

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Reformation Sunday, November 4, 2012

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 123, 263:1, 262, 463, 651.

Lessons: Isaiah 55:1-11, Ephesians 2:1-10, John 17:1-10.

Sermon Text: Psalm 46.

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehltritt

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Anyone who knows about hunting knows about a refuge. A refuge is a safe place for birds or animals, where they shall not be hunted.

Christians are being hunted daily by Satan the devil, as you read last week: *"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:"* (1 Peter 5:8 King James Version) *"Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings."* (1 Peter 5:9 New International Version)

I have been told by hunters that birds and animals seem to know where the game refuge is. They seem to even know that one side of a road is a refuge and on the other side they will be hunted, killed, and destroyed. So it must be with the Christian. The Christian, the child of God, the ones who are *"sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus"* (Galatians 3:26), must know where they are safe, and must learn and remember and be reminded that

THE TRUE GOD IS THE REFUGE OF HIS PEOPLE

- 1. God is our Refuge and Strength;**
- 2. Though everything around us fail;**
- 3. The Lord of Hosts is with his people.**

God's Word tells us plainly today: *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."* Few Psalms give us the spirit of confidence in the Lord in the midst of very real danger as strongly as this psalm does.

Now today, in just one sermon we can't talk about every aspect of Psalm 46 or every picture in Hymn 262, "A Mighty Fortress is our God". The very first word of this Psalm is "God". He is the center, the emphasis of this Psalm, this hymn of praise.

God is on our side. He is like a strong fortress into which someone may flee and be absolutely safe. Luther spoke of him in our last hymn as a fortress, something people in his day plainly understood. With the bombs and weapons built in the 21st century, no human building or "fortress" would be safe from destruction unless it were hundreds of feet underground. But when this hymn was written, probably in 1529, gunpowder and dynamite were not a danger to European castles or fortresses. God is a fortress that cannot be overcome.

God is also an unfailing source of strength, which enables Christians to cope with the dangers that attack them. God is a well-proved help in any kind of troubles. This is the basic fact on which the whole psalm rests. Luther concentrated his famous hymn on this thought.

If you accept what the first verse of this psalm says as true, your attitude cannot be anything except one of complete fearlessness. *"Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging."*

Even if the earth changes, as if a violent earthquake would throw mountains into the ocean, we will not be afraid. With recent earthquakes in many places in the world, or especially as a result of the earthquake and terrible tsunami that crippled Japan in 2011, we can visualize such things happening. But even if they happen to us, we must remember that God, Our God, Our creator, redeemer, and comforter, is still in charge and controlling all things. And so we can say, and feel from our hearts, with all our being, that we will not be afraid. Paul echoes that in Romans 8:28 ***"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."***

It is no little thing to remain confident and fearless in the midst of such terrible forces of nature. But he who has fully grasped what God is for his people may remain unmoved, for their God is with them all the way.

The waters of the sea are restless and dangerous, but the river of God is peaceful and life-giving.

God gives us some pictures to help explain what he is talking about: ***"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day. Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."***

Jerusalem was built on the top of a small mountain, and Solomon's temple was built at God's direction on the very top. In contrast with a mighty and turbulent river the Psalmist writes of a gentle stream – we could think of Psalm 23 and the still waters that our shepherd leads us to – and there was literally such a small stream flowing east of Jerusalem from the fountain of Siloam. The Hebrew word here for streams speaks of the small channels – “little runlets” says one dictionary – from which it is safe to draw near and drink. Isaiah writes this: ***"But now, this is what the LORD says-- he who created you, O Jacob, he who formed you, O Israel: "Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you."*** (Isaiah 43:1-2) Passing through the waters is a Biblical expression for passing through the trials and tribulations of this life. But God here writes of a gentle stream, insignificant in the eyes of the world, which provides water – the water of life – for those in the kingdom of God, those who believe in Jesus Christ as their only Savior from all their sins. Think of the power of water that we can see in some parts of our country when rivers are at or above “flood stage”. Perhaps you have even seen the rampaging Missouri or Minnesota or Mississippi River at wild flood stage. Or think of the most wild waterfall you have ever seen. No one, neither man nor animal would be able to draw or dip and drink water from such a wild river. But the gently flowing river of God – think of the Word of God, as Isaiah spoke of in our Old Testament lesson – is given for our nourishment. God provides gentle waters for his sheep. This makes the “temple”, that is, the people of God, rejoice, using the picture of the temple in Jerusalem. The believer draws help and strength from the simple words of the Bible. God's people will not fall because God is with them. He even named his Son, our Savior ***"Immanuel, which means 'God with us'"***. (Matthew 1:23) God is there to help at the very earliest dawn – and here we can think of the empty tomb discovered at the dawn of the day of the resurrection! This God, OUR God, from the very time of Jacob – another name for Israel – and earlier, is our fortress even today, though the nations of the world be in uproar and kingdoms are destroyed. The very voice of God, his words, have the power to make the earth melt, whether we think of the picture of the molten rocks of a volcano or the world being destroyed by fire on the last day. But God's people are safe, because ***"The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress, [our refuge]."***

God dwelling in his people makes the difference between the powerful nations and powers of this world and the seemingly insignificant tiny group of the people of God. It is God's power that makes her unassailable. When the night of danger and distress is past, then the morning of God's help regularly dawns. He can offer his help so effectively because he is in the very midst of his people. The heathen have raged and continue to do so today. Kingdoms have always been shaken, and God has been the one who has always controlled the situation. He has always uttered his Voice, and as a result all that men and kingdoms devised collapsed before him. He controls the raging of the nations and their tumults.

"Come and see the works of the LORD, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."

In the Bible are many examples of God rescuing his people. He led them across the Red Sea to rescue them from the Egyptian army whom he then drowned in the depths of the sea. Not only has God rescued his people Israel many times, but he rescues and protects us yet today from the desolations of the world. Just as the people of Jerusalem could take comfort from this psalm and the power of God resting upon them; just as Luther could take comfort from this psalm when he was threatened by pope and emperor – his life was in danger but God preserved him many times – so we, too, can take comfort in this Psalm. Many times God saved his people from things that would have destroyed them. In the Old Testament, we learn of things like God saving Daniel in the lion’s den and even God destroying whole armies. In the New Testament God rescued his people repeatedly, as when he released Paul and his companions from prison by an earthquake. And so God’s rescuing power rests upon us, today, too. I am sure each of us could think of physical calamities God has saved or rescued us from.

But more important is the spiritual rescue God has performed for mankind. He rescued us from the power of Satan by the work of his only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Jesus saved us from the most horrible disaster, eternal damnation in hell. And that salvation is yours just for the believing!

Think of Luther’s pictures which we just sang:

“Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us.
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
They shall not overpower us.
This world’s prince may still Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none,
He’s judged; the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.”

That one little word is the Word of God! Such pictures remind us and provide proof that God is our refuge.

God had foretold that persecutions and attacks on his people would happen. He says ‘But do not fear, o little flock. It is I, your God, who is controlling all things.’ He is the one who has all power, despite what it looks like on some days here on earth.

Never forget, as we shall soon sing that the Lord is on your side, is with you always.

“Be still, my soul; the Lord is on thy side;
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;
Leave to thy God to order and provide;
In every change He faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul; thy best, thy heavenly, Friend
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.”

“Be still, my soul; thy God doth undertake
To guide the future as He has the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence, let nothing shake.”

Yes, rejoice, because your God is a mighty fortress where you shall be safe, taking refuge in his Word. Never forget that. Always trust your God, no matter what happens. He guarantees it! Amen.