

## **Psalm 46:1-11**

### **Secure with God**

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Today we again mark the beginning of the Protestant Reformation, when Martin Luther nailed his 95 theses to the church door in Wittenberg on All Hallows Eve in 1517. And the psalm set for today is Psalm 46, which was the inspiration for Luther's hymn 'A mighty fortress' which we will sing shortly. This psalm opens with some very striking imagery. "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."

Now, mountains don't tend to move around too much. You'd normally consider them solid ground. Even if the ocean is chaotic, perhaps striking the land with a tsunami, the mountains, the high ground, is generally considered safe. Not so here in this psalm. The very things that are considered solid and immovable and safe, are giving way and falling and are part of the danger.

I'm sure you'd agree that we've had a similar experience this year. The things that we considered normal and solid and reliable, are suddenly not. What we thought was certain and dependable has changed. If you had said twelve months ago that this year's AFL grand final would be held at the Gabba, and not the MCG, not a single person would have believed you. And yet, it was.

The idea that our society is stable and predictable and safe has certainly been brought into question. And this psalm reminds us that creation itself is groaning under the weight of human sin. God's created order is in rebellion. And the symptoms are destructive earthquakes and tsunamis, and deadly famines and outbreaks of disease. This is not how things are meant to be. But it is reality. A reality that perhaps we have partially masked in our affluent western society.

This psalm also reminds us that there still is one trustworthy source of security and safety that can absolutely be relied upon, even in the midst of the chaos. God himself is our refuge. 'The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.' It may seem that we are drowning in the worries around us. Yet, there is no need to fear the chaos since we worship the one who brings order in the midst of chaos, the one who brings life in the midst of despair.

In the ancient world, the seas represented chaos and destruction, and that is contrasted here with the city of God that is fed by a life-giving river. The chaos of the world fades away when you are safe in God's peaceful city. This is a common image in the scriptures. In the book of Revelation, St John writes:

The angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

(Revelation 22:1-2)

The prophet Ezekiel also had visions of a river flowing from God's holy temple through the rest of the city, providing an abundance of life, and trees that will never fail to bear fruit. And in terms of a fortress, a walled city that can be a place of refuge for its citizens, this is really important. You can build the walls as tall and as strong as you like, but unless you have a guaranteed source of fresh water and fresh food, then eventually the army defending the city will fall. Starvation and disease will kill them quicker than sword or arrow ever could.

But God as our strong fortress provides for all that we need. He is our refuge, our place of protection and shelter and provision. Not even earthquakes, or mountains falling into the sea, or the waters surging onto land, can damage this strong fortress. Our God stands firm even in the face of such chaos. And in the midst of it all, says to us, "Be still, and know that I am God!" This is not just an invitation to quiet meditation or a slower pace of life. This a command to stop fighting. With the image of a strong fortress and nations waging war, this is a call to a universal cease-fire, to world-wide peace. According to this psalm, to know that God is 'with us' means not the courage to wage war on our perceived enemies thinking that God is on our side and will ensure victory, but rather the courage to stand in peace.

God says, 'be still', because he is our place of security, because we know that nothing can take away the ultimate victory that Christ Jesus achieved. The victory over sin and death and the power of the devil. All the disorder and chaos in our world, whatever form it takes, is nothing in comparison to the peace we have in Jesus. Because our God is with us we can 'be still' even if there is something arguably trivial like the AFL grand final at the Gabba, or more dramatic like mountains falling into the seas, or global pandemics disrupting everything.

And so, this psalm ends with a repeat of 'The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.' This doubled 'with us' marks this psalm as a psalm of trust in God. The same thing is expressed in perhaps the most familiar psalm for many of you. "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me" That's from Psalm 23, if you weren't sure.

There's a grounded reality to these psalms. They don't promise that God's people will be free from the chaos of creation, or the destruction of war or famine or disease. But they do promise that we do not go through these things alone. God is with us. Our lives are eternally secure in him. We need not fear regardless of what comes our way. So, let us continue to praise God for all his goodness to us. May we look to him as our place of refuge and shelter when turmoil threatens our lives. And may we rest securely in him, knowing that in him we have forgiveness and salvation and life for all eternity. Amen.

May God's peace, which passes all human understanding, keep your hearts and minds safe in the risen Lord Jesus. Amen.