

God is in the Noise

Psalm 46 (November 20, 2022)

Psalm 46

- ¹God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.
²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
³though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah
⁴There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.
⁵God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.
⁶The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.
⁷The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah
⁸Come, behold the works of the Lord; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
⁹He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.
¹⁰“Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth.”
¹¹The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

Historical Context

This psalm has been an anthem of the faithful throughout Christian history. In the turmoil of the Reformation, Martin Luther turned to Psalm 46 for courage and comfort. His robust melody and stirring lyrics became the definitive hymn of the Reformed tradition, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God” (*Ein’ feste Burg*, ca. 1529).

These words encircle the tower of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany. Ironically this is the same church that Martin Luther nailed his ninety-five theses to almost 500 years ago beginning the Protestant Reformation.

Theme: God is in the Noise

Psalm 46 reminds us that we are in both the desert and in the Promised Land. In short, this Psalm is a strong affirmation of trusting God in the most troublesome situations. The opening statement (verse 1) as well as the recurring refrain (verses 7 and 11) each serves as reinforcements to God’s presence and God’s protection. God is with us, even when the world around us might seem to be falling apart. In the midst of unpredictable natural disasters that change and destroy the earth, God’s people are not to fear (verses 2-3). In the midst of political calamity, the voice of God can be heard (verse 6). In the midst of militaristic strife, God will bring peace (verse 9).

John Goldingay asserts that this Psalm is not about violence, but about God.³ Goldingay also warns against another misinterpretation of this Psalm. That is, too often the Christian community uses the pinnacle phrase of this Psalm, “Be still and know that I am God!” as an invitation or an excuse to ignore or withdraw from a violent and noisy world. Goldingay reminds us “nowhere do the psalms have an ideal of silence.” Rather, “their assumption is that one finds God not in silence but in noise.” Psalm 46 is “an important challenge to the superpower to stand still and recognize that God is God and that the superpower is not.”⁴