

“God Is Our Refuge”

The first hymn we sang this morning, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” was written by Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, during difficult time in his life. The inspiration for this hymn was taken from Psalm 46.

There are a few different theories as to when he wrote the lyrics and one of them is that he penned them when he was hiding out in a castle in Germany because he had been excommunicated and his life was in danger because of his harsh writings against the Roman Catholic Church.

After his excommunication he was called to a meeting and given a chance to retract everything he had negatively said against the church. Luther apologized for his harsh tone but he refused to back down from his basic charges that the Roman Catholic had become corrupt, abandoned Scriptural authority and the core teachings of the gospel.

It was at this meeting that he famously said, "Unless I am convinced by Scripture and plain reason - I do not accept the authority of the popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other - my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen."

Luther departed and was not arrested because of a previous legal action that protected him for 21 days but after the meeting the Holy Roman Emperor (Charles V) declared Luther an outlaw, which meant he could be killed by anyone without threat of punishment.

During that time a sympathizer of Luther “kidnapped” him and took him to a castle in near Eisenach, Germany. It was here that Luther lived for a year in seclusion and began his translation of the Bible into German so that the common people could study the scriptures for themselves.

During this time of seclusion Luther later confessed to having battled depression and many attacks from the devil. While in the castle he spoke of having “drove the devil away with ink.” Perhaps he was referring to that famous story of him having thrown a bottle of ink across the room when the devil was attacking him or to his translation of the Bible into German.

None the less, it was during that time of solitary confinement in the castle, when his life was in grave danger, which many historians believe he wrote the words to this great hymn. The castle became a mighty fortress of sorts that protected him from the threats against his life and it was a reminder to him of that greater fortress of God that truly protected him from the threats that were all around him.

In the psalm this morning we get a picture of the one constant thing a man can cling to in the midst of the threats, difficulties, and challenges of life-God.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in times of trouble. Therefore we will not fear through the earth give way, and the mountains fall into the hearts of the sea, and though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake in their surging.

What we have in that first section of the text is one of the greatest affirmations of faith in all the Bible. The affirmation that there is only one anchor we can go to when our world is falling apart all around us-God.

Brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ, the world is falling apart all around you. It has always been this way ever since the fall of Adam. Sometimes it's falling apart more and sometimes less, but it is always falling apart, especially those places in the world that refuse to be redeemed by the power and grace of God.

But not only is the world falling apart all around us sometimes our own worlds are falling apart.

Just because we are Christians does not mean we will not go through difficulties in life.

Jesus said **“the servant is not greater than the master.”** (Jn. 15:20) Jesus is our Master and yet he was crucified and if he was crucified then who are we as his servants to think that we won't go through hardships, just as our master did?

We live in a fallen world and our lives are not immune from it. We too face sickness, death, and hardships.

Someone here today may feel like the earth is giving way, the mountains are falling into the heart of the sea, and the waters are roaring and foaming all around them but hear the good news of the gospel, **“God is our refuge and strength, and ever present help in a time of trouble.”**

To whom or what do you run to in order to seek solace and healing from the crumbling world around you? Are you going to yourself, own inner strength? Are you seeking solace in your work? In food? In sex? Money? The bottle? Education? None of these things will work for you. They cannot fill the God shaped vacuum in your heart.

The gospel says **“God is our refuge and strength,”** not all of these other things that we tend to run to when our worlds are falling apart.

The Lord God Almighty is our one sure place of refuge in the midst of the storms of life and we see this in the second section of the psalm when it talks about **“a river whose streams make glad the city of God.”**

The psalmist tells us that in that city the Most High dwells in the holy place (meaning God) and that God will help her at break of day. She will not be destroyed. The nations are in uproar all around her and they threaten to destroy her but God will lift his voice and the earth will melt and God will save the Holy Place.

This section most immediately refers to the Jewish temple that was built in Jerusalem yet I believe it points us to something deeper because the Jewish temple was eventually destroyed, never to be rebuilt. As a Christian I believe Psalm 46 refers to Jesus Christ himself.

Do you remember what Jesus said in the gospels? He said **“Destroy this temple and I will raise it again in three days.”** (Jn. 2:19) Everybody thought he was talking about the temple in Jerusalem, which at that time was still standing, but what he was really referring to was the raising of his body from the dead.

The NT clearly teaches us that Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word of God; meaning that he is God in the flesh. So if you want to see God then look to him because he is God in the flesh.

The ramifications of such a claim are astounding. It would mean that Jesus is the true temple and dwelling place of God. As much as God’s presence may have dwelt in the physical temple of Jerusalem it is minuscule in comparison to God becoming flesh in the man Jesus.

Jesus Christ, the eternal and incarnate Word of the Father, is the true temple of God because he is the true dwelling place of God and the good news of the gospel is that as the world is falling apart all around us we can always go to him because God raised this Jesus from the dead.

In Christ God is with us fully and completely, and God helps us at daybreak by saving us because God defeated the powers of sin and death that sought to destroy His true temple by raising Jesus Christ from the dead. The earth melts and the nations are in uproar but God lifts his voice and says get out of the tomb! Christ is risen and because of him we will not fall!

As we move to the third section of the Psalm not only do we see that God is with us and saves us in the midst of a world that is falling apart we also see that one day God will bring all of these problems in our world to an end.

Come and see what the Lord has done, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the shields with fire. He says, ‘Be still and know that I am God, I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted among the earth.’ (v. 8-10)

Here we have a picture of the new heavens and new earth that the Bible talks so much about, both in the OT, especially the writings of the prophets, and in the NT, especially the book of Revelation.

The world that we live in now *is* being redeemed in Jesus Christ but the task is *not* finished. God is saving his people and changing them and as consequence the Kingdom of God is coming on earth, just as Jesus prayed it would in the Lord’s Prayer, but this work is not finished. The world is fallen and we are still fighting the powers of sin, death, and hell in the world.

Sometimes we Christians can become easily discouraged when we look at all of the problems around us or in our lives but we **“must not grow weary in doing good because at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.”** (Gal. 6:9)

Peter tells us in his epistle that to God, **“one day is like a thousand years and a thousand years like one day.”** (II Pet. 3:8)

We do not and cannot know when our Lord shall return to consummate God's work of redemption in the world and to establish a new heavens and new earth, but one day Christ will return and when he does he will **“break the bow and shatter the spear”** of God enemies. He will **“burn their shields with fire”** and he will be **“exalted among the nations and in all the earth.”**

As we say in the creed most every Sunday, on the grounds of what God has revealed to us in his Holy Word,

He was crucified, dead, and buried; he descended into hell; the third day he rose again from the dead; he ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence he shall come to judge the quick and the dead.

Jesus Christ is Lord and at the end of human history (whenever that is and however that happens) every knee shall bow and every confess that he is Lord, either willingly or unwillingly but the knee *will* bow and the tongue *will* confess.

Be Still and Know that I Am God

This is a great truth that we must keep ever before us as we face our own trials in life. The way we do it is we **“be still and know that he is God.”**

We must carve out space in our lives for time with the Lord. We must make time in our lives for prayer, worship, and study of God's Word.

If we crowd out such times to **“be still and know that he is God”** we will lose hope and become despondent that things will never change in our lives or in the world, but if we make space in our lives for Jesus Christ to come in and **“sup with us”** (Rev. 3:20) then our Lord will build us up and feed us in our faith and give us good hope and he will become for us **“our refuge and strength and an ever present help for us in times of trouble.”**

In the name of the Father the Son and the Holy Spirit, amen.