

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Come, behold the works of the LORD, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. "Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Psalm 46:1-11

Well, for those of us who keep our eyes and ears open to what is happening in the world, we have some good news this week in that Hamas and Israel have agreed to open-ended truce in their war against each other even though the core issues of their conflict have not been resolved. But that's about it -because most of the other news is pretty much bad news. As the Islamic State in Syria continues capture and murder countless soldiers and civilians in Iraq and Syria, the United States and Great Britain have declared ISIS to be a "greater and deeper" threat than the world has ever known before. This past week Russia finally made public their push to invade the Ukraine, further destabilizing western Europe. And closer to home the school teachers in BC are still on strike - and if that's not bad enough for you it looks like Burger King is buying out Tim Horton's - which probably means *having it your way* might mean getting a doughnut rather than fries with your whopper in the near future.

The bad news that seemed to get the most attention this past week came from Arizona where a 9 year old girl accidentally killed her shooting instructor with an Uzi machine gun when the gun jumped out of her hands as she fired it on a rifle range. The senseless tragedy was caught on video and is causing a considerable amount of discussion throughout the world - so much so that it has almost overshadowed another video released on the same day of ISIS militants executing 250 Syrian soldiers in the desert. So much of what we see and hear about our world today is reflective of violence, pain, suffering and death - and much of what we personally experience even in our own lives is often that of affliction, loss and tragedy. It is at such times we can take heart in that God's Word tells us that anything and everything that happens in life is all is under the control of and for the sovereign purpose of God – and so it is at such times we can always trust in the providence of God, whether it be a world catastrophe or a personal tragedy or a little girl accidentally shooting her instructor with a gun.

The providence of God is that characteristic or attribute of God of His personal and His continual and His sovereign involvement in all that He has created. God providentially keeps all things He created existing and maintaining the properties with which He created them. God providentially draws all things together to cooperate together within their distinctive properties, according to and for the fulfillment of His created purpose. Whether it be a natural cataclysmic event such as a hurricane or tsunami or earthquake or whether it be of personal suffering, affliction or pain - God sovereignly rules over all that happens in life: Romans 8:28 says *"we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."* The providence of God also means God sovereignly rules over each decision we make and every action we take. Proverbs 16:33: *"The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord."* Proverbs 16:9: *"The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps."* Proverbs 21:1: *"The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."* Ephesians 1:11: *"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will."*

The providence God allows us to embrace the truth that we are never in the grip of blind forces such as chance, luck, or fate. All decisions of man are under the sovereign purpose of God; and that all that happens to us fits perfectly into God's plan, which means every event in life is a new opportunity to trust, obey, and rejoice in God, knowing that it's all for our good and for God's glory. This morning the Word of God reveals to us that God even has great purposes in the tragedies and disasters of this world. Psalm 46 was written in the context of problems and stresses and uncertainties - and as the writer's world was crumbling down all around him, he wrote: *"God is our refuge and strength!"* While this Psalm was written for the nation of Israel, God put it in the Bible for us to read and learn from today. The Word of God reveals to us this morning that in times of trouble, struggle, tragedy and catastrophe there are three reasons why we can respond by trusting in the providence of God.

1) In times of trouble we can trust in God's providence because of His sovereign *protection*. *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling"* (Psalm 46:1-3). No matter whatever *"trouble"* we might find ourselves in - God is our *refuge*, our strength, our help in the time of our *"trouble."* God is our *refuge* even when our world seems to be crashing down around us. There is no other refuge in the world like God; He is always protecting us. He is, in King David's words: *"My rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold"* (Psalm 18:2).

The word *"strength"* reminds us that our true power comes from God: *"God is our strength!"* The phrase *"very present help"* tells us that God is always ready and available to be our refuge and strength. In context, the word *"trouble"* here speaks of *"struggle, affliction, tribulation."* God is telling us today to not live in fear when a hurricane or earthquake does hit Vancouver Island because God is providentially in control over every hurricane and earthquake - and *He offers Himself to be our refuge and strength and help in the trouble of our situations and circumstances.* We read that if we do take refuge in God in the midst of our struggles, He will protect us. In Psalm 5:11 we read of someone who did take refuge in God during a time of trouble: *"Let all who take refuge in you rejoice; let them ever sing for joy, and spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may exult in you."*

The psalmist in Psalm 46 imagines the worst disaster that could possibly hit God's people as he describes hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, storms and floods. In ancient times mountains provided refuge in times of war and were considered to be the most secure part of nature. They were the most fixed and firm things on earth. But nothing on earth is eternally fixed or firm. Someday even Mount Arrowsmith will be no more. Someday all that be will left is God - and God was and is and always will be providentially and sovereignly in control of all things. Even though the *"earth gives way"* - if the landscape changes, and our houses and businesses and everything we have and own gets blown or swept away - we need not be afraid. If God is our refuge and strength we need not fear *"though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea."* In all times of trouble - *"though waters may roar and foam, though mountains tremble"* we can trust in God's providence because of His sovereign protection.

