

**Reformation Sunday  
November 1, 2015**

*“Psalm 46 and the Lutheran Reformation”*

**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. <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. <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.

Where do Christians often turn in time of trouble? They turn to the psalms. They turn to psalms like Psalm 46 with the powerful words “God is our Refuge and Strength.” On the Sunday after the September 11 attack on our country, Christians in our country gathered in their churches and they joined together with the words of Psalm 46. I have often read these words of Psalm 46 to brothers and sisters in Christ who are facing difficult times in their lives. No matter how many times I have read this psalm to comfort people, I am also the one who receives comfort as it is read.

It is a privilege to be a pastor and have the opportunity to read this psalm to people and to preach on the words of this psalm. On this Reformation Sunday we want to use Psalm 46 to help us appreciate the blessings that have come into the world through the Lutheran Reformation.

**What a Refuge!**

What a Refuge we have in the Lord our God. “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.” Where do you go for refuge from the storms of life? You go to the Lord not to yourself.

Two summers ago we experienced a thunderstorm while hiking in the mountains of Colorado. Sudden dark clouds brought rain and hail and lightning and crashing sounds of thunder. Where do you go for refuge? Under an overhanging rock? Under a tree? It didn’t help to know that the day before three hikers were killed by lightning that struck them as they huddled together in such a storm.

Some have suggested that this psalm may have been written at a time in Israel’s history when the city of Jerusalem was facing another type of storm, a storm of destruction from the Assyrian army under Sennacherib. Remember what happened to that mighty army of 186,000 soldiers. They were destroyed by one angel of God. Nothing was left of this army except a field of dead bodies. It seemed like the mountains were falling into the sea, but God was their Refuge and Strength. He spared them.

Martin Luther experienced a terrible thunderstorm during his student days when he was studying for a law degree. He feared for his life and cried out, "St. Anne help me and I will become a monk." Afraid of death and facing God in the final judgment Martin Luther sought refuge not in God and his mercy but in his own efforts to purge the sin from his life. The more he tried to purge the sin from his life the more sin he saw that needed purging. He wrote about his experience a hymn, "Yea, deep and deeper still I fell, Like had become a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me."

But then Martin Luther found refuge from the storm. He found a shelter from the lightning bolts of God's wrath that he knew he deserved because of his sin. It was through the reading of the Bible he came to understand that a holy and perfect God who demanded that people be righteous and perfect also provided that righteousness through the gift of his Son. He found his refuge and protection in the words on the banner before us this morning, "The righteous will live by faith." All of heaven opened up when he realized that the God who demands that people be righteous has in love and mercy provided that righteousness in Jesus. Luther fondly called this an "alien righteousness," a righteousness found outside of himself in Christ.

What are the greatest storms that come to you in life that turn your world upside down? Is it a sudden change in your health? Is it the loss of a job? Is it a friendship that has been broken or people turning against you? Is it the doubts that arise about God's promise that whatever the future brings your God will work out everything for your good. Of all the storms we face the worst are the internal battles with sin that we constantly lose. Where do I go for refuge from the sin that makes me unacceptable to God? I go to the Lord. If I go to myself I am hopelessly lost. I go to Jesus the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. That's where Luther found his refuge. That is where you find your refuge.

In his lectures on Galatians Luther said of Christ your Refuge: "Again, if Christ Himself is made guilty of all the sins that we have committed, then we are absolved from all sins, not through ourselves or through our own good works or merits but through Him." God is our Refuge and Strength. We find our forgiveness and protection in what Christ has done for us. As we sing in the hymn, "In Christ alone, our hope is found."

## **What a river**

The scene now shifts in this psalm from a mighty fortress is our God to a stream or river that waters the city of God. "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 and the earth melts." Here is the city of God, the city of Jerusalem, the church of God surrounded by enemies yet she has a river that flows within her that makes the people of God glad in their salvation.

It was during the time of King Hezekiah that the people of Jerusalem dug a tunnel under the walls of the city to bring in the waters of the Gihon springs to the pool of Siloam. If the Assyrian army attacked the city and put it under siege they would still have fresh water flowing in the city through this 1700 foot tunnel. Tourists still visit this tunnel today.

We have such a stream that flows into our lives and refreshes us. It is God's grace and mercy that comes to us through the Word of God, the Holy Bible. Here you are besieged by problems in life and yet you drink deeply from God's promises that come to you in his Word. Here you are facing a new day and you spend time reading God's Word. That Word continues with you throughout the day. It protects you in time of temptation. It assures you that in spite of your difficulties in life nothing in all creation will ever separate you from the love of God that exists in Christ Jesus your Lord.

"God will help her, she will not fall; God will help her at the break of day." See the break of day. See the sun rising in the east. See the morning light finding its way through your bedroom window. It is a new day that is dawning. At the first light of dawn your awesome God who is your Refuge and Strength refreshes you through his Word that makes glad the city of God. We think of the words of Psalm 130: "I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in his word I put my hope. My soul waits for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning."

Martin Luther loved the Bible. He did not grow up with God's Word. Even during his early days in the monastery the Bible was a book that was hidden to him. But then by God's grace he found the words, "The righteous will live by faith." Instead of a book that made him fear God's wrath, the Bible became a book that led him to believe that he was saved by grace alone as we see in the banner before us this morning. His knowledge of the Bible grew. His convictions became more firm. This river of God's grace that flowed into him now flowed through him. He could not keep quiet.

On October 31, 1517 he posted 95 theses or statements calling on the church to look into the Bible and see what it says about repentance. For the church was telling people they could have their sins forgiven by buying little slips of paper called indulgences. I know local soccer teams will sell tickets for a Santa Maria style BBQ, but can you imagine the church selling tickets to get the forgiveness of sins?

Martin Luther's love for this stream of God's Word also led him to help other people drink from that stream. He started teaching the truths of God's Word in the university. I am holding in my hand a book of his lectures on Galatians. He loved to preach from the Bible sometimes verse by verse as he did with the Gospel of John (Hold up book). He translated the Bible in the German language of the people so they could read the Bible on their own. He wrote the Small Catechism so fathers could teach the truths of God's Word in the home. He wrote hymns and composed music that brought God's Word into the music of the church.

Let me reflect on my personal life only because I pray it will help you reflect on your personal life. I have had the privilege of reading and learning God's Word all my life. In my eighth grade confirmation I memorized Psalm 46 in the King James version. I have read the Bible many times. I have preached sermons. Over the years the Holy Spirit creates this wonderful collection of God's promises in your life that you draw on daily just as the people drew water from the pool of Siloam. That has happened in your life and it has happened in my life. The Bible has become the river that makes glad the city of God.

## **What a Lord and God**

The mighty God who is our Refuge and Strength is also a God who goes to war and fights for us. "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." See the chariots of Egypt scattered on the bottom of the Red Sea. See the bodies of the dead Assyrian soldiers struck down by an angel of the Lord. See the Spanish Armada blown off course and being destroyed instead of attacking England and the Protestant Reformation. See the cell phones in China, millions of cell phones, millions of smart phones, accessing information around the world, tapping into sermons that preach Christ crucified, and people reading the Bible as Luther once did. People see how they are saved by Christ alone. "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." Amen.