

A Refuge in Times of Fear

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 20 November 2022

Preacher: Angus MacLeod

[0 : 00] Our second reading tonight is from Psalm 46, and you will find that on page 570.

So, Psalm 46, and you'll find that on page 570. That's Psalm 46 on page 570, and it'll be on the screens as well.

And we're going to read the whole Psalm, and so we're going to begin in verse 1. For the directory of music of the sons of Korah, according to Alamo, a song.

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 at their surging. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God. The holy place where the Most High dwells.

[1 : 06] 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 what the Lord has done. 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. He says, 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. Amen.

This is God's word. Please do keep that open if you can. We're going to be spending our time looking at this. This is quite a well-known psalm for most people.

[2 : 04] It is a song that we sing and a beautiful psalm that we sing. It's wonderful that we can do that. But it's also a hymn that some of you might know is, A Mighty Fortress is Our God by Martin Luther. But this is a psalm that I hope will be a welcome reminder to all of us of who is in control of the world, but also who is in control of your world.

Because we all live in a scary world, and no one needs to teach us to be afraid. And there's so many things to be afraid of that we come up with funny names for them.

We come up with great big long names, such as alphoidophobia for snakes, and acrophobia, fear of heights, aerophobia, fear of planes. And there's a reason why in my house, when I was growing up, and even now in my flat, that I'm the designated spider killer.

And that if at any point, whether it's like I'm falling asleep to being asleep, and a spider is found anywhere, my name is shouted. I almost know what it is, especially at this time of the year.

It's, I need to run. We sometimes call our fears anxiety, or worry, or panic. And there's life fears, job fears, finances, health issues, getting old, world fears, economies, wars, general uncertainty.

[3 : 30] There's much in this world around us. But there's also somewhere that we can see this fear really clearly in our world right now. Somewhere where it's just bubbling to the surface in many people, and that's with the climate issue that's going on.

And we see it in Egypt, and there's a conference, and there's a lot of anxiety and fear around it. And I raise it partly because this is what our language that we find in this psalm speaks quite directly to.

There's a creation and a disorder, and for some people, as they look out in the world, they see what is going on, and they see the chaos, and there's a fear that has almost become a panic.

And they fear that people are blind to it, and they must speak about it. They fear that the world itself is about to give way. They look at the earthquakes, or the floodings, and the famines, and they see that it's humanity's fault, and we must do something.

And it's actually got a name, and it's become a condition of climate anxiety. It's become that serious. And I was actually really struck by this, as I had to read an article.

[4 : 45] I don't normally spend my time in articles, but for uni, I had to read one for an essay, and it was from the National Geographic. And it had quite a striking quote, and I want to read it for us.

And it said, the level of anxiety can be crushing. And it says that more than half of 10,000 young people surveyed in a global study published last December in The Lancet, agreed with the statement, humanity is doomed.

Almost half of the respondents said, concerns about the state of the planet were interfering with their sleep, their ability to study, to play, and to have fun. And the psychotherapist who wrote the study said, what surprised us was just how frightened these young people were.

And see, this fear is just in one place. And this fear is not a distant issue. This is a fear going on in many people around us. And I say it again, over half of the 10,000 people studied believed that the world was doomed no matter what was done.

And I think that's just a really sad state for a lot of people to live under. And these are young people who was affecting their life and their ability to play and even sleep that they just believe that it's hopeless.

[6 : 07] But I want to ask, do we have an answer for that kind of fear? Do we have an answer for, like, the fears we have in our own hearts? For the fears we have and the fears for the people around us?

And as far as the climate, I do believe we should be good stewards of the earth. I do believe that humanity, with its sin, has made a mess of the world. And I also believe the world will one day give way.

But not for the same reasons and maybe not with the same panic as them. For I think here, and especially in the psalm, we see that there's a creator God who reigns.

That human effort, no matter how well intended and whatever we may achieve in this world, in any area, cannot and will not create a stability in this world that we long for.

Partly because we don't have the power or the ability. And second, because the starting place has to be with God. So that whether if fear comes upon us, whether it's to do with the climate, to do with the economy, to do with the world, or wars, or medical, or even if it's just that spider that crawls into the shower with you in the morning.

[7 : 25] We need an answer to these fears. But I believe that the answer we can find is found. And the answer that our neighbors need is found here in this Bible.

It's found with God. It's not a call to action. Ultimately, it's a call to rest that God is with us. Even we read, 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. The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. I'm going to be looking at this psalm under three headings, and they all end with a musical term, Salah, in some editions.

