



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School

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REFORMATION DAY

October 26, 2014

“Though the Mountains Tremble”

(Psalm 46:1-3)

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“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling” (Psalm 46:1-3).

Collect of the Day

Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen**

In 1964, Lyndon B. Johnson declared a war on poverty. With so many homeless even in Watertown, how are we doing on that war?

In 1971 Richard Nixon declared a war on drugs. That was 43 years ago. Have we won yet?

That same year, 1971, we also declared war on cancer. The president of the American Cancer Society said at that time, “We are so close to a cure for cancer. We lack only the will and the kind of money . . . that went into putting a man on the moon” (*The Emperor of All Maladies*, p. 181). Since then billions of public and private dollars have been directed at research, and we’ve seen advances, and a lot of pink this month, but is the problem solved? Not from my perspective.

In 2001 a global war on terrorism was declared –but annual global fatalities due to terrorism today are twice those in 2001.

Many believe we’re losing the war on global warming. And how about the campaign to degrade and destroy ISIS? Is it working? And then there’s Ebola, which can travel as fast as a commercial airline. The World Health Organization says that by December, there will be ten thousand new cases diagnosed each week.

Meanwhile, the grown-ups in charge, the guardians of order, those in government, in spite of customary swagger seem overwhelmed and overmatched, always behind the curve, never anticipating the severity of the next threat, with Ukraine, Isis, Ebola.

But the big problems aren’t just out there. How are your own personal wars going? Did you lose the weight you promised you would? Did you save what you intended for retirement and college? Did you pay off the debt? Did you change your passwords, and back up your digital photos? Did you put an end to

that unhealthy habit, that secret addiction, that customary sin?

When we put our trust in our own strength, we will be disappointed. Proverbs 28, “Whoever trusts in his own mind is a fool” (vs. 26). And when we put too much trust in the readiness and strength of government, we will also be disappointed. Jeremiah 17 says, “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert, and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.”

So to whom shall we go? Psalm 46: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”

Walter Brueggemann, one of the better known scholars of the psalms, says that some psalms were written for good times, when all is well and the world is sane and safe and orderly. He calls them psalms of orientation. They are psalms to pray when everything makes sense, when we know where we stand, we know our place in the world and with God.

The trouble, of course, is that life is not always like that. And so, Brueggemann says there are also psalms of disorientation, when our world seems to be collapsing in on itself. These are psalms for those times when things look bleak and people are feeling anxious and vulnerable, times of radical change when old certainties no longer hold. These are psalms to pray when we’re feeling abandoned by God, or when we’re confused about his will and plan for us. Professor Brueggemann says Psalm 46 is one of those psalms. And I believe this ancient psalm is highly relevant today, given all the dangers and threats, and our cultural dismay and anxiety.

God, the psalm promises, is not only present in the good times, when nature is kind, and the sea calm, and children are all healthy, personal well-being secure, and enemies subdued and quiet. God, this psalm asserts, is present and may be relied upon when nature is unkind, when mountains shake, and the sea roars – when we feel

disoriented, when nothing feels secure or stable. Doesn't that describe life today, a time of breath taking change happening all around us?

My wife works at UW Hospital. She's been getting all kinds of protocols to follow when confronted with a potential case of Ebola. Just a few months ago, who would have anticipated a Wisconsin hospital prepping for a disease usually isolated to a few tropical villages in West Africa?

I suspect your work place has seen changes too. In the past, your employer probably wanted loyal employees, people who would stick with the company. Today, your employer is probably looking for flexible people, people who are not so possessive about how things are done, people who can change and adapt to the new technologies and demands, and also move on gracefully when the time comes.

Today, institutions that cannot change die. Churches that refuse to change usually decline and become irrelevant. Two weeks ago, there was a seminar for LCMS pastors in South Wisconsin. It was entitled, "Change or Die." I'm told that in the next decade, nearly fifty percent of LCMS churches will not be able to financially sustain a full-time pastor. Current seminarians therefore, are being told to anticipate having to take on part-time jobs (in addition to being a pastor) in order to support their families and pay down their educational loans. All of us are being pressed to do our work differently than we ever have before.

Sometimes change comes with the announcement that we're downsizing and you're unemployed. Sometimes change comes when a long and stable relationship begins to fray and tear and then unexpectedly falls apart, and your whole world is turned upside down, and you have to think in ways you stopped thinking years ago and never wanted to think about again. And sometimes it comes when your body, which you thought was nearly indestructible, lets you down, and you have to deal with the limitations of aging. Sometimes change comes in a frightening way when the test comes back, and the moment the doctor walks in you can read the results in the fine muscles around his mouth. And

for all of us there comes a time when our work is done and you're retiring from the job which, in many ways, life revolved around for forty, fifty years, but now you have to think in brand new ways about who you are and what you will do and what your life now means. And some of you know the radical change that comes when your spouse dies, and you don't know where or how to start again, and there is grinding loneliness and relentless silence in the house.

It is during these times – when everything is up for grabs, when the earth is moving beneath your feet, and the mountains shaking . . . when the waters roar and foam, it is precisely then that you can count on the strong presence of God. That's the promise of this psalm. He will be your refuge and strength. You will not be alone. In him you are safe come what may.

For we believe that God came and lived among us in Jesus Christ. We believe God was present as he lived and taught and healed and laughed and enjoyed the company of his friends. But we believe God was present in the dark times too, as he experienced radical disorientation when he was pursued and tested by the religious authorities, when he was betrayed by his friends, when he was arrested and battered and mocked. He experienced disorientation when spikes were driven through his limbs. And the ultimate disorientation came when he was abandoned by God. No voice from heaven saying "This is my beloved Son" . . . only grinding loneliness and relentless silence as he dies our death. It is precisely then that God in Jesus was a most present help for us. Even as he dies, he becomes our refuge, our mighty fortress, a place to hide from our enemies of sin, death and the devil.

We still live in a fallen world. The waters will roar and foam, and mountains will fall into the heart of the sea. The nations will still rage, kingdoms will totter. But he will be your refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore you need not fear. Instead this psalm recommends, compels actually, orders us

Be still
And know that I am God!

He has the world in his hands. He has you in his hands.
You are his baptized; nothing can separate you from his love
in Jesus Christ.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help
in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth gives
way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the
sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains
tremble at its swelling . . . Be still, and know that I am God. .
. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our
fortress.” Thanks be to God. Amen.

