

Written Copy: Psalm 46:1-7 “Who Is Your Refuge and Strength?”

Reformation Sunday

Sunday, October 27th, 2024

Text: Psalm 46:1-7

¹ God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, ³ though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. Selah 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 her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. ⁶ The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah

Exegetical Statement

In this world we will face dangers, perils, and attacks of which we are powerless to prevent or defend against. We are no match for hurricanes, floods, and other natural disasters. We are warned that these will come upon us. There will be wars and battles that we will not be able to prevent, or even win. And in the midst of this all there is an ongoing spiritual battle in which we are tempted to place our trust, hope, and find refuge in anything other than the LORD God Himself. He is far more powerful than the strongest hurricane. He stands unmoved by the strongest earthquake. He allows wars to commence as the result of mankind's sinful selfish hateful nature, but only He can put an end to them disabling the weapons of war and bringing about peace. He is the refuge and strength for all who put their trust in Him. He alone has defeated our worst enemies: sin, death, and the devil. His Spirit brings the gifts of peace and joy to His Church in this midst of all these battles as He keeps us looking at God alone and rejoicing in Him as our refuge and strength. So, He tells us to drop our hands, stop trying to save ourselves, or seek salvation in anything else other than the LORD God of the Angelic Armies. He alone is our refuge and strength.

Focus Statement:

Our refuge and strength is Christ Jesus alone. He is greater than all natural disasters, allowing them and controlling them to fit His own plans and purposes. He allows wars that are caused by the sinful brokenness of mankind, yet controls and brings them to an end according to His good and gracious will. He fought for us and has defeated our greatest enemies: sin, death, and the devil by becoming the atoning sacrifice for our sins, defeating Satan's hold over us, and opening the door to life with Him now that stretches into eternity.

Function Statement:

Why it's important to know:

We see disasters, problems, and situations that move us to seek refuge and strength in human institutions, political parties, and even ourselves. But all of these are run by broken sinful human beings who cannot save us. We see other people as the enemy, when the real enemy is Satan who encourages us to trust in anyone or anything other than Christ Jesus.

What the hearer should do as a result:

Live out our Christian faith trusting in Christ alone as our refuge and strength. Be good citizens of the Left Kingdom exercising our right to vote informed by our Christian faith regarding policies, but not putting our hope and trust in a candidate or political party. Remember that the enemy is not our fellow man who voted different than us but is the devil who would have us forgo the Gospel that saves us in this world and the next.

Subject Sentence: Christ is our refuge and strength now and forever

Introduction

The Detroit Lions with the season they had last year, and their continued success this year, have certainly energized the hometown crowd. It has not only invigorated the faithful Lions fans of the past but has drawn new people into the fan base. My oldest daughter, who never really cared much for football before, after going to some home games, watching their success on TV, has grown to love Lion's football. She even plans Sunday activities now around game time. That's a fun and healthy way to enjoy football as a pastime. But she would never look at the Lions as the thing that solves all her problems, nor would she consider the fan of another pro-football team to be her enemy.

We can enjoy a friendly rivalry of sorts with those who cheer for the opposing team. Take for example my good friend Tim Hill. He was born in Ohio and loves Ohio State Football. And that brings about much friendly rivalry and joking about whose college football team is the best between him and other members of the congregation: Ohio State or U of M. Tim knows that his choice of college teams won't necessarily keep him out of eternal life, although there will be a lesser room there for Ohio State fans...and that is a joke too. Tim knows that, as you should too. Our allegiance to a college football team cannot and should not affect how we view one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

This is something that I believe most of us know and agree with. But I bring this up because this principle has been shoved by the wayside lately when it comes to politics and support of political candidates this election year. Outside the Church, and even inside the Church, I've seen and heard people use political party affiliation and support for a particular candidate for president to be the reason to either welcome or hate another person. I've heard Christians give voice to the same rhetoric that is coming out of the mouth of both candidates, and directing it toward fellow Christians, saying things that God would never approve of His children saying about one another.

And what is the root cause of this? I think each of us need to ask ourselves, "***Who in my life is my Refuge and Strength? Who and where am I placing my hope and trust for today and tomorrow? Is it really on God? Is He really my refuge and strength? Or is it something or someone else?***"

The Witness of Psalm 46

Psalm 46 is pretty clear about where our hope and trust should be placed, especially when it comes to problems, situations, and difficulties that are out of our control.