But I'm going to read it under the first one being comfort in cosmic collapse, and that's going to be verses one to three. And then peace in political panic, which is verse four to seven. And the last one will be dependence in divine deliverance, in verses eight to eleven.

But our first point tonight is comfort in the midst of cosmic collapse. And this psalm is written by the sons of Korah. You can see this up at the top. And these are the appointed songwriters of the Old Testament.

[8 : 41] And it's written to help us and to help the people of God in a troubling world. And we see this called trouble in verse one, or even distress.

But in these first verses, we see we're told who God is. We're told what his character is like. And it's his character and power that matter. The psalmist says that it is God who is the refuge.

It is God who is the strength. And it is God who is present. And it is God who will help. So that whatever may come to pass in this world, it is God who is there with his people.

And he is the one who's safe. And so understanding that, we can be so bold as to say when we find the troubles of verses two and three, therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way.

Therefore we will not fear though the mountains fall into the heart of the sea. Therefore we will not fear though its waters roar and foam. Therefore we will not fear though its mountains quake at its surging.

[9 : 49] And what the psalmist does here is he's using biblical picture language, symbolic language, to describe the spiritual war of the earth's most destructive disasters.

He's using big pictures that are found throughout the Bible from the chaotic floodwaters that roar and foam. And it's a terrifying threat to the stability of the world.

This solid earth and its rock solid mountains, this place of order, this place of creation order, where you can know where you stand, this mountain that's so solid.

But yet we live in a world where this good order of God's creation is, is not, is there something wrong? And we read about this in the Bible because we see that in the Bible the sea is a place of, it's anti-God, it's disorder.

And we have a scary picture, it's almost terrifying. These mountains are crumbling. The sea is out of control.

[10:57] Think of a storm like you've had many of them up here in Aberdeen, this storm that you can't do anything about, the waves are crashing. You just can't do anything.

It's unpredictable and it's scary. We see it's, it's a picture of de-creation because in the beginning God made the world and in that he separated the sea from the land.

But here after the rebellion of Genesis 3 it's all mixed, it's all troubled, it's all together and this world is upside down and that we simply cannot control.

Yet this psalm still tells us that these forces of chaos are not independent from the sovereign creator God. There is a place of refuge, there is a safe place for God's people and there is a God who can and there is a God who will help.

See, God is always in control of everything because he made everything. He made the sea and all that dwell in them. And we come on to my second point, we have peace in political panic.

[12:10] We see this in verses 4 to 7. And in verse 4 to 7 we shift focus from this cosmic world to a political issue, this political panic.

And I don't think I really need to do much introduction. I mean, if you watch the news at all, our leaders seem uncertain wherever you are in the world and the opposition often feels just as bad. But where are we to hold our security when we see that in verse 6 the nations are in uproar and kingdoms fall?

And this kingdoms that fall is the same word that's used for the shaky, quaking mountains, these stable mountains that fall in verse 3. It's a similar chaos and disorder.

So that China and North Korea and Russia might terrify us. Their leaders make shouts or roars as we see here. They declare wars.

[13:12] They cause fear. Yet for all their power and seeming stability, they are in fact shakable. And we see this through history.

These nations that rise and fall. They cause terror, but they fall. When the Berlin Wall fell, people thought, how could a mighty power fall in a matter of days?

Like the whole Soviet Union collapsed. We see it with the once great British emperor, Babylonians, the Romans. It doesn't matter. These kingdoms, they rise, they make their shouts, they cause terror, and they collapse.

We get the idea of these shaky kingdoms causing terror, causing incredible fear. But we also see something else in verse 4.

We get a different picture that we're shown. There's a river. And it's strange that this river isn't like the sea we saw in verses 2 and 3. The waters here aren't crashing.

[14:20] It's a stream and it's calm. There's joy and not fear. It's a river that makes the people glad. Not a sea that crashes and causes fear.

This is a sunny Saturday afternoon as you're sitting in Ballotter having a nice coffee as the D rolls past rather than being on the ferry to Orkney or the Isle of Lewis and you're trying to hold on for dear life.

It's a picture of calm. And verse 4 is a picture of a glorious city, a city that is God's place. It's a place where God dwells and this river flows from it.

But this river is strange because unlike Aberdeen with its D, ancient and present Jerusalem didn't have this river that flowed out of it. And the psalmist knows this.

