

**Sunday, October 25, 2020 – Reformation Sunday**  
**“We Will Not Fear”**

Psalm 46

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV  
Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Jerusalem was in trouble in 701BC. The Assyrian King Sennacherib and his army, nearly 200,000 strong marched against the weakened Kingdom of Judah. They'd already wiped out the northern kingdom and its' 10 original tribes of Israel 20 years earlier and now they were going after the southern kingdom. King Hezekiah, descendant of King David and ancestor of Jesus, tried to cover his bases. He tried to buy off the king of Assyria. He more than emptied the national treasury to pay off the Assyrians, even stripping gold from the walls and doorhandles of the temple, hoping they would be spared. And still the Assyrian army came, surrounded the city walls, mocked Yahweh the God of Judah and started to lay siege with manpower that I can only grasp in my mind's eye by remembering one of the big battle scenes in Lord of the Rings.

It's not 100% certain that this event prompted the writing of Psalm 46 but it's a respectable guess. If not this, something similar, for sure. What do you do when your world is falling apart around you? When you desperately bargain, hoping against all hope to get a reprieve? When the political order has devolved into chaos, and nature itself seems to be conspiring against you, mountains falling into the heart of the sea? When the future is murky at best, and scary at worst? When the very future of your people is in question?

For Hezekiah, so much rode on what he could bargain or how much he could plan and prepare, but the power that he was up against was too great for anything that he could do to make a difference. He covered himself in sackcloth and ashes and prayed for God to deliver the people. And God did exactly that. Direct divine intervention led to the Assyrian army of 185,000 being destroyed without a single arrow being fired over the wall into Jerusalem. Judah may have been much weaker, and poorer, a leaner kingdom than before but God saved His people.

Martin Luther was inspired by this psalm and this sentiment. Over the previous ten years he'd caused a major stir throughout Europe with his 95 Theses, brought into increasingly stiff conflict with the church that ended with his excommunication. He was pursued by those who'd drag him in, dead or alive, but for the help of a friendly prince. He spent a year pent up in a castle tower, disguised as a knight. He had seen war break out during a revolt by the peasant class, using his own teachings in a way that he never intended or approved of. And then to top it all off his town of Wittenberg was besieged by the plague. The suffering expressed by the psalmist, where it feels like the earth is giving way, the sand ever shifting under his feet was all too relatable for Luther. It prompted his writing that most stereotypically Lutheran of hymns, "A Mighty Fortress."

God is our refuge and strength. Our fortress. Our place of protection. Whether waters roar and foam and mountains tremble or nations rage and kingdoms totter He need only to utter His voice.

But the answer isn't always found where you think. Hezekiah started out strong, doing what was right. So few of the kings of Judah did right. He tore down the various worship sites to false gods throughout the land, including the gods of the Assyrians. And when the Assyrian army marched against his fortified cities and destroyed them, he counted on a form of diplomacy. 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold – this is GDP level currency, not just some rich guy's checkbook. But the nation against him raged as his kingdom tottered. There was no financial solution for King Hezekiah and Judah. No political solution, either, against an enemy that held all the cards. And certainly no military solution. This God-fearing king had no recourse bound up in his abilities, his resources or the people under his command to fix the issues.

Isn't that the temptation? To look for a financial, political or military solution during the darkest night? The psalmist writes, "4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of

God, the holy habitation of the Most High. <sup>5</sup> God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.”

God will help her. This is the dwelling place of the Most High. The ruler of the heavenly armies, the Lord of Hosts. He is watching out for His people.

Who is she? Judah was different than any other nation, certainly any nation state of our day. It was a theocracy – ruled by God Himself, with day to day governance delegated to a human king from the line of David. The nation and being the people of God were one and the same thing. Not so today. No nation state has that status. But there is a continuance of this line, the promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah and it has come down through yet another king who came from that line. He too was faithful to hold up only the worship of the true God but unlike Hezekiah he did not succumb to the temptation to pay the kings of this world. There He was, the Word made Flesh, in the midst of His people.