It mentions natural disasters that have been and will continue to come upon portions of the earth. It poetically describes the destructive force of storms, hurricanes, earthquakes, and floods. But with them you could also include other natural disasters such as wildfires, droughts, plagues and diseases, sickness and cancer, and even death. There is no human being that can prevent these things from striking us. And when they come our hands are

tied as to how much we can do to protect ourselves from them. With adequate warning we can escape the path of hurricanes, floods, and wildfires, but we can't stop the destruction in their path. We can use irrigation and water rationing to help with dry conditions until the clean water supply runs short. We can eat healthier and exercise, but that will not prevent disease or cancer from ever striking us. These problems are beyond the control of any human being, but not beyond the control of our God.

Our God is the refuge and strength in the midst of all these things. He is in control of all natural events. He can and has turned the path of hurricanes and wildfires away from heavily populated areas. He can and has lessened their destructive force. And after they have gone through, He is the force behind the clean up and rebuilding efforts. He works through government agencies, relief agencies, and the Church to come alongside those who have lost belongings and loved ones to provide comfort, support, and help, both short term and long term. He provides the knowledge and means to track storms and forecast where they will hit. He provides the knowledge and the means to fight forest fires. He sends the rain to end the droughts. He provides the means to prevent the spread of disease as well as providing the treatment for it. And there are plenty of people who have been cured of cancer, or at least seen it go into remission, all ultimately coming from the knowledge and medicine supplied by Him.

Jesus told His disciples there would be wars and rumors of wars. We certainly see them in our lifetime. Yet these are not a sign that there is no God, or that God is helpless against them. Wars and violence, abroad and at home, are the result of the sinful selfishness of the human heart that refuses to put the needs and concerns of others above oneself. Yet God is in control of these too. He allows them to happen for His own plans and purposes. He uses them as punishment and discipline upon the unbelieving world. He uses them to demonstrate how fraught is a life lived without Him and to turn the godless to look to and trust in Him. And for believers caught up in war and violence it is His means to move us to cling to Him even more tightly as our refuge and strength. He is the reason that wars come to an end, and violence is stopped. He provides through good government the protection of police and our armed forces. And He promises a day to come when all wars, famines, disease, and all destructive forces of nature will cease.

The Witness of Christ Jesus

Yet there is one force that no human being can stand against. There is one enemy that is behind all the troubles and afflictions that plague us today. It is not a political party candidate or any government official. It is Satan.

Satan is the instigator and propagator of all the evil that plagues us in this world. He manipulates and encourages our sinful broken hearts to lack patience and understanding for those whose ideas and opinions differ from our own. He encourages us to put ourselves and our well-being first above that of our neighbor. He is behind all the malicious personal attacks and rhetoric that is being spewed by both political parties, and he loves when we the Church join in. He wants us to see those who support the other party as being the source of evil instead of him. He wants us to think that we are totally right and they are totally wrong. He doesn't want us to admit and confess the truth of **Romans 3:23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God**. All of us fall short, none of us has a lock on what is true, and good, and God pleasing: neither Democrat or Republican, male or female, black or white. None. No human being is fit to be our refuge and strength, except for one, Jesus Christ.

Acts 3:14-15 ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.

That One Man, Jesus Christ, is the author of life. He created all things, and He Sustains all things. He is the One who is at the right hand of the Father ruling over all things. He is the One who allows hurricanes, floods, sickness, and tragedies to befall us. But He is also the One who moderates their severity and is the source of our protection from them. And He knows what it is like to be affected by them.

He knows what it's like to fight the spiritual battles we face. He knows the temptation to turn on one another and blame one another. He faced every temptation the devil could throw at Him for 40 days in the wilderness and triumphed over every one of them. He is the One and Only Holy and Righteous One who never fell short of the glory of God. And as Paul testifies in **Romans 3:23-24 ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus**. In Him we are justified, we are declared innocent of all the times and ways we put our trust and hope in ourselves and others.

He declares us innocent as His gift of faith. He earned that for us by living the perfect life and then taking from us all our faults and sins upon Himself and suffering and dying for them. They are cleared from your record; you never need to suffer the punishment you deserve in this life or the life to come. He gives that to you as His gift of faith in Your baptism, where you are welcomed into the Father's family, placed under His hand of protection as His beloved child.

He is your champion. He fought for you and won for you. Whenever the devil whispers in your ear accusing you of sin and guilt you can point to the empty cross, the empty tomb, and Jesus as your Lord and Savior, your refuge and strength in all things. Through His indwelling Spirit He walks with you now, holding you in His hand throughout all the problems, dangers, troubles, and trials that life might throw at you. And whatever He allows He uses to keep you in steadfast faith toward Him, keeping you confessing Him as your refuge and strength.

