

Psalm 46: “From Fear to Faith”

22 March 2020 - Led by Rev. Sam Mawhinney

Welcome & Call to Worship:

Well, good morning everybody and welcome to our service of worship today. We will be looking at Psalm 46. It has been good, hasn't it, to see people read the psalms and share parts of the psalms, and many of them speak into our situation. Let me just read to you from Psalm 62, a few verses from verse 5. “Find rest, O my soul, in God alone, my hope comes from Him. He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I shall not be shaken. My salvation and honor depend on God; He is my mighty rock, my refuge. Trust in Him at all times, O people; pour out your hearts to Him, for God is our refuge.” And so you have this picture of a huge, mighty rock and that rock is permanent, stable. That rock is our God. And so we are going to sing a song as we begin our worship.

Praise: Forever (Give Thanks to the Lord)

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father, we thank you for this opportunity that we have to be still and to know that You are God. Father, we thank You that You are faithful, You are dependable and You are that mighty rock that the psalmist spoke about. Father, You have created this world. It spins on its axis, gravity holds it in place. Father, we thank You for the rising of the sun and the setting of the same sun. We thank You for the constancy of the day and the night. We thank You for the moon. We thank You for the stars. We thank You, Father, for our place in this universe, controlled by Your hand. Father, we come to You because there are many pictures of You in the Bible, one that I've been reading recently has been of You roaring like a lion, as the prophet Amos speaks to us about. And Father, we have been devastated, we have been stopped in our tracks as we've had to face this catastrophe of the coronavirus. Father, we pray that as we hear Your voice to us that we would take time to listen. Forgive us, Father, when we're so busy that we do not listen to you. Forgive us, Father, when we make choices to do other things, rather than to spend time with You. Forgive us, Father, when we prioritize the good things of this world over coming to worship you. And Father, help us to listen carefully to who You are - that You are good, that You are strong, that You are our refuge - and that Father we will come increasingly just to pause and to reflect on the goodness of our God. So Father, we pray that You will be with us as we look at Psalm 46. We pray that You will help us to take on board all that You want to say to us today, so that we might live in Your presence, with Your love, joy and peace, and that we might live for Your glory. We ask these things in Jesus' name, amen.

Introduction: God, our ever-present help

We are living in unprecedented times. The COVID-19 virus has silently infiltrated our world and caused sickness and death, fear and panic. I do not need to rehearse the difficulties we all face - the disruption of life, the real danger - and we are in trouble!

In our trouble we need help. The danger to our health makes us look to our hospital and healthcare systems and all healthcare professionals. And we thank God for them. The danger to our economy and business life makes us look to our government and thankfully we are seeing good and effective leadership. The danger to our social and community life causes us to turn to our families, peer groups, social media, an engagement with nature, and other things. All good and helpful things.

Yet even with all these excellent helps, there is still a widespread, public fear. It is the source of wild and misleading information, of panic buying, of a desperate rush to be at home, of worries about mortgage, childcare, elderly relatives, loved ones, and our jobs.

Sometimes there is trouble for which no help is available, and the very best efforts of governments, professionals, community and our own efforts cannot alleviate and take it away. At heart this appears to be the fear of death and we don't know how to fix it. Where do we turn?

Psalm 46 has the answer, and it is speaking of an overwhelming catastrophe that no one can stand against or overcome, and even in this scenario, the writer says, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. Therefore, we will *not* fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea."

When we realise that there is no one who can help, when it dawns that nothing will take away the problem, when we are overwhelmed and we get afraid. We fear the unknown, the pain, the loss of our job, finance, freedoms, and that movement towards death. The fear is natural, and it mobilises, it promotes a "fight or flight" response, adrenaline surge, and that is good.

The writer of Psalm 46 is telling us in our trouble to look for help in God and that by so doing we turn from fear to faith, and what is different about that help that God gives is that it's not limited. God is described here as a refuge, strong and ever-present. And if we live by faith, moving away from fear, then we must run to God.

God is our best hope in this crisis, He is a safe person to be with, He can help us in every situation even if we face death itself, even if the earth gives way!

So, now, that is easy to say and harder to live but I want to share some things that we can do to increase our faith and help us keep moving away from fear.

Reading: Psalm 46

Praise: IPH 165 Be Still

Sermon:

So let's look now at some ways that we can move from fear towards faith.