2) In times of trouble we can trust in God's providence because of His sovereign *presence*. *"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. The nations rage, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress"* (Psalm 46:4-7). God protects us when we seek refuge in Him, but we don't have to run very far to find Him because His *presence* is always right with us. The Psalmist speaks of God being in the *"midst"* of God's people in Jerusalem, *"the city of God."* What is interesting here is that Jerusalem was built on top of Mount Moriah and the psalmist speaks of a *"river"* and *"streams"* but Jerusalem doesn't have any *"river"* or *"streams"* running through it like the other major cities of the day. But while Jerusalem did not have any rivers or streams running through it -it did have the *presence* of God in her *"midst."*

The “*river*” spoken of here is the joy of God’s grace that flows like a river through the hearts of His people. This Psalmist tells us that while the ocean rage and the waters roar; the presence of God gently flows like a quiet stream. While it may seem like the world is falling apart, God’s sovereign presence brings God’s peace. The presence of God “*in the midst*” of His people is one of the great truths and most comforting promises in Scripture. The power of the peace of God’s presence is reflected in the words: “*She shall not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns.*” No matter how bad things get, God’s is always providentially present. We see this more clearly in taking a closer look at the connection between verses 2–3 and verse six here: “*Though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam.*” The words for “*move*” and “*roar*” in verses 2-3 are the same Hebrew words used for “*rage*” and “*totter*” in verse 6: “*The nations rage (roar) and the kingdoms totter (move).*” The psalmist uses the same Hebrew words to make the point that whether our troubles in life come from nature (hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, storms and floods) or from political upheaval and wars (nations raging and kingdoms tottering) – God is still our refuge because He is *present*.

We also see God’s presence is our “*strength*” too. His presence is an active counter force and a source of peace and refreshment when nations rage and kingdoms totter: “*He utters his voice, the earth melts*” just as His presence causes waters that roar and foam is to become a “*river whose streams make glad the city of God.*” The psalmist affirms the peace and power of God’s presence here: “*The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*” God is present with His people even when “*the nations rage, the kingdoms totter.*” Though ISIS and other terrorist groups have declared a holy war against God’s people, God is with us. The presence of God in our lives is our power; the raging world melts and dissolves before Him: “*He utters his voice, the earth melts.*” God providentially protects us with His presence in Christ. Jesus came as “*Immanuel*” which means “*God with us.*” After his resurrection Jesus said, “*I am with you always, to the end of the age*” (Matthew 28:20). This is why the apostle Paul, who knew a lot of “*trouble*” could write: “*We are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 8:37-39). In times of trouble we can trust in God’s providence because of His sovereign protection and presence.

3) In times of trouble we can also trust in God’s providence because of His sovereign *position*. “*Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire. “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!” The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress*” (Psalm 46:8-11). The phrase “*Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth*” brings to mind the destruction caused by the Japanese earthquake and tsunami that killed over 16,000 people in 2011 and the Indonesian tsunami that killed over 230,000 people in fourteen countries in 2004. The phrase “*Come behold*” here in the Hebrew means “*to run or pursue in order to gaze and perceive.*” The psalmist is telling us that when we stop and focus on the vast immensity of how God exercises His power in the natural world - we will clearly see God’s *position* in the universe as being absolutely preeminent over and above all things. When the world calls hurricanes, earthquakes and tsunamis an act of God, they are absolutely right.

God’s position as the Creator, as the Almighty God of the universe is reflected in the reality that “*He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the chariots with fire.*” At the time this was written, the Assyrian empire had assembled the mightiest army on earth, and was bent on conquering the entire world. But Almighty God providentially had other plans and purposes. An army with broken bows and shattered spears and burning chariots cannot win a war. In His position as sovereign king, God did not allow Assyria to conquer the world. He is in charge; God will decide who wins and loses. God will decide who wins in Israel and Syria and Iraq and the Ukraine and Russia and Britain and the United States and Canada and Port Alberni.

