

November 13, 2016

Psalm 46

God Is Holding Your Life (There is a River)

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

Last week, I pulled from “Bye, Bye Birdie” to begin my sermon. This week I return to Broadway once again, this time to the “Music Man” who sang for us “Trouble In River City” and from whom we heard, “Trouble with a capital “T” and that rhymes with “P” and that stands for “Pool”.

The world has been troubled this week. Trouble with a capital “T” and that rhymes with “P” and that stands for “Polls”: demonstrations, the stock market, world leaders, to name just a few.

Whether you agree that the election results was “Trouble” with a capital “T” or not, you cannot deny that “Trouble” comes with living, and not just on Election Day, for “Trouble” is an equal opportunity employer. And if we are to survive, much less thrive in life, we will need to learn how to deal with trouble.

The good news is that the Bible outlines for us not only the types of troubles we are sure to encounter in this life, but also what to do when trouble comes!

The Psalmist begins with a reality check – served up two ways.

#1. God is our refuge and strength, and God a very present help in trouble. God is...

#2. That there are three kinds of trouble, and they will come to you sooner or later.

- a. The earthquake – the finality of all that has been built to date, turned into rubble. The type of trouble

that shakes you to your very foundation. The kind of trouble from which there is no place to hide, not even in a hole, for it is even dangerous to go underground, for the earth shakes there are well.

- b. The storm – and its fury, the unrelenting battering and beating of wind and rain, and the havoc that is now filling your life, that seems to have come out of nowhere.
- c. The flood – and its force, that sweeps away all you knew and held dear, and causes you to end up in a very different place than you began.

Trouble spelled: earthquake, storm and flood,

Trouble spelled: finality, fury and force.

Trouble spelled: shaken, pelted, and swept away.

The names of a few of our earthquakes are: cancer, car accident, and elections.

The names of a few of our storms are:  
death, divorce, and gun violence.

The names of a few of our floods are:  
disability, and demolition and denial of human and civil rights.

We've got trouble all right, not only in River City, but in Havertown, Delaware County, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the United States, and throughout the world.

### **APPLICATION**

Trouble is our reality.

Yet, we need not wind up crushed, blown away or wiped out by trouble, because the Bible provides some very specific, and helpful instruction on how to deal with trouble.

A. The first step is to come to three realizations:

1. God is a **Refuge** for God's people (verse 1).

God is continually available, as opposed to the shifting wind and the cracking foundation. God will always be there for you.

Elected officials come and go, yet God remains. God remains so we can find what – refuge.

Yet, we would be amiss, if we did not explore the human dimension of refuge, that is also, a part of God's plan. For when it comes to refuge, the original hearers of this Psalm would have automatically associated God's refuge with the City of Refuge outlined in the Old Testament books of Numbers, and Joshua.

(Map of the six "Cities of Refuge")

The Old Testament lists 6 cities throughout Israel that were set aside for perpetrators of murder, so that the emotion of death would not move people into instant vengeance, an "eye for an eye" and a "tooth for a tooth" – in other words, you kill mine and I will kill you. The cities of refuge were God's way of assuring a trial, a fair trial, and if found innocent, they could remain safe within the city of refuge for as long as they lived. And then, upon the death of the high priest, all would be free, to go beyond the city limits, and feel secure (because all would be too preoccupied with the death of the high priest to institute vengeance).

It's interesting to me, that in the New Testament book of Hebrews, Jesus is referred to as "our High Priest. Hmmm... Are those implications not far and wide!

God's economy works like this – God gives to us, and then we are expected to give away what we have received. For instance, God first loves us, and then we love God and others.

We have received refuge, now it is for us to provide the refuge we have received to others. That's why the Church has felt it necessary to accept and take in those others have rejected whether the issue which enrages others be: race, ethnicity, gender, economic status, or sexual orientation, to name just a few.

2. God is a **Resident** among God's people (verse 5)

So, we know from Psalm 46 the truth that God has taken up residence among us. Which means, when we are in trouble we need to go to fellowship.

