

Psalm 46

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. 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. 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." The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

I saw the stunning headline just a few weeks ago. A study came out with this disastrous statistic: 40% of babies born in the United State today are born to unwed couples. There are certainly more than a few factors at play in a statistic like that. One of them is a deep-seated fear of commitment. I was watching a show called Parks and Rec last week. A guy on there playing an intern said something like this, "I'm not going to tie myself down romantically." And then one of the characters said in response. "Oh, he gets it. He so gets it." We live in a culture that sees complete commitment as dangerous and even contradictory to the freedom of self.

So people say things like this to themselves: "I don't want to make a marriage vow. It's too big a risk. I don't want to face the potential pain and loss of a failed marriage. It just feels irresponsible." That's how the thinking wrongly goes. Do you see what that means? It means that contrary to what a lot of people think today's young people are not failing to respect vows. Many young people respect vows very much. It's just that they're afraid vows won't be able to be kept so they avoid them.

If that's the state of marriage vows, the state of religious vows isn't any better. I don't think there's been any time in world history where people are quite as quick to jump denominational ship or abandon rock solid Christian faith for very secular thinking in - oh - about the first five to seven years of young adulthood. The stats on religious vows are arguably more apocalyptically bad than the ones on marriage vows. So why risk binding yourself to Jesus Christ for life? Why risk saying that not only are you going to remain a Christian, but that you are going to remain a Lutheran Christian *for life*? Why risk making a promise so high that it's not just *before* God, but *to* him? I'll tell you why. Actually, Psalm 46 will.

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (v. 1) Why bind yourself to God for life? He's our refuge. He's our strength. In trouble, he's easily and quickly found. That's the Psalmist's argument. In other words, why seek God all your life? Why find him in the truths you've been taught in the Lutheran church? Why do this regularly for the rest of your life? You do it because you can't afford not to.

Have you ever thought about how much control you have of your life? One of the great cultural lies that we have to unpack for ourselves is that we have control of our path in life. We are self-made people. That's what we like to think. Honestly though, that thinking holds about as much water as a straw hat. What is actually true is that we have little to do with where we are at in life. Seriously, let's eat some humble pie and realize that. Let me ask you a few key questions. Did you get to pick

your parents? Did you lay out your genetic structure? Did you orchestrate life so you met or were related to just the right person so you could get to such and such a place in life? Did you arrive at your personality and your work ethic by something you arranged or was it given to you and implanted in you by people in your life? Think about it. Genetics, environments, and choices shape us in a way that is far beyond us.

Christians have always known that and believed that. It doesn't bother us that we may have married someone else if things had been solely in our control. It doesn't upset us that we started on one career track only to get bumped to another one. It doesn't concern us that we planned to have three boys and two girls by now, but only have a dog. We Christians embrace the fact that our lives are way beyond us.

And we especially embrace it when life comes crashing down around us. It's truly important to notice how explicit the Psalmist is about that. We have this idea that God is there in the twists and the turns in life, but somehow has vacated the most devastating parts of our life. The Psalmist says, "Get that idea out of your head." The Psalmist takes the most extreme view. He says, "God is for us when everything - and I do mean everything - seems to go wrong." Look at what the Psalmist does. He paints a truly end-of-the-worldish picture. It's a portrait of the world finally and totally coming undone from the way it's supposed to operate. The earth caves in on itself. Mountains get tossed into the sea. Tsunamis roar, foam, and threaten to overwhelm even the highest peaks.

Do you see what the Psalmist is doing? He paints this picture to argue from the greater to the lesser. He's saying, "If God is there for you in those circumstances, then he'll be there in everything else too." Or to put it another way, God will always be for us what he started out saying he's going to be for us. He's our safe place. He's our den. He's our hiding place in life where can curl up in the fetal position and just be OK. Always okay in God our refuge and our strength.

Now you may say, "That's pretty passive. It sure looks like a completely defensive posture to me." And that's exactly right. Please realize that this Psalm never asks the Christian, "So what are you going to do about it?" Have you thought about why that is? Let me tell you. It's beside the point. People who have God's view of life realize something. They realize they are merely a participant in his grand scheme that *he* manages and rules. I've been reading a lot about this guy named David lately. I reread David and Goliath for myself. It sparked a question. In that story, who did the fighting? Was it David or was it is God? Or later in David's life, how was David able to duck spears that were chucked at him from the arm of a veteran warrior? How did he escape multiple assassination attempts far more complex than a spear flying at him? Was that David or was that God? I'll tell you what. We know from David's writings that he had a pretty strong belief about that. One I share with him.

Do you see it? There's a verse from this Psalm that many Christians including me make one of their mantras, "**Be still and know that I am God.**" (v 10) Do you see it now? Christians have this habit - this way of doing life. We've always lived and thought and believed that it's our job to seek refuge in God. It's our job to hide. It's our job to faithfully fill our roles and spend the rest of life curling into the fetal position safely in God and letting God be God. Or to put it another way, it's our job to sit, wait, and watch to see how God is going to be God. When we do that, God fights. God defends. God always wins. I don't know how much clearer the Psalmist could be on that. God breaks bows. He shatters spears. He lifts his voice and then the earth melts.

Maybe think of it like this: if there's any creature I wouldn't mess with on God's green earth it's a momma bear with cubs. The cubs have it so good. They scoot around to the safe side of her when something threatens them and momma does all the work. We might even realize from that picture that if the cubs try to fight they may end up getting in the way and harming themselves. It's the job of the momma bear to protect her cubs. It's the job of the cubs to find their refuge in her. Do you think a momma bear will ever stand by and let something mess with one of her cubs? If you think a momma bear is protective, God is ten times over. Do you think that God is going to let one of his kids get truly harmed? Do you think he's going to let an enemy finally beat us? There's nothing more unlikely in the universe.

So what's happening today? Today most of us remember the vow we made and a few of us make that same vow. We vow before and to God to stay true to Jesus our whole life long. That's huge. There is no vow that should feature itself more in our thinking than the vow to remain loyal to Jesus. Except one. "What?" you may say. What vow is more important than vowing to remain loyal to Jesus? I'm glad you asked. The vow that trumps the one you made to God is the one he has made to you. He has solemnly vowed to care for you as his child. That means forgiveness. That means tender love at times and tough love at other times. That means finally bringing you to the place where, to quote the Psalmist, **"There is a river whose streams make glad the place where the Most High dwells." (v. 4)** Understand your confirmation vow for what it truly is. It's not about you doing some high and mighty thing for God. It's about you sticking around to see how God will keep his vow to you in Jesus Christ in a future that includes eternity. It's about you saying to God, "God, you are my lifelong hiding place. You will fight for me. You will strive for me. I will be here to go along for the ride." Amen.