

Sermon: 500 Reformation Anniversary

Text: Psalm 46 (vv.1, 7)

Theme: A mighty Fortress is our God

Goal: To strengthen our Faith in the Almighty God, as Martin Luther's faith was strengthened by this Psalm 46.

Dear Friends,

Introduction: Psalm 46 was Luther's preferred Psalm. He loved the Book of Psalms, but this one had a special meaning for him. An American preacher wrote: *"Specifically, in 1527, Luther faced one of the greatest difficulties of his life as the Black Plague swept across Germany and much of the European continent. During this time, Luther's son almost died and his own body was fainting under the mounting pressure. In the midst of this personal conflict, Luther found himself contemplating the promises of Psalm 46, an encouraging psalm of trust in the invincibility of the Lord.*

Gaining new strength from this old song, Luther composed what is his most famous hymn, 'A Mighty Fortress'. Amid such adversity, this embattled stalwart found God to be his 'bulwark never failing'. Though he had previously taught and even translated the Psalms, Luther now found himself living them as never before. Many times during this dark and tumultuous period, when terribly discouraged, he would turn to his co-worker, Philipp Melancthon, and say, 'Come, Philipp, let us sing the forty-sixth Psalm.'

The Psalm begins with a Confession of faith and trust, which is repeated in different words twice during the Psalm: "God is our refuge and strength, and ever-present help in trouble... The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress!" And develops the fight against two big forces that afraid (or scare) God's people:

The forces of the nature and the forces of the enemies, assuring that God is stronger and bigger than any forces and that we shall rely on Him alone: “Be still, and know that I am God!”

I – The forces of nature

Earthquakes and the power of water in storms and on the sea always frighten everyone. We are living in the Cape of Good Hope, but its original name was Cape of Storms; and we know why this place earned. The psalmist refers to these forces of nature in a poetic way: “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.” – It seems that the psalmist was talking about a terrible earthquake followed by a tsunami. Even so he confesses: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.”

It is difficult to say “Amen” to these words when we face the forces of nature. We become afraid even when the wind is too strong or if there is a thunder-storm. Martin Luther solved this natural human fear when he finished his hymn saying: *“The Kingdom is ours forever!”* Even when our life is in danger because of natural disasters, the eternal kingdom is ours by God’s grace. We can confess, “I will not fear” because the resurrected Jesus addresses to us in love and peace and says: “Don’t be afraid, I am with you to the very end.” The Psalm confesses this faith when he speaks about God’s City, “the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break time.” The coming of Jesus, the Emmanuel = God with us, is the accomplishment of this hope. The ever presence of Jesus in our lives gives us strength to surpass the fear and to look forward to the eternal city of God with hope.

II – The forces of enemies

Martin Luther had several enemies that threatened his life many times. They were not just personal enemies, but enemies because of the truth of the Bible preached by Luther. They couldn't agree with the truth. Even so, Luther didn't stop to preach and to teach that man is declared righteous before God by faith in Jesus alone, without the help of deeds, as it was then taught by the established church.

When the Psalm 46 says: "Nations are in uproar" ... God "breaks the bow and shatters the spear...and burns the shields with fire", Luther applied this to all the physical and spiritual enemies of the Church of God. He mentions in his hymn "*the old satanic foe has sworn to work us woe*", and, "*Though hordes of devils fill the land all threatening to devour us*". But at the same time Luther confesses: "*A mighty fortress is our God, A sword and shield victorious; He breaks the cruel oppressor's rod and wins salvation glorious... We tremble not, unmoved we stand. They cannot overpower us.*"

Many enemies of the church are still trying to demolish the structure of the church and of the family. We don't suffer violent persecution in South Africa. But through the raising of doubts, a proposal of a new style of life, and relativism about Bible's truths, many Christians and many churches are going astray from Christ, following their own reason. Listening to a Radio program, the speaker said: "*Let's go back to the Bible! Don't believe in everything preachers are promising you in their TV programs and in their churches. Let's do like Martin Luther: Go back to the Bible, search in the Bible to find the truth in Jesus Christ!*"

III – The power of God

After presenting the turmoil of the nature and of the enemies, the psalmist lets God Himself speak: “Be still and know that I am God.” It’s an invitation to rely quietly in God’s arms. God says more: “I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” God is not a God of far. He lives among His people and defends His people. He is acknowledged as a God that can be trusted and is exalted by His people. Therefore the Psalmist repeats: “The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

Conclusion: As we are celebrating the 500th Reformation Anniversary, let us be faithful to our Lutheran roots, which lead us back to the Bible and to Christ. We have numerous opportunities and facilities to read and to learn the Bible. Let us be strengthened by God’s gracious promises in His Word and let us share our faith and our hope with others. This is a treasure that has to be shared. We cannot save it for ourselves alone. And following the steps of faith of Martin Luther, we will be conquerors with Christ over our fears and enemies, because “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear... The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

One more quotation to finish our message:

With unshakable confidence in God, Luther reflected upon and drew strength from this choice psalm: “We sing this psalm to the praise of God, because He is with us and powerfully and miraculously preserves and defends His church and His word against all fanatical spirits, against the gates of hell, against the implacable hatred of the devil, and against all the assaults of the world, the flesh, and sin.” (Quotations from *Steven Lawson’s Preaching the Psalms.*) . Amen.