

A Meditation on Psalm 46
Reformation Sunday
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I have heard it said, in reference to Martin Luther and the Reformation, that "Luther read his Bible and the world changed." Indeed, it was the transformation that Martin Luther experienced in his study of the Word that birthed his passion for getting the Bible into the hands of lay people, and fueled him to protest the practices of the church that got in the way of others' experience of God's grace.

Kristie and Tom will be teaching about the Reformation between services, so I will resist the temptation to go there. What does seem appropriate within the scope of our worship today, is to dwell in Scripture in much the same way Luther might have; to pour over the Word and let it pour into us so that we too might experience its transformative powers.

Our Scripture today is Psalm 46. You see it woven throughout our service of worship this morning. Our opening hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*, is Luther's paraphrase of this psalm. It's a hymn of confidence; a psalm of trust in the midst of destruction and turmoil. As we explore Psalm 46 now, I think you'll agree that its assurances are for all time, and certainly for us today.

The psalm is divided into three stanzas – the first we read together for our Call to Worship; the second was read by Martha/Kim as our Old Testament lesson; and we'll read the third stanza later in the service, to invite our tithes and offerings.

Let's look together at the first stanza, verses 1-3, our Call to Worship on page 2 of your bulletin. Psalm 46 opens with a proclamation of God as our very-present refuge and strength, and goes on to describe significant disruption and turmoil going on in the physical world – an unsettled earth, mountains shaking and trembling, waters foaming. I can't help to read it and be reminded of our own hurricanes, earthquakes, and wildfires; frightening

and very real aspects of the physical world. Yet in the face of these fears, the psalmist proclaims with confidence the strong presence of God. Even when the whole world seems to fall apart, when our lives appear to be in shambles, God is with us.

As we move into the second stanza, page 4 of your bulletin, the water provides contrasting imagery. Described in the first stanza as roaring and foaming, the waters now bring joy. Such is the paradox of life through the eyes of faith. Dying leads to new life, in tragedy we find blessing, giving away is gain. The waters of the psalm, once with the capacity to destroy, are now life-giving. Also in this stanza we find the disruption of intensifying – now nations and kingdoms are collapsing – yet God, our refuge, is still present and at work. This stanza reminds us that darkness and disruption will come in our lives, but God will ensure that morning breaks through. Trusting in that, the psalmist persists in proclaiming hope in chaos.

The psalm's closing, on page 5 of your bulletin, verses 8 – 11, now adds invitations to come, see, and know; and a promise again that God our refuge is with us. There's a familiar verse in there that might be jumping out to you, verse 10, which is translated there as, *Be still, and know that I am God*. This verse has been a comfort to many. It is my own go-to Bible verse for meditation. But, I'm going to add another layer of appreciation for you. The more nuanced translation of "be still" from the Hebrew text is closer to "let go" or loosen your grip. So, *let go, and know that I am God*. Let go of that which is keeping you from experiencing the refuge you have in God. Let go, God is with you. God our refuge and strength is very present.

Now as I close, I'd like to read the psalm again. I invite you to sink into the Word and receive its invitation to be still and let go. To let go of what is weighing you down, and enter into the refuge that is God. Rest in your seat, close your eyes if that is comfortable for you, and let God's word pour into you.

Psalm 46

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.

² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.

⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.

⁵ God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.

⁶ The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.

⁷ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

⁸ Come, behold the works of the Lord;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰ 'Be still, and know that I am God!
I am exalted among the nations,
I am exalted in the earth.'

¹¹ The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Amen.