

Do Not Fear: the Lord of Hosts is with Us

Michael J. Nielsen / General

Fear; Refuge; Strength / Psalm 46

- › Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

[Psalm 46](#) is well known to Lutherans. It's one of the most well-known and memorized Psalms next to [Psalm 23](#) and [Psalm 121](#). It forms the basis for the great Reformation Hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." This hymn has been a comfort for many Christians since it's writing. It not only recognizes the real problems we face because of the world, our sinful flesh, and the devil, but it also provides comfort and security to those who are in the fortress of Jesus' protection.

The hymn is beautiful and comforting because it reflects its basis in Holy Scripture: [Psalm 46](#). Neither the Roman Catholic Church nor the government in Luther's day would accept the teaching of the Reformers. In fact, both powers brought great tumult upon Luther and those who followed him. The world at that time was also filled with plagues and death, and the devil was recognized as active in the lives of everyday people. This psalm was recognized as active in the lives of everyday people. This psalm recognizes all these troubles and tumults, while at the same time reminding its readers that God is a mighty fortress,

that the Lord of Hosts is our Refuge,

and all who trust in him are safe.

God is our refuge and strength in the midst of natural disasters. Natural disasters seem to be everywhere. Forest fires in California, Colorado, Oregon and other places out West. Derechos in Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana. Hurricanes striking the Gulf Coast as well as the Atlantic. We have even moved to the Greek Alphabet for storms this year! There's also the tornadoes, earthquakes, Tsunami warnings in Alaska earlier this week, and Floods that continue to plague our planet. Not to mention disease and disability that cause fear. We have the Covid-19 Pandemic that is going on and surging in many parts of the world that causes anxiety and fear.

The fears that natural disasters (and Pandemics, even though not directly spoken about in the Psalm is indeed a Natural Disaster) provoke are the focus of the first section of this Psalm. The Psalm mentions many of those things that afflict our natural world: the earth giving way,

mountains falling into the seas, the waters roaring and foaming, the trembling of the earth. I saw this to some degree when Delta moved across the Carolina's. The winds and the waves and the wind were very much impressive for just the ending of a storm.

It's easy for Christians to say we will not fear, but doubt is an inevitable result of the sin within each of us. That does cause us to fear at the turmoil in the natural world. Some are better at hiding their fear than others. Even we Christians will not overcome the totality of fear in our lifetime because our sinful nature is still part of us.

However, in this Psalm, God promises to be our refuge and strength. He is our "very present help." In the midst of all these troubles, the psalm gives an alternate picture: peace for those in Christ Jesus. While the world may be captivated by the troubles of natural disasters and disease, the psalm pictures a calm river, "whose streams make glad the city of God."

The world is indeed corrupted and sinful, the world is broken and falling apart, but such peace is promised to the children of God. Their eyes should not focus on the things of death but on the things of eternal life.

All who are baptized into Jesus' death and resurrection shall see "the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High." St. Paul is helpful as he describes his contentment:

English Standard Version Chapter 4

11 Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 12 I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. 13 I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

Paul can say this because he understands that already while in the world he also stands in the presence of God. For the holy place of God is wherever God's Word is proclaimed and his Sacraments properly administered.

In the Church, we share these promises. The World around us is in chaos. However, once we enter into the presence of God, who speaks to us through his gifts of Word and Sacrament, peace and sanity are restored.

In addition to the natural disasters we face in this fallen world, fallen humanity itself causes us great anxiety and fear. In fact, the attacks propagated by humans cause much more pain than natural disasters do. Nevertheless...

God is our refuge and strength against our world enemies. The example given in our text for today is nations raging and kingdoms tottering. We don't have to go too far to find such examples in our time. Just open your web-browser or social media page. Wars and rumors of war are constant. Civil unrest is so common, not only in countries that are far away...but right here in our own state and cities that aren't that far away. My fear is that in the coming weeks

the civil unrest is only going to increase. We are in an unpopular time with an election a mere 9 days away.

We're reminded of so many murders, abortions, sexual sins including pre-marital, extra-marital sex, homosexuality, pornography, pedophilia...and the list goes on. People are violently protesting against so many things. Violent protests are not the answer. Here is where we are at.

Sin does not understand itself to be sinful because it looks inward to its own desires—and sin seeks to remove anything that threatens these desires. In certain parts of the world, military members have recognized that for humans to kill other humans, it's necessary to convince them that those whom they kill are something other than human, something less than human. That is what sin does when it sets its own desires against God and his people.

Not only are people, the nations raging; they are doing so because the devil and his demons are real and remain active in the world, seeking to do evil and bring despair and death to God's creation. But here once more...

God is our refuge and strength against the powers of evil. The devil is constantly on the attack—today, also, through societal secularism and spiritualism. The first seeks to remove God from the world; the second seeks to provide false gods. Our nation and world continues to fall further away from God and into the devil's lies. The lies that you can be in a marriage relationship with anyone of either gender. The lies that you can switch your God-assigned sex at birth. The lies that killing an unborn child is women's health. There is so many more lies.

Yet, again, in the midst of the turmoil caused by the devil, his demons, and evil people, the psalmist redirects our gaze to the proper place: "The Lord of Hosts is with us: the God of Jacob is our fortress."

The hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" provides one of the most powerful sermons on this Psalm. It reminds us and proclaims that God is our "mighty fortress...a trusty shield and weapon."

I was thinking of this Psalm and the Reformation as I was driving through the Smoky Mountains between Knoxville, TN and Asheville, NC. As you take that drive you drive through some tunnels carved into the mountains. With the mountains you see the majesty of God, but I was also seeing the Fortress, immense beauty but also immense strength.

The mountains also on the side of the freeways have nets in place to catch rocks that fall. I was thinking about those nets and realized that those are protecting us from the danger. There are protecting us from harm. They are acting like the shield.

What a beautiful image along with this Psalm and to know that there is nothing that can harm those who are in Christ Jesus. The world can torture and kill, but God has defeated the powers of sin, death, and the devil through the death and resurrection of His only Son.

All the raging powers, including the struggles and pain they cause, cannot stand against the crucifixion of Jesus, His resurrection...and our Baptism that intimately connects us to him. The Lord our God will make these evils cease on the day of the glorious return of Christ our Savior. [Revelation 21](#) says that on that day there will no more tears, no more crying or mourning, no more death, no more pain...and ultimately no more sin! The Psalmist assures us that:

English Standard Version Psalm 46

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.

We do live in a world of seeming chaos where natural disasters afflict hundred of thousands...and sometimes millions of people. We live in a world where disease of all kinds (not just Covid-19) infects and kills thousands every-year. We live in a world where there is constantly wars and rumors of wars, violent protests, abortions and every other kind of sin. This is the work of the devil.

Yet in [Psalm 46](#), we are reminded that no matter how chaotic things may seem or even are...God stands above all things, and he promises us a place of comfort and safety in the midst of evil. We find this safety in Jesus! Apart from Jesus, there is only death, fear, suffering, and the works of the devil. But in Jesus we have a mighty fortress. He is our respite until we close our eyes in this life and then ultimately are raised to never-ending joy as God's children. Thanks be to God that he worked through the Reformation to bring such clarity back to his children—the clarity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ...the eternal Gospel, which proclaims that Jesus Christ by his life, death, and resurrection removes the works of sin, death, and the devil.

In the name of Jesus. Amen

- › Now may the peace of God which passes all human understanding, guard your hearts and minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus our Lord and Savior. Amen.