But the city that he speaks of does. And there was, however, a river in Eden, a river where God made the world back when, before, man rebelled against him at the beginning of the Bible.

[15:25] And we also see here there's something else that this city will never be moved. It will not fall unlike these nations. It is secure. And this is the new Jerusalem.

It shall not be moved opposed to the ancient Jerusalem which fell to the Babylonians. And at the end of the Bible we read some of it.

We are told of a future world, a new creation, this world made right where there will be a glorious city. There will be no more sea, we're told. No more crashing waves of disorder.

But there will be a promised river of life that flows from it from the very throne of God outwards. And God will be there and this new Jerusalem will stand forever and ever.

And there, God will be with his people. This psalm is moving from a picture of decreation and disorder and pointing us towards a hope in a new creation, a new world.

[16:33] But our world right now doesn't feel like that. Our world doesn't feel secure. Our world is not like that. Our world feels scary. It's a world with nations that are in turmoil and uproar.

But maybe this world is so scary because we are looking for it to provide us a security that it never can provide. Because here in the psalm, the psalmist wants us to look to God.

He says, God will help. God will be your security. And it says in verse 5 that help will come. Help will come at the break of day.

And this is a military term that just says at first light when battle used to start. Basically, he's saying God will not delay. He will come and it will come suddenly. And we're told how easy it will be.

We saw in verse 6 that the nations rage. But yet, in the very next line, we read that God simply speaks. He lifts his voice.

[17:37] The earth melts. When God speaks, when God acts, the insecure crumbles. This is God's judgment.

And every kingdom that's caused terror and fear will be brought to nothing. He need only speak. His voice brings the vast armies to nothing.

So much so that the earth melts before him. We see this in the book of Revelation. God only speaks. And all these powers come to nothing with a word.

One day, this fear and turmoil will be taken care of. But in the meantime, we are told and reminded that God is with his people. God is with his people in the midst of this terror and of these fears.

And he is the one who's bigger than all the trouble that we face and all those around us face. So if you are fearful today of nations or politicians or powers, or if you look out in your leaders and you despair and long for them just to do something, well, we have this repeated refrain.

[18:56] The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. God is with his people. He is the refuge in the storm. He is the mighty fortress for his people.

Which brings us to our third point, our last point, dependence in divine deliverance. And you'll find this in verses 8 to 11. And in these verses we have the verses you might have on your fridge.

Verse 10 it says, Be still and know that I am God. Wonderful verses. Beautiful. But often I think we read these verses a bit like a command, simply for us just to be still.

Oh, you're fearful. Just be still. I don't know if you've ever tried that with maybe your child or your child struggling. Just be still. It doesn't work. You can't just tell them not to worry and then they don't worry.

And I don't think that this verse is just telling you just to stop worrying. See, I think this is God speaking to his creation. It's addressing them. Verse 10 begins with, says, He says to the shaky world and all the powerful nations who rage against him and to individuals everywhere who are in rebellion against him and to us with our fearful hearts.

[20:14] God says, stop and be still. Come and see. We've seen these words. Come, see, be still, know. You see that in verse 8.

Come and see what the Lord has done. See, this be still isn't a quiet invitation just to meditate, but rather a silence and awestruck wonder at who God is.

We call each other to come and see with the eyes of faith the final destruction, the fulfillment of God dealing with the sin and the brokenness and the evil of this world.

This is to come and see this Lord and all that he does. The works of his making, in verse 9, to wars to cease to the ends of the earth by destroying the greatest tools of war of the day.

He see the symbols of the bow, the spear, and the chariots. He destroys them, the greatest weapons of the day. God's going to destroy them, burn them, and this should bring fear to anyone who uses them to oppress and to bring difficulty and fear to others.

[21:33] But it should bring courage to those who are trusting and waiting on God. This Lord Almighty, this warrior God, this strong, powerful God is in control of these nations who think they're

so tough.

He comes to see God in his works. He makes wars to cease. He does it through his judgment and we see it in verse 8 as desolations. And this might worry us, God judging and dealing with things in the world.

But we should remember that the people who sung this psalm would have been relieved. These judgments fall on the nations around them who bring death and destruction.

And it was likely written after one of the many foreign armies have come in and invaded Israel. And the people had cried out to God and God came to their aid. They were facing being destroyed, but God was with them.

God was their refuge. And this relief that comes through judgment is a bit like the people of Ukraine, being relieved of the guns and the tanks and the planes of the Russians just were destroyed, smashed to pieces.

