

Sermon - October 26, 2014 - Reformation Sunday

## When Things Fall Apart

Psalm 46



Dear friends in Christ,

Grace, peace and mercy from our Lord Jesus Christ be with each one of you.

Have you ever wondered what happens when things fall apart? How do you respond, what do you do?

Imagine this; you encounter a person with personal conflicts, maybe here at church, or at work or at school. Imagine you encounter a couple with interpersonal conflicts, what do you say? What do you say to them or to that person? What

would you say to couples who are divorcing? To the children of divorced parents, what would you say? Have you ever wondered how to respond to people who for whom things are falling apart?

What would you say to somebody who is dying of cancer? What did you say to your children when you heard of the shooting in Ottawa, or the killings by the Isis, or other acts of terrorism in Latin America by western countries, or terrorism in any part of the world, what would you say to people who whom things are going bad? When things fall apart?

What happens when things fall apart?

Sometimes we don't know what to say! I know it happens to me often, and it's strange because I'm supposed to know everything, right? But it does happen, when I hear of bad things happening to someone, that's the first question I ask myself, what do I say, to this person, or this family, or this couple, or these children. What can I say?

This morning I would like to invite you to explore these questions by turning to Psalm 46 to discover clearly how we should respond when things fall apart. And I would like to invite you to read it with me verse by verse:

**P:** God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

**C:** <sup>2</sup> **Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea,**

**P:** <sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

**C:** <sup>4</sup> **There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.**

**P:** <sup>5</sup> God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.

**C:** <sup>6</sup> **The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.**

**P:** <sup>7</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

**C:** <sup>8</sup> **Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth.**

**P:** <sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.

**C:** <sup>10</sup> **“Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”**

**P:** <sup>11</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Psalm 46.

## **I. In each scene the psalmist sees, God is with him.**

Does this psalm sound familiar? Yes, this is the psalm on which Martin Luther based his hymn of all times “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.”

In here, this psalm, the Psalmist describes all kinds of natural disasters, geopolitical turmoil, interpersonal conflict, and all kinds of other stuff that happens simply because we’re imperfect people living in an imperfect world. And what the psalm describes is happening all around us: International chaos and interpersonal conflicts, economic turmoil, geological distress, emotional anxiety, family dysfunction, and on and on and on.

And at the face of all of what is happening many are asking all sorts of questions that run through our minds: Where is God? How should we understand what’s going on all around us? How should we as Christians respond during these times?

Now, right away in this psalm the author makes a bold statement about the position people of faith take when things fall apart: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear” (vv 1–2a). We will not fear. Period.

Then the author describes three scenes. Did you catch them? The first scene is in vv 2–5, describing hurricanes, earthquakes, tornadoes, and other natural disasters. “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” (vv 2–3). The earth is giving way, the mountains are falling into the sea, the rivers and the oceans are in chaos, the earth is shaking and trembling. But right in the middle of this scene, what do we see? “There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns” (vv 4–5). A river. The kind of river that, when people see it, they’re glad. The kind of river that you’d find in the presence of God himself. The kind of river that warms the heart of God. The kind of river that, when the people of God see it, they rejoice, because it quenches their thirst. The kind of river that, even in the middle of the chaos, people stand and say, “God is within her! She will not fall! God will help her at the break of day!”

The second scene is in v 6: “The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.” Sudan, Syria, Iran, Israel and Gaza, North and South Korea, Afghanistan. Geopolitical conflicts are raging. Military forces clashing. Hard-line, ideological, hate-filled, power mongers standing toe-to-toe with one another, calling one another out, pushing one another’s buttons, seeing how far they can go before they reach the breaking point. Interpersonal attacks being waged one after another after another. And yet right in the middle of all the chaos and the turmoil, what do we see? “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (v 7). A fortress. The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. A place of safety and security. A hiding place where we can rest secure.

The third scene is in vv 8–9: “Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.” Some interesting words here describing the mighty, holy, unbridled power of God, doing things that God in his wisdom sometimes does without our comprehension. Breaking spears, destroying kingdoms, bringing desolation upon this earth! And sometimes, God’s

mighty, holy, unbridled power intersects with our lives, and there is collateral damage. But right in the middle of all of this, what do we hear? A voice. “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” (v 10). Be still, and know that I am God.

