

“Fear Not—The Lord is With Us”
Sermon for March 22, 2020

Text Psalm 46 (ESV)

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.

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior,
Jesus Christ. Amen.

Things change and so do our lives. Life changes—quickly, life changes—dramatically. A week ago many of us met here in worship; today, beside Pastor Kaiser and myself there are two other people in the building—both of them helping facilitate this worship and its distribution online.

A deadly virus threatens everyone around the globe. We are not just watching from a distance as in some cases of suffering around the world, saying, “Those poor people.” We are the people whose lives have been disrupted. We are isolated. We are all affected—some much more than others. And all of this because of a microscopic virus—something we can’t even see, but the effects are certainly seen.

And we are afraid. Oh, some may scoff at all of the precautions and even ridicule the measures that inconvenience our daily routine, our activities and precious enjoyments, but we are not invulnerable. We are not in control of our lives. We do not shape our own destinies. We are in the hands of God.

The child of God--and all those who trust in Jesus as their Savior are the children of God--the child of God knows how precious it is to be in the hands of God. The Christian knows of the inseparable love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. We have His powerful presence which is greater than any threat, and He calls to you and to me today and always to “Fear Not—for I am with you!”

Please consider with me first, that not all fear is bad. A right fear can even save your life. If a tornado is approaching your house you would be a fool to pull out a chair, sit on your porch and say, “I’m not afraid. God will protect me.” No. A healthy fear at that moment will move you to get yourself and your loved ones to the safest place until the storm is past. A healthy fear leads us to take precautions against a highly infectious and even dangerous disease. It would be foolish to presume we could not become sick, and we could even become a source of infection to others.

Bad fear, even sinful fear, is the fear that immobilizes us and keeps us from being the people God has called us to be. Such fear keeps us awake at night; such fear leads to hysteria. Such fear borders on faithlessness. Remember the time when Jesus was in the boat on the sea with His disciples and they encountered a great storm? Jesus was asleep in the back of the boat. The disciples woke Him and said, “Teacher, do You not care that we are perishing? And [Jesus] awoke and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, “Peace! Be still!” And the wind ceased, and

there was a great calm. He said to them, "Why are you so afraid? Have you still no faith?" (Mark 4:38-40)

The writer of Psalm forty-six is a man of faith who is encouraging us to faith in our great, powerful God. He describes God as "the Lord of hosts," and He is with us. "The Lord of hosts" gives us a picture of the Lord leading the whole angel host of heaven always ready to move to protect and defend His people. He is the God of power and might. This God, our God, by the power of His Word shapes the course of the world and the course of human rulers and nations. When they rage against Him, He speaks to them--silences them, immobilizes them--as Jesus spoke to the wind, "Be still and know that I am God."

We Christians, we the people of God, know this God of power and might to be a gracious and good and kind in His dealings with us. The Psalm writer describes our relationship with the Lord who is with us in this way: "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 "city of God" is the church, all who have been called to faith in Jesus our Savior. When God calls you to be His own through faith in Jesus, He becomes for you. He is in our midst. God knows your hurt, your loneliness, your fear. God knows your struggles. He knows how you worry about your children and grandchildren and He knows how you are anxious for your parents and grandparents. He knows how you are troubled about your health and the future. He knows how stressed we are about these unprecedented times. He knows your tossing and your turning, and—your tears.

The Lord, your God knows, and He says to you, "Come and see the works of the Lord." He leads you by the hand to a rough little hill outside the city wall of Jerusalem and lifts your head to gaze upon a cross where the Lord of hosts hangs bleeding and dying for all of your sins, all your faithless sins. The God of all power and might who took on human flesh for you and me dies there for your forgiveness and for the sins of all. Then, wonder of all wonders for all fearful hearts, He leads us by the end at the break of the third day to an empty grave, and shows us that our Lord Jesus is risen from the dead! Yes, He lives, and He is alive for you. He lives to silence all my fears; He lives to wipe away my tears! He lives to calm my troubled heart; He lives all blessings to impart!

