

Reformation Sunday Yr C, 30/10/2016

Ps 46

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“God is our Mighty Fortress”

Safe places and feeling that you are secure and being protected. What place in your past made you feel safe and secure? What place right now, in the present makes you feel safe, secure and being protected? When you think of God, how do you picture him? Do you picture God in some way that helps you to believe that you are safe, secure and being protected?

Well, in Psalm forty-six the opening verse gives us a beautiful picture of safety, security and being protected. The psalmist writes with bedrock confidence saying: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Or it can be translated like this: “God is our *fortress* and strength, a *well proved* help in trouble.” I wonder if you’re like me, when I hear that word fortress, I think of a safe, secure place, a place of protection.

On several occasions now in my life, I have visited fortresses. One of the things that I notice about them is how well they are built. Some of them are very solid, with very thick stone or brick walls. They were built to keep the people inside of them safe, secure and protected.

The verse also describes God as “our strength.” As a pastor and chaplain, many people have told me about times of difficulty and suffering. They have said things like this: “Pastor, if it wasn’t for God, I don’t know where I’d find enough strength to get me through this.”

The psalmist continues to speak with confidence in God here in verse one saying that God is “a very present help in trouble,” or it can be translated God is “a *well proved* help in trouble.” In other words, the psalmist believes God can be counted on; God is reliable; God is dependable.

Notice that God our fortress, strength and very present help, well proved help does not mean that life will be trouble free. No life is not trouble free. There will be trouble; we will have failures and disappointments; there will

be sufferings and yes, even tragedies will happen. The psalmist does not say here that we will be spared such things. No. Rather, the psalmist assures us that in all of these troubles God is still there with us.

In verses two and three, the psalmist again speaking a word of confidence, says that because God is our fortress, strength, and help in trouble “we will not fear.” We do not have to live in fear. The psalmist claims that even in the midst of catastrophic events like earthquakes we do not have to be afraid. God is still there with us so do not fear.

Verses four and five shift from natural disasters like earthquakes to a peaceful picture of streams from a river flowing through the city of God. Once again the psalmist tells us that the city is blessed with God’s presence. This fits in very well with the title of Psalm forty-six in my Bible. The title is: “God’s Defense of His City and People.” So that sense of feeling safe, secure and protected is reaffirmed here.

Then, in verse six, the scene changes. Now nations are in an uproar, kingdoms totter. The picture here is perhaps one of war and the opposite of feeling safe, secure and being protected.

Yet, in verse seven of this psalm—which was sung by the people of Judah and Jerusalem—has a very confident refrain: “The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge,” or it can be translated again as: “the God of Jacob is our fortress.” This refrain is repeated again in the last verse—once again reaffirming that sense of feeling safe, secure and being protected by God.

In verses eight and nine, I like the translation of the Revised English Bible; which invite those who worship God to: “Come, see what the LORD has done, the astounding deeds he has wrought on earth; in every part of the wide world he puts an end to war: he breaks the bow, he snaps the spear, he burns the shields in the fire.” So once again God acts in a powerful way here to bring his people safety, security and protection.

Verse ten is in the form of a command to: “Be still, and know that I am God!” The people are able to be still and know that God is God because of what he did in verses eight and nine—because he put an end to war and destroys the weapons of war. God is not a God of hatred and war. God is a God of love and peace—therefore we his people can be still before him; and we can sing out with awe and wonder; with reverence and respect because he is the Holy, Supreme, Exalted One. The God of all nations and the whole earth.

So the song ends with the refrain, reminding us again that God is our fortress—the one who grants us safety, security and protection.

Today as we celebrate Reformation Sunday, we sang “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” which is based on Psalm forty-six, and reformer Martin Luther’s most popular hymn.

For Luther himself, likely one of the—if not the—most important message(s) of the hymn is that for him, on numerous occasions, God was like A MIGHTY FORTRESS. Perhaps it was during his year that he spent in hiding at Wartburg Castle while he translated the New Testament into German that he found God on a much larger scale to be like that mighty fortress at Wartburg. Those thick protective walls of Wartburg Castle may have helped him feel safe and secure away from his military, political and ecclesiastical adversaries. Oftentimes Luther felt that everyone was against him—hence, it was solely by the protective and gracious God that he remained unharmed and safe, and was able to continue with his reforming work. For Luther, Jesus Christ himself being The Word of God Incarnate could accomplish ALL THINGS. Luther took great comfort in this and it was The Source of his strength and inspiration throughout his life.

Fast forwarding now to the present day, we too are able to be inspired, strengthened, and encouraged by God Our Almighty Fortress. I’m certain that if we all stopped to think about it; every one of us here today could recall at least one time—if not more—in our life when God has protected us from

troubles, dangers and harm. God has been like a Strong Fortress for us too; whether we face physical, mental, spiritual or other dangers.

Maybe, like ancient Judah and like Martin Luther, we've had to face some overwhelming opponents and obstacles. We, like they, might feel we have precious little chance of overcoming or winning over such opponents and obstacles. Our own strength, skills, gifts and resources may seem next-to-nothing compared to those of others. Yet, we're still here! God is good! God has given us exactly what we've needed at the right time. We have been protected, strengthened, encouraged, inspired—we've overcome and prevailed because "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." The power of God's word has worked in us and in our lives too. And so we worship the LORD our Mighty Fortress and serve him, as did the people of Judah and Jerusalem; as did Martin Luther and the other reformers in gratitude for what he has done for us throughout our lives. Praise and thanks to God our Mighty Fortress, now and forever! Amen.