

SHELTER: OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH

Sermon written by Martha-Jean Fitch

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TEXT: Psalm 46

Good morning! How absolutely wonderful it is to be in worship with you this day! I have been looking forward to this day for a long time – well for 5 months, to be exact! Who would have ever thought we would be apart this long! I want to praise God for this day and for being our shelter and our help, especially as we have been separated! And for calling us together – oh how we need each other! I do believe God has put us in community together. And the Holy Spirit works in and through us to help and encourage each other.

Isn't it incredible to think how the world has changed in these past 5 months? Obviously, the pandemic has been first and foremost in our minds. That alone would be enough! But then there are the shortages – shortages of toilet paper, of all things. And now of cleaning supplies. And empty shelves in grocery stores. And then you start adding in the civil unrest, the racial divide, the political divide, the natural disasters like the California wildfires and the derecho winds – that is described as a “very rare weather event”. Then there is the economic downturn and unemployment. Need I go on? So many changes, it is overwhelming, really. Too much change! Too much uncertainty!

Oh, how badly we need to be reminded of the changeless God! Hebrews 13:8 tells us that “*Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever!*” He is that certain anchor we can cling to, in the midst of uncertainty. And in the midst of all the shortages, there is one thing we will never be short of – and that is the love and power and strength of our Lord. Today we proclaim that God is our rock, our strength, and our everlasting God. We can have “blessed assurance” that our God is sure and steady – unchanging and faithful, throughout every circumstance we find ourselves in.

This is truly the kind of faith the psalmist had in our Scripture reading for today. I invite you to get your Bibles out and you can follow along as I read Psalm 46 in my New Living Translation Bible.

As you are looking for that in your Bibles – let me tell you a bit about this Psalm. It is believed that this psalm was written around the year 701 BC when the Assyrian army invaded the land and surrounded Jerusalem. The Assyrians had conquered many countries and were convinced they could easily take Jerusalem. They surrounded the walls of Jerusalem and shouted out to the people: “Your God will never be able to deliver you out of our hand”. The king of Assyria even wrote a letter to king Hezekiah to describe exactly how they would destroy Judah.

When Hezekiah read the letter – he went right up to the temple to find refuge in God. There he laid out the letter and pleaded with the Lord, saying, “Lord, we don't know what to do. Please help us!”

Have you ever been that desperate – that unsure of what the next step should be? How has God helped you in that situation?

Hezekiah and the people were helped in a powerful and dramatic way – with God delivering them from their enemy. It is believed that Psalm 46 was written to celebrate God's help and deliverance.

So, hear the good news of God's protection and victory as we read Psalm 46, beginning at verse 1:

¹*God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.*

²*So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.*

³*Let the oceans roar and foam.*

Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!

⁴*A river brings joy to the city of our God, the sacred home of the Most High.*

⁵*God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed.*

From the very break of day, God will protect it.

⁶*The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble!*

God's voice thunders, and the earth melts!

⁷*The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress.*

⁸*Come, see the glorious works of the LORD: See how he brings destruction upon the world.*

⁹*He causes wars to end throughout the earth.*

He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

¹⁰*"Be still and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation.*

I will be honored throughout the world."

¹¹*The LORD of Heaven's Armies is here among us;*

the God of Israel is our fortress.

Even though Psalm 46 was written over 3000 years ago – it could easily be written for today. We could write in all those "storms" we are going through - those in our own country, those in our world and yes, those in our own personal lives. And the message to us is we don't have to live in fear! We have a God who is bigger than all of those storms. He is our refuge and our protection even as the storms rage all around us. He will guard us and be our shield and shelter when everything around us is falling apart.

And the psalmist declares that God is the ever-present help in times of trouble. Other versions say: *“God is always ready to help!”* And I really like the way the new Passion version says it: *“God, You are a proven help in times of trouble – more than enough and always available whenever I need You.”* He is not an absentee God, as some have said – or a God who doesn’t care – but a God who listens and watches over us – and is ready and willing to help us, especially in our times of need. And not only is God available – but He is sufficient – more than able to meet all our needs and give us the help we need. Here’s what is amazing – God is greater than any trouble that you will ever find yourself in – and He will give you the strength to get through it. He is greater than the pandemic – the economic woes – the confusing political climate and the racial division. He’s greater than cancer and divorce, loneliness, and grief. No matter what you are going through, God is bigger than all your problems and He will get you through it. As Pastor Chip Ingram says: *“Satan can throw all the forces of Hell at you, but God is your strength. The Risen Lord is adequate. If you closely relate to Him, there is no way that you can be finally and ultimately defeated.... We must realize that God is our Refuge, not only continually available, and thoroughly adequate, but (thirdly), readily accessible as well.”*¹ All we need to do is “be still” and trust Him – and believe that He is able – more than able to help us and will carry us through the storm.

You know this week, I read a devotional by a Dr. Mika Edmondson, that talked about a scene in one of the Superman movies. Superman saves a man from a burning building rescuing him right off the top floor of the building. As Superman is carrying the man to safety through the skies, the man looks at Superman and then looks down to the ground below. “I’m scared, Superman. Look how far down that is.” Superman replied, “Now if I just rescued you from the burning fire, what makes you think I am going to drop you when I am carrying you to safety?”²

Friends, if we have trusted Jesus as our Lord and Savior – believing that He has rescued us from the power of sin and death – what makes us think that He will drop us before we arrive at our heavenly home? No – the *“eternal God is your refuge and His everlasting arms are under you.”* (Deuteronomy 33:27) We are held in His arms and He will carry us and help us in every kind of trouble we face.

As we close, I invite you to bow your heads in prayer – and open up your hands on your lap. Look down at your hands – and pray along with me. “Lord, I open my hands up to you. I surrender all those things that I am afraid of – or worried about. And I rejoice that I am held in Your arms and that You will help me and be my refuge and strength. We can keep on going, walking without fear, knowing You are right beside us, giving us Your power, presence and promise! To You Lord we give all the glory and praise, as we pray in Jesus’ name. AMEN

RESOURCES:

¹Chip Ingram, “*Experiencing God When You Are Gripped by Fear*”,
<https://livingontheedge.org/broadcast/experiencing-god-when-you-are-gripped-by-fear/>

²Pastor Mika Edmondson, “*Meditation: God is our Refuge and Strength*”.
<https://www.newcitygr.org/devotions-and-liturgy/2020/3/26/meditation-god-is-our-refuge-and-strength-a-very-present-help-in-trouble-psalm-461> -