The Lord of hosts is with us. Jesus promised, I am with you always. The Psalm writer describes His very-present care with the words, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God." That river is the full flow of God's grace—all those blessings He imparts to care for us. The streams make us, God's people in the city of God, the church, glad!

The word for streams is the word used for irrigation canals. You know, water flows from the irrigation canal—the river—to the irrigation ditches carefully formed in the fields to allow the flow of water. It's regulated. It's always given when needed for the crops to flourish. God's grace, all the riches of His blessings for us in Christ, are given to us exactly where we are at in our need. He gives to us through His Word and Sacrament to cause us to flourish in faith.

The Lord of hosts speaks to you with power and grace and says, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness." In these troubling days especially, turn to your Bible or to your Catechism and read again and again the precious promises of God to strengthen and gladden your heart. Then, strengthened, reach out to those around you who are still struggling in fear and uncertainty.

Yes, we should not be foolhardy; we should be careful. It is wise to not shake hands and limit contact. But is not wise to so shake with fear so we stay out of contact with each other—as Marvin Olasky wrote in his editorial in the recent *WORLD* magazine. We are meant to serve each other. We should not be so concerned about our own health that we're afraid to be neighbors. Continue to pay attention to the needs of the elderly and those most vulnerable.

We always need to show God's love. Jesus also taught us the timeless truth of God's command: Love your neighbor as yourself. In this time it means staying healthy yourself, so that

you do not bring infection to others. It means obeying civil authorities who are charged by God to care for all citizens. It also means caring for one another in appropriate ways.

You may say, “What can I do?”—especially if you are one of those especially urged to limit contact. One thing someone has suggested--one thing you can do is call five other people, especially people who live alone or those you know who are hurting. We all know how important it is to encourage each other and especially now when many are isolated.

Knowing our own fears, be assured, others have many of the same. As you receive encouragement through the Scriptures, as God Himself calls those words to your mind and fills you with hope--so share those words of promise and hope with others—over the phone, by social media, by cards and letters. My mother celebrated her birthday on the 14th. Several days later she received a belated card from one of her grandchildren. She was genuinely thrilled to get that single piece of mail.

As I planned the service today I chose hymns which I considered to address our hearts in this time of crisis. Only later I realized the first and our last hymn today were by Paul Gerhardt. Paul Gerhardt lived in the 1600s. His father died while Paul was young. He suffered much because his youth took place during the 30 Years’ War that ravaged Europe. He was able to go to school, studied theology, and became a pastor. He experienced financial hardship, jealousy of colleagues and later lost his position as a pastor because he refused to compromise on his teaching of the truth of God’s Word. Just before that four of his five children died and his wife was sick. Later she also died. But Paul Gerhardt, a man who knew much suffering, was also a man of faith and clung to the promises of God. Listen as I read the verses of that hymn which will close our worship a bit later. Hear the powerful truths and promises He retells. Be assured—the Lord of hosts is telling you—Be still and know that I am God. The time for fear is over. The time for faith has come.

Why Should Cross and Trial Grieve Me By Paul Gerhardt

- 1 Why should cross and trial grieve me?
 Christ is near
 With His cheer;
 Never will He leave me.
 Who can rob me of the heaven
 That God’s Son
 For me won
 When His life was given?
- 2 When life’s troubles rise to meet me,
 Though their weight
 May be great,
 They will not defeat me.
 God, my loving Savior, sends them;
 He who knows
 All my woes
 Knows how best to end them.
- 3 God gives me my days of gladness,
 And I will
 Trust Him still
 When He sends me sadness.
 God is good; His love attends me
 Day by day,
 Come what may,
 Guides me and defends me.

4 From God's joy can nothing sever,
For I am
His dear lamb,
He, my Shepherd ever.
I am His because He gave me
His own blood
For my good,
By His death to save me.

5 Now in Christ, death cannot slay me,
Though it might,
Day and night,
Trouble and dismay me.
Christ has made my death a portal
From the strife
Of this life
To His joy immortal!

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In the name of Jesus. Amen.