

## **Sermon Draft**

**Text: Psalm 46**

**Sermon: Reformation 2020 (Our Refuge)**

Our Psalm for Reformation Day is Psalm 46 as it is every Reformation Day. It also forms the basis for Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." While this hymn is sung regularly on Reformation Sunday, it is also the Hymn of the Day for the First Sunday in Lent, when the Church remembers Jesus' temptation in the wilderness.

These two Sundays of the Church Year share common themes. In the time of the Reformation, Lutherans were facing temptation and possible death at the hand of the Roman Catholic Church and the government. Luther understood that the agent of these tormentors of the Church was the devil. Yet, the point of the Reformation was the Gospel message of justification through Jesus' death and resurrection and, not to be forgotten, Jesus' active obedience to God for our sake. Therefore, the hymn also points us to the one who for us overcame sin, death, and the devil when he was tempted by all the things that prevail against us.

The Reformation reminds us that Psalm 46 must be understood as promising refuge specifically in Jesus, who has secured us to himself through Holy Baptism. In Baptism, Jesus has connected us to his own death and resurrection, thereby nullifying the powers of sin, death, and the devil, which all seek to cause us harm.

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” has been a comfort for many Christians since its 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 teachings 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 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 in the midst of natural disasters. Natural disasters seem to be everywhere. Tsunamis, earthquakes, mudslides, forest fires, floods, hurricanes, and tornados continue to plague our planet. This hurricane season we have had 27 named storms. The fears that natural disasters 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.

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”** (v 1). 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, the psalm pictures a calm river, **“whose streams make glad the city of God.”** The world is indeed corrupted and sinful, 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”** (v 4). Paul is helpful as he describes his contentment: **“I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. 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. I can do all things through him who strengthens me”** (Philippians 4:11–13).

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 against our worldly enemies.

The example given in the psalm is of nations raging and kingdoms tottering (v 6). We don't have to go too far to find such examples in our time. Just watch the nightly news. Wars and rumors of wars abound all around us. Civil unrest is so common, not only in countries that are far away, but also in our own cities.

We are reminded of so many murders, abortions, sexual sins, thefts, and acts of greed. People are violently protesting against the very foundation of what is good, right, and salutary.

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. It's interesting that the militaries of the world 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 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 country continues to fall away from God and into the devil's lies. We can't even agree on how to deal with this pandemic which should be something that unites us. But instead it has become a political issue. 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"*** (v 7).

"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God" provides one of the most powerful sermons on this psalm. It reminds us that our God is a "mighty fortress . . . a trusty shield and weapon" (LSB 656:1). 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 Jesus' glorious return.

The psalm assures, ***“He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire”*** (v 9).

We live in a world of seeming chaos where natural disasters afflict hundreds of thousands. There are wars and rumors of wars, protests and violence, abortions and every kind of sin. All the work of the devil.

Yet in Psalm 46, we are reminded that no matter how chaotic things may seem, 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, who removes the works of sin, death, and the devil.

Amen