Living With Christ as Your Refuge and Strength

That being the case, how should we live out our lives confessing that He is our Refuge and Strength, our Lord and Savior above all else?

We should recognize that this country and our electoral system is His gift to us, even though it is fraught with sinfulness and brokenness. It is still far better than any other country, and it allows us as individual believers to have a voice. In fact, it was designed with people like us in mind. The founding fathers were not all Christians, many were Deists who believed in an impersonal god who set things in motion and left us to fend for ourselves. But all agreed that if the citizens were given the power to vote people into office and vote propositions into law, they needed to be moral people, people that subscribed to the second table of Commandments that tell us what it means to love one another as Christ loves us.

So a Christian should exercise their right to vote. But to do so informed about the policies and values each candidate supports and comparing them to what Scripture has to say.

Scripture clearly supports the sanctity of life in the womb, that an unborn fetus is a person from conception on through birth, and terminating that fetus amounts to murder. But it also allows for protection for the life of the mother if she is in danger, and a prayerful decision to be made if going through with the birth of that child could cause the mother's death. That means that we the Church need to step up and support those mothers who are struggling with their pregnancy through institutions such as Flint Crisis Pregnancy Center. We need to support families in trouble as well as adoption of unwanted children through such agencies as Wellspring Family Services, who support the sanctity of life all the way to the end. We stand against measures to enact Euthanasia, but supporting the comfort and care of the person whom God is calling home through Hospice.

Scripture clearly states that God designed marriage as the foundation of society to be between one man and one woman. And to support and approve of any other situation is to deny the will and plan of what God has set in place.

Scripture clearly states that God created humankind to be male and female, meaning He designed our gender at birth. By saying that we have the right to change what God has preordained is to set ourselves against His will and plan. It is the same as making ourselves out to be God. He creates each person to be unique individuals. As a result, can some women possess traits that might be considered more masculine? Yes. Can women be gifted to be in charge of businesses and corporations, or even the president of the United States? Yes. But they are still a woman, and the role God has given them to fulfill as such should be highly honored and respected. The same is true for men. Some men may possess traits that would be considered effeminate and might suit them well for a role such as childcare. But yet they are still men with a God given role to play in society.

The LORD told His people to honor and care for the widows, the orphans, and the sojourners otherwise known as the aliens among us. We should carefully and lovingly deal with those who come to our country seeking a better life. But we must do so according to the laws that seek to incorporate them into the ideals and freedoms we enjoy as citizens of this country, while protecting our citizens from those who come to take advantage of our freedoms and cause harm.

The integrity, the truthfulness, and the honor of the candidate must be taken into account. With all these things to consider, your decision on who to vote for, from President on down, should include prayerful consideration. At the same time remember, the person you vote for will never be your Savior. They are not the person you should ever put your trust or hope in. Instead, place that in the Only One who is qualified to be your refuge and strength in times of trouble, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Also remember that any of these things that stand against God's will are forgiven by His grace when we confess with a repentant heart.

Conclusion

Two final points for you to consider as one who places your hope and trust in Christ alone. Each party and candidate promises that if elected life will get better for you. But if you look back at our history, despite which party is in office, things overall have gotten progressively worse. That fulfills the message we have in the book of Revelation. As we draw closer to the Last Day, things are going to get progressively worse. Satan is going to increase his hold and influence on all human governments and institutions over the whole world, including ours. He will use that influence to turn hearts and minds away from trusting in God as our refuge and strength to trust in anything or anyone other than Jesus. But the one thing he cannot and will not take control of is the Church, the faithful who hold fast to the Word of God rightly preached and the Sacraments rightly administered. The place where you will continue to hear preached and confessed **Romans 3:23-24 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.**

Secondly, consider those people who may vote for a different candidate than you. They could be sitting next to you in the pew right now. On November 6th, after all is said and done, no matter who is elected president, Christ is still ruling on the throne, and He will work out His will for us through whomever is in office. And that person sitting next to you will still be your brother and sister in Christ, no matter who they voted for. Remember, all have sinned and fallen short, both them and you, and all have redemption through faith in Christ Jesus, both them and you. Christ has called us into His Church not to preach the message of the Democrat or Republican party, but to share the hope and faith we have in Christ. Heaven forbid that our political rhetoric should ever turn anyone away from hearing about Jesus as the refuge and strength for all mankind in these troubled times.

And there is a day coming when all things will be made new, and all the temporal, emotional, and spiritual problems we suffer through now will be gone forever. All tears will be wiped from your eyes, never to be cried again. And that will come about not from the hands of any politician or political party, but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Amen.