe in the love that Jesus his King had for him. He wrote in his hymn, “And do what they will- Hate steal, hurt, or kill, Though all may be gone, Our victory is won. The kingdom’s ours forever.”

Because of Jesus we have the mighty God as our ever present help in trouble. We don’t have to wait to call on him for help. You don’t have to climb some mountain to find this special place with your God, or reach a certain religious level. “Therefore since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have access into this grace in which we now stand.”

The scene of Psalm 46 changes from a Refuge and Fortress to a river that gladdens God’s people. This mighty Fortress of God’s unfailing love and strength is like a peaceful, gentle river that flows into your life every day of your existence on this earth. This love comes to you in the Word the Lord has bestowed on you and given to you.

### **What a river**

“There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah”

Oh look at the ancient city, nestled up against the side of mountain. High in the mountains are springs of water that flow down the mountain into a stream that flows through the city and provides clean water for drinking, bathing and washing clothes and watering plants. The water is directed into channels or streams that flow throughout the city creating beautiful gardens, and watering the valley farms so there is always enough food to eat.

You know personally the love your God has for you through Jesus. It flows abundantly into your life through the Word of God that you have come to cherish and love. You are the city of God. You are his church. Every morning you can wake up to his love for you and drink deeply of that love. Martin Luther found God's love in the Word that he read. He said that when he realized that he was justified or declared righteous before God through Jesus, all of heaven opened up to him. He wanted other people to find what he found in the word. That is why he translated the Bible into a language the German people could understand.

It is here in God's Word that you have hundreds of places where the Lord assures you that he will always be with you and not fail you even when nations fall and kingdoms are in uproar. You can never exhaust the comfort and peace from God's Word that you find in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm with its words, "Goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life." Or Isaiah 59:1 that says, "Surely the arm of the Lord is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear." Or Romans 8 with its reassuring words that nothing in all creation will ever separate us from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus our Lord. As Martin Luther wrote in his hymn, "He helps us free from every need That has us now o'ertaken."

The greatest tragedy that can happen to the Christian Church in these last days is that we ignore the Word of God and stop the beautiful streams of God's love from flowing into our lives. Pick up the Bible, dear Christian, pick it up as Luther did, as your grandparents did, as your parents do, pick it up and read, and streams of God's mercy will always sustain and refresh you.

### **What a Lord**

Is there reason to fear what the future brings? Do we need to distinguish between fear and fright? It is OK to be frightened when danger comes to us personally, whether it was a near miss in a car accident, a burglar breaking into your home, or bad report from the doctor, or even when we feel the hot breath of hell breathing down on us from Satan. We don't have to fear what the future holds because we know who holds the future. "Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth." The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah" See the Egyptian chariots at the bottom of the Red Sea. "He breaks the bow and shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire." The Lord tells us to "Be still and know that he is God." He will be exalted. He will work out everything for our good by his mighty power.

There was a cartoon showing a family camping next to a stream of water. It also showed them unloading their TV, Xboxes, Ipods and portable speakers. The cartoon had the son saying to his dad, "I am sure glad were brought all this stuff with us, because I don't think

I can stand to listen to this stream all day." Today the Lord tells us to be quiet, real quiet and still, and listen to him assure us that he is our Refuge and Strength. Listen to him say to you personally, "I am God, I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth." God is our Refuge and Strength. Amen