In verse ten God calls us to bow before Him in His *position* as the providential, preeminent, sovereign ruler over all the universe: “*Be still and know that I am God.*” To “*be still*” means to “cast down or let fall.” It’s the sense and idea of *not putting forth exertion*; it’s a picture of letting our hands fall to our sides, surrendering to God and leaving matters with Him. This is not about a moment of silence or just being quiet. This is a call for all people to stop reacting to each other and to circumstances and to situations – and start responding to God. The word “*know*” here means to “acknowledge and comprehend.” This is a command and rebuke from God that we cease striving on our own initiative, stop reacting in our own strength, and humbly submit ourselves to *knowing* and obeying God.

God Himself proclaims: “*I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!*” As we stop working in our own self-effort, as we quiet our souls and reflect upon God’s position as Lord over the whole world and over the entire universe - we will recognize His sovereignty, His supremacy His preeminence, His providential and inevitable triumph over all the nations. Until we are still in our hearts and quiet before His throne, the awesome reality of His coming exaltation among all the nations will not change us. God will be exalted among the nations in what happens in Israel, Syria, Iraq, the Ukraine, Russia, Great Britain, the United States, Canada and Port Alberni - *not by what we think or say or decide or do - but by the power of who God is.* God will be exalted in all the earth because of the glory of God revealed in Jesus Christ. Colossians 1:16-17 tells us: “*For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*”

“*The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress*” (Psalm 46:11). In this phrase we see again see the three reasons that in times of trouble, struggle, tragedy or catastrophe why we can respond by trusting in the providence of God. We can trust in God’s providence over and above all circumstances and situations 1) because in his *position* as “*The Lord of hosts*” God is the supreme, sovereign and preeminent commander of the armies of heaven; 2) because the power of God’s *presence* “*the Lord of hosts is with us;*” and 3) because “*the God of Jacob is our fortress*” we can run to Him for *protection*. Psalm 124:4 says, “*Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth*” (Psalm 124:8). King David, who lived in turbulent times of struggle, was able to write those words because in the midst of the troubles and wars of his day, he found his security in a God who was providentially in control over all situations and circumstances. The reality of God’s providence is before us in these days and our response must begin in affirming *the promises and truths of God’s Word* about where our security is.

Our security is *in God*, not in the things of this world. Proverbs 9:10: “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*” Psalm 20:7-8: “*Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. They collapse and fall, but we rise and stand upright.*” 1 Peter 1:3-4: “*Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you.*” Our security is *in God*, not in the things of this world.

Our security is *in our faith in God*, not in our safety in this world. Psalm 16:8: “*I have set the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be shaken.*” Psalm 91:4-6: “*He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler. You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day, nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.*” John 16:33: “*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*” Hebrews 12:28-29: “*Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.*” Our security is *in our faith in God*, not in our safety in this world.

Our security is *in our eternity with God*, not in our circumstances in this world. 2 Corinthians 5:1: *"For we know that if the tent, which is our earthly home, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."* 1 Peter 4:12-13: *"Do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed."* Romans 8:18: *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us."* Our security is *in our eternity with God*, not in circumstances in this world.

Our security is in the reality that even though life on earth is dangerous - Jesus Christ is our Savior, our Lord, our God and our King. Romans 8:35-39: *"Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."*

When the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center were destroyed by Islamic militants on September 11, 2001 the common consensus was that life would never be the same afterwards. Travel, politics, immigration, government, religion, the economy, culture, war, history, and our relationships with others have all been affected by the trouble and tragedy of that day. Life has been different for all of us since then. But perhaps the real tragedy that we should be talking about is that while life has been different for us since that event, *we haven't really changed very much at all*. While it is true that most of us would confess that the horrific attack on the World Trade Center did cause most of us to stop and think about what really matters in life. For the most part, most of us just went back to living life as we had been living it before. But Psalm 46 does not allow us to do so. In the face of mountains being moved into the heart of the sea, and waters roaring and foaming, and mountains trembling, and nations raging and kingdoms tottering, and wars with bows and spears and chariots – the psalmist is overwhelmed by the goodness and greatness and glory of God's providence because of His protection, His presence and His position: *"The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress!"*

When faced with life-threatening troubles the psalmist had no fear, but instead proclaimed: *"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble!"* He was able to do so because moving mountains, roaring waters, raging nations, falling kingdoms, and the violence and death of war *helps you see and sort out what really matters in life*. Watching videos of a 9 year old girl accidentally killed her shooting instructor with an Uzi machine gun and ISIS militants executing 250 Syrian soldiers in the desert will do the same thing. When these kinds of things happen, we who claim Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior should be asking ourselves: *"What is God calling us to do?"* Well, Jesus made that pretty to us clear in Matthew 28:19-20: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."* We affirmed that calling in our mission statement to *"passionately proclaim the glory of God in Christ for the joy of all people."* God Himself affirms that in our text for today when He said: *"I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"* We are called to go and make disciples of all nations so that Jesus will be exalted among the nations.