And he too was besieged – and worse than Hezekiah. Arrested, surrounded by hateful crowds, scourged and mocked. Judas regretted his betrayal and offered a hopeless financial solution – to return the 30 pieces of silver. Pilate tried political solutions – maybe Herod will let Him off? Maybe the people will accept His release instead of the murderer Barabbas? But no, He was nailed to a tree while His own people, the very people He came to save threw insults at Him, adding insult to the injuries to his hands and feet, nakedness and shame. They taunted Him to prove Himself, with a military solution of sorts, to show supernatural power and strength to come down from the cross. Even another criminal being hanged railed against Him. None of these worked because none of these were His plan. He came to offer an entirely different kind of solution – His own suffering and death for the sin of the world, your sin and mine and all the bad things that have happened, are happening and will happen in us and to us and around us in this life.

“Be still and know that I am God.” Another psalmist says, “Do not put your trust in princes.” Salvation is in the Lord who is in the midst of us – the life-giving waters of baptism

streaming over our heads with promises of God's constant presence and help for you and me. These make glad this city of God, this Church, do they not?

The nations rage, kingdoms totter – but Jesus comes to make wars cease to the ends of the earth. You see, His purposes for His kingdom and for His Church are different than the purposes of the world. Oh, we'll be tempted, won't we – to put our trust in every financial hope, political promise or power focused outcome. The world begs us to, calls us foolish if we don't... and if you're thinking of "the other guy," think again – it's all of us. And like Hezekiah and Judah the Church today can lose its' nerve – fighting about worldly issues in a worldly manner that have absolutely nothing to do with our greater identity as children of God, supposing to sever our unity around this Word and these Sacraments over whatever the financial, political or military rancor of the day would say, warning us that if we're not for them we're against them, asking us to trust in them.

The kingdoms of this world have their place. They are the duly appointed authorities that God ordains and God uses for His purposes – all of them, no matter their political bent. But they are not the source of our hope.

No, we're called to something far more foolish. To keep our eyes fixed on the cross, the empty tomb and the life of the world to come – and to know that in the meantime Jesus tells us to expect to go everywhere He has gone.

Are you looking forward to victory? Has someone promised you that your enemies will be overcome, that things will be either restored to the way they used to be or will turn into what they were always supposed to be? Is a man or woman or political party held up before you as a sort of prophetic savior figure to usher in this victory? It's happening on all sides in the world around us. Are you being told that you that you need not actually love your neighbor – that is, all the humans around you – born and unborn, from every nation, tribe and language, with lifestyles with which you agree or not, from all over the political spectrum – as yourself? Some would even let these worldly perspectives keep them from the house of the Lord, begrudging brothers

and sisters in Christ! Are your lips, or your fingertips and thumbs sharing and liking that which is divisive, while calling a brother or sister in Christ foolish (or worse) out of solidarity to some sort of cause? If so then you, like me are a chief of sinners, seduced like Hezekiah by the financial, political or power focused solutions the world has to offer.

What do we do? We repent. We go back to the Scriptures, which is what the Reformation is all about: What does God say? We test the spirits and ask whether this is from God or not. If our hope is in some promise of victory on the world's terms with no regard to others, that's a sign that our hope is misplaced. Ours is a faith where we rejoice in our sufferings that produce perseverance, that produce character, that produce hope, that does not disappoint. Ours is a faith that confesses, "If we say we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Jesus said, "If you abide in my word you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth – and the truth will set you free."

Hezekiah and the psalmist both say that worldly solutions don't work, but God is a refuge and strength. Therefore we will not fear. Be still – God is in the midst of us, we who are baptized in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit. Your body is His temple. He's here in this body and this blood. Those waters course over us, drowning us as He washes us and makes us alive again. Then He sends us, truth that sets us free spoken over you for the forgiveness of your sin. We're sent looking to a different kind of victory, at the end of the age that only God can do. Or, as He says, "Be still, and know that I am God – I will be exalted among the nations – I will be exalted on the earth. The Lord of hosts is with us – the God of Jacob is our fortress." In Jesus' name, Amen.