[22 : 51] And we see a bit of this relief and you see it as the Ukrainians advance. The Russian army has collapsed in many places and they re-enter their towns and they rejoice.

While this devastation is hard to watch, for those in the midst of it, for those under the weight of this world and its fear, there's joy and all that oppresses being dealt with.

And for us as Christians, we are told that all things that ruin our world must be dealt with. All the things that bring death and destruction and pain will be dealt with.

And so we read this be still in verse 10, is be still in the true knowledge of God and his deliverance. peace and security be found in trusting him rather than trusting in these nations that promise so much.

But it's also true for us. God is calling on people everywhere to stop their personal rebellion against him, their personal shaking against him, and come and cease from their rebellion, to cease from trying to build their own stability apart from him.

[24 : 15] Because in a world that is going to have its problems dealt with, there is one safe place. There is one safe place under God's judgment.

And it may be seen as refuge. And this refuge is the city of God. It's the place where God dwells. This is a place where the covenant God dwells, the Lord.

And this God, this covenant God who keeps his promises, well, we see his fulfillment of his promises. These promises that we read here, we find them fulfilled in Jesus.

See, Christ is the safe place. Christ is the fortress of refuge. And in him, these troubled waters of chaos are transformed into a river of life.

See, Jesus leads us in singing this psalm. We tell one another that Jesus himself is the safe place in a dangerous world. We call on each other to surrender our rebellious hearts to him as we come and find rest and be still in the assurance of his victory.

[25 : 30] for his people, there's no fear of judgment. There's no fear of this, what God will do to make this world right.

But there's comfort and there's peace and there's longing. And so we are all invited to come and be still at his feet, at the feet of Jesus and under the protection of this big God, this unshakable God. And I really love that we get a beautiful picture of this in the New Testament. And we get it in Mark chapter 4 and verse 35, we see that Jesus takes his disciples into the midst of a storm and they're in a really small boat.

And he takes them across the sea and this storm builds and this boat begins to fill with water. And where's Jesus? He's asleep. And his disciples rush in and they're in fear.

And they wake him up and they say to him, teacher, don't you care if we drown? They're saying, Jesus, do you not care about us? Look at what we're facing.

[26 : 41] Look what is causing us such fear. And what we see is Jesus wakes. He rises up and he rebukes the wind and said to the sea, peace, be still.

And the wind ceased and there was a great calm. The storm was raging. The boat is sinking. And Jesus just speaks peace.

And the waters are calm. And he says to them, he turns to them and he says, why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith? Do you still not get who I am?

Do you still not know that I care for you? He's saying. And he says to them, and we see that they were terrified. These disciples are terrified, we read, and they say to one another, who is this?

Even the wind and the waves obey him. Who is this one that the foaming waves listen to? Who is the one that makes all this chaos calm?

[27 : 45] Who is the God who is present? Who is the God who will help? It's the one who's sitting in their boat. what is my refuge?

What will be my comfort as I live in this world and face its troubles? Not that I can make anything still, let alone my own heart, but I know a God personally who can.

He simply put, the one who takes you into the storm is the rescuer and the redeemer from the storm, and he's none other than Jesus himself. He is the one who the winds and the waves must obey.

He is the one who these powerful rulers must one day submit to. And that's the one who watches over you and says, peace, be still, to whatever would bring you trouble and fear.

See, Jesus, the Lord of creation, speaks to his creation and brings peace to it. It is Jesus who says, be still, not you.

[28 : 46] It doesn't matter how many times you try and calm your fears, and you can say a thousand times, oh, just be still, be still, be still. It won't bring peace.

But when Jesus speaks peace and be still to you, we find peace. And the psalm, it closes with this repetition of the Lord Almighty being with us.

And this is what we need. This is what we all need as we face tomorrow, as we all go out into our lives and all that we have going on. A people reminded of the God whose power is at work within us, whose power is greater than anything we may face, who's greater than any of the powers of this world.

And as the saying goes, anyone plus God is in the majority. So as we understand more and as you come back Sunday by Sunday and as you read in your Bible and you hear more and more about who God is, we are reminded to trust in Him.

We are sustained by Him and confident in Him and His protective care of us. See, we do not need to be taught to fear, but we do need to be taught how to fight fear.

[30 : 10] And this psalm is a great place to start. There's a reason why many of you might have it on your fridges. The great place to start is we learn to trust God.