## **II. When our lives fall apart, God is our fortress too.**

Let me ask you a question this morning. Which of these three scenes do you see in your life right now? Natural calamities, where things are falling apart in your home or with your health? Interpersonal conflicts? The inexplicable, holy, unbridled power of God, where sometimes stuff just happens? How are you doing with this scene playing out in your life? In the middle of the chaos and the anxiety and the uncertainty, how is your faith? Or should I ask, Where is your faith? In whom is your faith? Without knowing it or intending it, Luther found himself in the midst of conflict that rocked the world. You know the story, he raised ninety-five questions that nailed at the door of the church in Wittenberg, those questions were only topics for debate really, just asking for open discussion, and who would know, they became the changing face of Europe and the planet even to now, but they also become the reason for Luther’s threat of death and, worse, excommunication from his Church, the official word that his soul would spend eternity in hell. Where could Luther put his faith? In whom?

Well, no matter which of the psalmist’s scenes is being played out in your life, God comes to each of us this morning as he came to Luther, with these words: “Be still. I am your refuge and your strength. I am your fortress. I am that calm, tranquil stream.” As the writer of Hebrews says, “I will never leave you nor forsake you” (Hebrews 13:5). Or to paraphrase God’s word to us: “I will stand by your side no matter what. I sent my Son, Jesus, to make this happen. His life, his death, and his resurrection took away the sin that had separated you from me, so now and forevermore I am with you.” This Table—this body and blood—is the guarantee of this promise. The waters of Baptism are the guarantee of this promise. And with God’s promise, we can depend on the Lord’s presence throughout our lives. We can say, as the writer of our psalm says, “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (v 11).

This is the promise that enabled Luther to stand against popes and armies. His Lord of hosts, his Jesus, was with him. A mighty fortress was his God—and is ours.

There will be times in future weeks and months when we witness the three scenes of Psalm 46 playing out right in front of us. But the same psalm will also enable us to stand against these scenes, after all God himself comes to us in this psalm and encourages us with these words: Do not be alarmed. Do not worry. Do not be afraid.

Here’s the point. When things are falling apart, there will be opportunities for us as Christians to speak these words to one another: We will not fear. Be still. There will be opportunities for us to sit quietly in our favorite chair and read these words over and over again: God is our refuge and strength. Do not be afraid. In the middle of this chaos, we have a calm, peaceful river that warms the heart of God. We have a strong and mighty fortress. We have a voice speaking to us: “Be still. For I am your God.”

Friends, when those words are true for each one of us, when we see not only God’s presence but are assured of what can do, now we can have a word of comfort that we can share and give when we encounter people whose lives are fallen apart.

Here once more verse 1 of the Psalm: “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” The phrase “very present help in trouble” can also be

translated as “well proved help” in other word this help is not only ready but has been for ages, and as we have seen in the last series of sermons, we have witnesses that can help us to see, that yes indeed God is our “well proved help” in times of trouble.

Thanks be to God for his promise and his readings in hearing our cries and come to our help and aid.

And thanks be to God for now we have the privilege in knowing that, and reading and meditating in God’s word, especially in this psalm, that almost five hundred years ago people didn’t. Thanks be to God for Luther who, having called by God helped us to see the truth of the Scriptures and thus reform the Christian Church, reform Christianity and even shape the world, always looking for the good of others. Yes because of sin, many have gone so far as to leave the faith entirely, satan has had his way, but hasn’t won victory, for victory belongs to your Lord and Savior. For he is the Light that shines in the darkness, and here is another good news, darkness will not overcome that light. In the Gospel of John 1:5 we read: “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.”

Conclusion:

Dear Friends, on this Reformation day, let us give thanks to God for “The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress” (v 11). He is our help, our proven help in times of troubles, our Savior and our Light.

Now we can say with the Psalmist let’s all say it:

“I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress” Psalm 59:16  
In His name, amen.