I. Know God

You'll see that in the beginning of the psalm, it says "God is." It tells us about God - God is our refuge, our strength, our ever-present help in trouble. If we are to have faith, then everything depends upon us knowing God. And the way to know God is to read about Him in the revelation that we call the Bible. In Romans, we read, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word about Christ." (Romans 10:17).

In Psalm 46, there are many truths to ponder and I believe that if we are not to fear and have faith, it is vital that we take time to read and ponder the truth about God. This is personal, it's about knowing Him personally. As part of our coping and being confined indoors, Karen and myself have started to watch *The Crown*. In one of the early scenes, one of Winston Churchill's secretaries wants to get to know him and spend the evening with him, rather than going to the pub with her flatmate. She does this by reading his biography. If we are to know God, we need to spend time getting to know Him, and we need to know who He is, and we do that through reading the Bible.

II. In times of trouble

So, now that we know God as a refuge, a strength, an ever-present help, the second thing that we need to know is that we are in trouble. Life is full of trouble. Folks, we have seen how detrimental and dangerous it is to believe fake news concerning COVID-19. Don't listen to that news. One of the false stories that Christians believe is that you come to Jesus and everything will be fine, you will always get the parking space, or that we would have health, wealth, and prosperity, what we call the prosperity gospel. Such belief is false. In the psalm again we read that God is our refuge and strength and ever-present help *in trouble*. The nearness of God, following Jesus, is not a promise of escape from the usual experiences of life, sickness, pain, and death, but He has promised to be with us, in them and He is ever-present.

If you remember how distressed the first disciples were when Jesus was leaving them, He told them do not let your hearts be troubled. Why? Well, because He is coming back again and He left the Holy Spirit to be with us forever. The picture given in this psalm about God's presence is found in verses 3-6. It's a picture of a river flowing from within a city that flows deep within it. And that is a picture that the Bible uses constantly through it to tell us about Jesus' presence and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Let me read you Jesus' words: "All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. ²⁷ Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." Life is full of trouble, but God is within and God is an ever-present help.

III. Pray

Next, if we are to move from fear to faith, we are to pray. How do we put together the truth about God, our refuge, strong, ever-present helper and the reality of trouble, even overwhelming trouble? If we have symptoms of a new cough and high fever, we are to ring our GPs. If we are out of work, we are to contact the government. In every situation of trouble, we are to talk to God and ask Him for help. In Deuteronomy, read “the Lord our God is near us whenever we pray to Him” (4:7). And in Philippians Ch. 4, many of us know this verse by heart: “The Lord is near. ⁶ Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. ⁷ And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Of the good things I have enjoyed in this crisis, praying with people has been the best, and I want to encourage us to make prayer a priority, talking to God, linking who He is with the trouble we are in and asking for His help.

IV. Remember: God always wins

And lastly, we are told to “come and see” in verse 8, and to “be still and know” in verse 10, because ultimately this is a picture that tells us that God always wins.

As you know, I am a Manchester City supporter, and even I feel sorry for Liverpool, because there is a chance that they will not win the Premier League this season, and on the record I hope that they do, as long as we win the Champions League. However, verses 8-10 tell us God wins. He beats His enemies, the enemies of sin, Satan and death, and He proved it by raising His son Jesus from the dead. The penalty for our sin was paid, and He seated Him at His right hand in heaven, reigning with sovereign power. And He is coming back to put an end to all this mess of sin, which is great news for all who are on His side.

And so, this psalm calls us to come and see, to survey the scene of His victory over His enemies, to stand still and to stand firm. The encouragement for us of the reality of God being our refuge, strength and ever-present help in time of trouble is that He is able to lead us from fear to faith. To increase our faith, we must read the Scriptures to know God. We must understand that life is hard but God is with us. We are to pray and bring our concerns to Him. And we are to come and see and be still and stand firm in the knowledge that God is victorious in everything.

Considering these truths about God, we say with the psalmist: “The Lord Almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress.” And when we do, we are able to move from fear to faith. Amen.