And I have a niece, she's amazing, I also have a nephew, but my niece is amazing. And without being taught, without needing anyone to tell her how to be afraid, she learned that by herself, like many other things.

But at two o'clock in the morning, she shouted through my dad. She screams to her dad, my brother. My dad comes in, and her dad comes in, my brother, and says to her, you know, what's wrong?

What's wrong, Flora? There's a polar bear under my bed. My brother at two o'clock in the morning took a wee minute to kind of get, she's been serious, and she's terrified.

She's had a nightmare, and she believes there's a polar bear under her bed. And in her terror, she's not interested that my brother just simply says, there's no polar bears in Inverness, or points to the fact that I don't see how a polar bear would fit under her bed.

[31 : 16] None of that will make any difference to her. She says to him, you need to go down and check, which she does. And she says, no, turn on the torch on your phone just to be extra sure. See, she didn't need to be taught how to be afraid, even if it's irrational, such as a polar bear.

But what she does is need to be taught where to turn in her fear. And my brother turned to her and he says to her, he says, why don't you need to be afraid, Flora?

And he's worked with her on this, and she says, because you are with me, Daddy. And then they turn and they pray together, and it's beautiful, I mean, it brings me to tears, I mean, it's lovely, but they pray together for God to be with her.

See, we have no power to make our own fear still, let alone that of our children or our friends or the people that we love. But we can cry out to our Heavenly Father ourselves, but we can also pray with others and cry out with them.

To the God who is our refuge, the God who made us and loves us, to our Heavenly Father who sits with there, even though our fears are often irrational as a polar bear, our Heavenly Father still comes to us and sits with us and loves us and listens to our prayers.

[32 : 34] all that would overwhelm us, all that would shake us. And so as I close, we can have comfort in the midst of cosmic collapse.

We can have peace in the midst of political panic and we can have dependence that there will be divine deliverance. In this psalm, we call on one another and on the world around us to cease from the rebellion to God, to come and find refuge from all its toil and worry.

God here and through the Bible doesn't promise that the life of the Christian or anyone else will be easy. But he does promise that one day wars will cease, one day Jesus will return, one day there will be a new creation.

But here and now we can know comfort. We see in verse 10, we see that actually people will come. We see verse 10, I will be exalted among the nations.

I will be exalted in the earth. We have wonderful hope that not just us and our fears will be stilled.

People who are rebels, people who are against God will come and find refuge in him.

[33 : 57] Many people will come and trust in him. We need to take time to consider who God is and what he has done and what he promises to do as his return.

And as I close, I would like to just read a few verses of this promise that we have, this hope that we have in the midst of our fears. And it's from Revelation chapter 21. We read 22 earlier.

And this is to where this psalm points. And this is where Revelation picks up from. And it's a city where the psalm longed for. The psalmist longed for. It's a city that we long for.

And we read in Revelation chapter 21. I realize I had a different version there. We read in Revelation chapter 21. And verse 1 to 4.

We read, Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth. For the first heaven and the first earth passed away. And there was no longer any sea. I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride, beautiful, dressed for a husband.

[35 : 08] And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, Look, God's dwelling place is now among the people. And he will dwell with them, they will be his people, and God himself will be with them and will be their God.

And he will wipe away every tear from their eye. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away. And that is our hope.

There will be a day where the tears will be wiped away. There's a day where our fears will be stilled completely. But right now, we can turn to our God and know peace in the midst of our troubles.

So let's do that now. Let us turn to him in prayer. Lord, we thank you that you are in control. We thank you that though the world around us may seem so full of trouble, we can know there is a God who reigns.

There is a God who's in control. There is a God who knows us, who knows our needs, who knows our struggles, who knows our fears. And he is our heavenly father who loves us, who comes to us as we cry out in fear, who says peace and be still to all that would trouble us.

[36 : 32] And though even though many of us go through many trials in this life, we long and look forward to the day when God you will wipe away every tear. You will bring judgment on all the evil of this world and you will make all things new.

And on that day we will see you. On that day we will know you. And that day there will be all your people will be there. No one will be lost.

All will be secure in you. So Lord, help us as we face tomorrow. Help us as we face all this world throws at us. Help us in the midst of some of the biggest challenges life throws at us that we would know that there is a God who reigns and that you are our fortress.

So Lord, we cry out to you now in Jesus' name. Amen. And we're going to now sing as we come to a close of our service. And we're going to sing and we're coming. We're going to be at the end of stage again.