Psalm 46 asks us the question today: How are we doing when it comes to our call to go and make disciples of all nations so that Jesus will be exalted among the nations? Well, we do have a ways to go – and there are differing opinions as to what is holding us back. But the psalmist gives us some deeper insight into the real reason why God's people are slow to go and make disciples of all nations – as God Himself tell us right before He said: *"I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!"* Missions, we read, is hindered when we refuse to obey God and *"be still, and know that"* He is *"God."*

One of the greatest reasons the mission to go and make disciples of all nations is so hard to fulfill - is that most often the church does not give the mission to go and make disciples the same priority God gives it – *because the church often does not give God the priority He deserves.* Right before He said: *“I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth”* God said: *“Be still, and know that I am God.”* Remember now that the context of these words is the psalmist proclaiming the goodness and greatness and glory of God’s providence because of His protection, His presence and His position in the midst of moving mountains and roaring waters and raging nations and falling kingdoms and the violence and death of war – and God declares: *“Be still [cease striving, quit hurrying, quite being so busy doing your own thing] and know that I am God* (I am sovereign Creator God of the universe who providentially rules and reign over all - look at me, trust me, surrender to me, serve me). *I will be* (I have been, I am and I am meant to be) *exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”* And then psalmist cries out: *“The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress!”*

Our mission is to go and make disciples of all nations by crying out, living out, giving, loving, serving, sacrificing and prioritizing the reality of: *“The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress!”* But we can only do so when we become *“still”* enough in our hearts and lives to let the good and great and glorious realities of *who God is* sink into our souls. Psalm 46 is telling us that the impact of the supremacy of God in the world and His inevitable triumph over all the nations, and the coming of His glorious kingdom of righteousness and peace – *will not hit us and will not hold us and will not change us unless we become still and quiet before God.* God reveals Himself to us in His stillness. But if we are too busy or distracted or agitated or if we put anything ahead or above or in front of our most good, great and glorious God and His call for us to go and make disciples of all nations so that He might be exalted among all the nations - the mammoth realities of our great need for God and God’s gracious provision for our forgiveness, redemption and restoration and eternal joy and victory we can know through the death and resurrection of Jesus - will never take hold and change our lives.

We will never be the same once the good, great, and glorious realities about God grip us in our still moments before God. Because God is good, great, and glorious in the providence of His protection, presence and position we will never be or stay the same ever again once we are still before Him. We see that in the context of this psalm. The words of Psalm 46 were written by the *“Sons of Korah.”* Korah was a man, along with three other men who rebelled against the leadership of Moses as he sought to lead God’s people to the Promised Land. As a consequence, in the providence of God, an earthquake occurred and swallowed up Korah and his three companions: *“So they and all that belonged to them went down alive into Sheol, and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the assembly”* (Numbers 16:33). The words we are reading this morning were written by the sons of those who were destroyed by their father’s rebellion. They watched the earth give way and the mountain move and the waters roar and foam and the mountains tremble at its swelling. They heard God utter His voice, and they watched the earth melt – and they were they responded by placing their trust and their security in the providence of God’s sovereign protection, presence and position. In the same way the disciples were different as a result of God’s providence following the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus. For them and many others, Jesus’ death was the greatest catastrophe they could imagine. Everything they had committed their lives to had been nailed to the cross; all of their hopes and dreams had died with Him. There was nothing left, everything was gone. Yet as they grieved, in the stillness of their hearts, God revealed Himself to them in the resurrected Jesus and the Bible tells us they followed Jesus’ command to *“go and make disciples of all nations”* - and God providentially used them to spread the gospel throughout the world in the midst of great opposition - and countless men, women and children came to know Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. James 4:14-15 says: *“What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that.’”* Life is short. May we spend the rest of it putting God first and exalting Him through Jesus Christ to all the nations!