Praise: IPH 427 When I Survey the Wondrous Cross

Mother’s Day Message:

Good morning everyone. This month’s memory verse in Sunday Special comes from 1 Peter 4 v 10 - let’s say it together. “Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.” (1 Peter 4 v 10)

Wow! What a challenging verse. Can you think of someone who has shown you what this verse actually looks like lived out? I can think of quite a few someones, and today, I'd like to introduce you to some of them. This is my great-grandmother, Willa, my grandma, Anne, and my mum, Susan. (and you guessed it, that's me right there in the middle). Each of these women has used the gifts God has given them to serve our family, our church, and our community. My great-grandmother had the gift of encouragement and in our family, her handwritten letters are famous. When my mum and her cousin were at university, a letter arrived every Thursday, full of stories, Bible verses and encouraging words, and their friends would gather round expectantly to listen in. My grandma is a gifted pianist who played for thousands of Sunday services, weddings, and funerals. She taught me how to read music and drove me for years to weekly lessons and rehearsals. My mum shares many of her gifts - teaching, listening, visiting the sick - but there's one that often goes unnoticed - she gives really wonderful hugs.

But the most precious gift these women share is the gift of knowing and loving Jesus. And they aren't the only ones! There have been many women in my life who have loved, supported, and encouraged others. Now, I love these women very much, but none of them are perfect. No woman is. Nevertheless, on this special day for celebrating mothers, we want to give thanks to God for all the women in our lives who have loved, nurtured, encouraged, comforted, and instructed us, and most importantly taught us about Jesus, especially the women in our church family.

Now, Mother's Day can be bittersweet, especially this year. Perhaps today you are separated from the women who have meant the most in your life - by quarantine or long distance, by an argument or even death. Still, no matter where we are, we can give thanks to God for the precious gift He has given us by placing these women in our lives, even if only for a time. And we rejoice that there are still so many ways we can tell these women how much we love them and are thankful for them! So today, take a little time to reach out to at least one of these women in your life - call, text, Facetime, draw a picture of flowers and WhatsApp a photo of them - let's be creative and return the blessing, using the time and gifts the LORD has given us to love, serve, and encourage.

Heavenly Father, I thank you for the gift of the women in each of our lives who have been Your hands. Who have loved us and served us, fed us and cared for us, who have shown us what Jesus looks like in the lives of others. We ask that You would bless each of these women today, that they would know Your comfort and Your love. We ask all this in the precious name of Jesus, amen.

Prayers for Others:

One of the ways, of course, that we can serve others is by praying for them, and in our services every week we like to pray for people around the world and in different situations. And there are other people who are suffering, not because of the virus, but many Christians are in prison and as a church we are praying with Church in Chains, an organization that advocates for Christians who are persecuted, and today we pray for someone in Eritrea. So let's join together in prayers for others.

Father, we thank you for the truth that You are our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. Father, today we want to remember Meron Gebreselasie from Eritrea in Africa, a pastor of a pentecostal church, a doctor, an anaesthetist who has been in prison for sixteen years because of his faith. Father, it is hard for us to contemplate, having had two to three weeks of being in isolation, how someone copes for sixteen years. We simply want to mention his name, Meron, before You and pray that You will hear our prayers for him. We pray that You will give him hope when he feels like giving up. We pray that You will give Him joy whenever he is depressed and unable to continue in his faith. We thank You for his faithfulness to date, and we pray, of course, that You will let justice be done, that he will be released from prison, and that, Father, You will change the hearts of those who make those decisions.

Father, we particularly want to pray for the country of Italy today. Father, we realise that the government and the health professionals and the community are under a great deal of pressure. And Father, we pray that all of them would be able to do their work to the best of their ability. We pray that people will be supplied with all that they need in terms of food and healthcare. We pray, Father, for their communities, that they will be wise and that they will follow advice. We pray, Father, that You will be a comfort to them in this grief that they feel, because of the deaths of so many people, and the devastation that it has brought. Father, we thank You that You are a God of mercy and of grace, and we pray that You would be their refuge, and very evident in these times of trouble. And Father, what we pray for Italy we pray for ourselves. We thank You for the many good things we're already seeing in our government, in our healthcare professionals, and Father, in our community. And we pray that these good things would continue, that You will protect us as a nation.

And Father, lastly we simply pray that You will be with all of us, and that, Father, You will take us from a position of fear towards a position of faith - that through this crisis we will grow to know You better and our belief in You will be stronger. And Father, that You will be with us as we seek to serve You and others, as we seek to be good in this community. Father, we pray as well just for those who come to mind, for those who we particularly just want to bring to You at this time. We think of those who are weak and vulnerable - we ask that You would be with them especially. Father, we thank you for this opportunity that we have to come and talk to the one who is ever-present and is able to help. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

Closing Praise: It Is Well With My Soul

Benediction:

Thank you for listening and watching us today. May the Lord bless you and keep you. We join together to say the words of the benediction.

May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with us all evermore. Amen.