I wonder where the victims of Hurricane Sandy would have been without the Church. When government money had dried up, and shady contractors taken what they could and done a lousy job, the Church came in to clean up the mess. For that's what the Church does. Where would our world be without the Church coming up to clean up the messes – whether they be earthquake, storm or flood (and I mean that literally, and figuratively).

So, that the corporate meaning, now let's look at the personal meaning. In other words, when you are in trouble due to grief, loss, tragedy, and crisis – do you say to yourself, "I can't let people see me like this." Yet, the Bible tells us the help we need amidst our trouble is not at home by ourselves, but in community. I am encouraged this week to see groups gather post election. Some have gathered in the streets, others over a potluck, and there are also others who have begun strategies together about what next, in the light of what has come to be.

Yet, as followers of Jesus, I would be amiss if I did not remind you or help you realize that God's residency is always with you, because the Spirit of God is within you.

God is much alive on this planet earth – in you and me. God is not only our refuge, but also our strength. For God is not just available, but also adequate. The truth is this, nothing less than the power and purpose of God is within you.

When the trouble comes it is like the sun:  
we either harden like clay, or  
we become soft like wax.

Let's really look at what we're made of,  
because it lets us know how we will be able to respond to  
the heat.

And last but not least, the third realization we need to have is: 3. God sends a **River** of blessing to God's people. This river of God flows into the city of God according to Ezekiel 47. There we see this river providing fresh water and thus everything lives where the river flows. It will be the place of the spreading of nets, and there will be a great many kinds of fish. Where the river is there is blessing for all. Where the river is there is abundance and diversity. This river according to scripture should always be preserved.

In John chapter 7 verses 37-39 we read, "Out of the believer's heart shall flow rivers of living water". This is a fabulous description of the activity of the Spirit of God (that Spirit that is within us). Wherever you are, and wherever you let the Spirit flow forth from you, there is a reviving effect.

In these three realizations:  
God is a refuge for God's people,  
God is in residence among God's people,  
God's send a river is a blessing to God's people,  
is hope.

Are you hopeful yet?

B. The second step beyond the three realizations is to behold, see, and relax.

**Behold the Works** of the Lord - this week more than any other I can remember, I need to be quenched by good news. I have purposely gone searching, so I may behold the works of the Lord administered through the hands of God's people. I have savored and looked long and hard into the faces of men, women, and children who are doing God's work of love, compassion, mercy, hospitality, inclusion, and justice. Behold, behold, behold, we must – till the same thing that took ahold of them, takes ahold of us. Behold and then go and do.

**See the desolation** God has always made something out of desolation. Let me just say, Noah and the Ark, the Tower of Babel, Slavery in Egypt, the fall of Israel and Judah, and the killing of Jesus to name just a few.

Psalm 46 reminds us after the war there is nothing but broken bows, and shattered spears, and a fire whose sole purpose is to burn the shields.

We need not despair, for God is not finished, for there is more work that will be done, by God for sure, by us? No, unless we be sure not to give into despair.

And last but not least.

**Be still.** Now, before you use that as an excuse to do nothing when capital "T" trouble come, let me tell you the best translation for the phrase "be still" is "relax". Now, "be still" is doing nothing. Relax is doing something, but with a certain attitude and demeanor. Relax; it's going to be alright.

Alright, because you are going to receive refuge and give refuge. Alright, because of the residency of God in the community you are going to join. Alright because there is a River that can revitalize you and others. Alright because you have seen and will continue to behold the works of the Lord through you and others, and because God has something to say and do and so do we after there has been desolation. Because, God took the desolation of the empty tomb, and gave us resurrection. So then, let us relax, and get busy!

As I began this sermon with a song, I will end it with a song. The song "Through It All" sung by Bishop Yvette Flunder, pastor of the City of Refuge (a UCC church) in Oakland, California. A church that has been a refuge for all the members of their transgender gospel choir: the first all-transgender choir in the nation.

(Show Clip: "Through It All" by Bishop Yvette Flunder)