



Good Shepherd Lutheran Church & School
1611 E Main St., Watertown, WI 53094

Onset of Coronavirus

March 18, 2020

“God’s Encouragement Today”

Rev. David K. Groth

March 18, 2020 – Onset of Coronavirus

Psalm 46

*Every day, Everywhere, By Everyone....sharing
the grace of the Good Shepherd.*

Collect: O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.
Amen

So here we are. My, how everything has changed right. Suddenly something that seemed so distant and far away and in a foreign land, something that started, we're told, at a wet market in the Hunan province of China is knocking at the front door Watertown, WI, and it is shaking our world. There's a bit of chaos in the air. At work, I know I'm flying by the seat of my pants and some of you probably are as well. In the grocery stores with whole aisles having been cleaned out. (By the way, I'll trade you some fresh maple syrup for some hand sanitizer and T.P. Just kidding. I have enough hand sanitizer.)

But the fears are real. Fear that your employer may not be able to pay you. Or maybe you've already been laid off. Fear for elderly family members. Fear for the health of your friends. Fear for your own safety. Fear for what the long-term impact will be on your retirement savings.

And this social distancing is so unnatural, isn't it? Just when we want to be in the company of family and friends, just when we want to congregate in God's house, we cannot. My son came home from Prague last night. I picked him up from O'Hare Airport. I haven't seen him in a couple of months. We bumped elbows and then promptly put on a couple of those precious paper masks. He's in a mandatory 14 day quarantine now in an empty apartment in Madison. I'm thankful he's back, but I'd prefer that he were home with me.

Meanwhile, the grown-ups in charge at the national level, in spite of customary swagger, seem overwhelmed and overmatched, behind the curve, and ill-prepared, not having anticipated the severity of the threat, short of even simple, basic supplies like test kits and paper masks. It has certainly exposed what government can and cannot do for us. And it makes me think of Jeremiah 17, "Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength, whose heart turns away from the Lord. He is like a shrub in the desert and shall not see any good come. He shall dwell in the

parched places of the wilderness, in an uninhabited salt land.”

So it’s a strange world we live in. I’ve never experienced an earthquake, but it sort of feels like the ground is shaking. It feels a little bit like Psalm 46. I read the first three verses:

“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.”

Some of the psalms were written for good times, when all is well, and the world is sane and safe and orderly. They are psalms to pray when everything makes sense, when we know where we stand, we know our place in the world and with God.

The trouble, of course, is that life is not always like that. And so there are other psalms for when our world seems to have been turned upside down and inside out. Someone called them psalms of disorientation. These are psalms for those days like today when things look bleak and people are feeling anxious and vulnerable, times when old certainties no longer hold. These are psalms to pray when we’re feeling abandoned by God, or when we’re confused about his will and plan for us. Psalm 46 is one of those psalms. I believe this ancient psalm is highly relevant today, given all the dangers and our cultural dismay and anxiety.

God, the psalm promises, is not only present in the good times, when nature is kind, and the sea calm, and children are all healthy, personal well-being secure, and enemies subdued and quiet. God, this psalm asserts, is present and may be relied upon when nature is unkind, when mountains shake, and the sea roars, when pestilence slithers into our communities, into our homes and into our bodies—when we feel disoriented, when nothing is secure or stable. Doesn’t that describe life today?

It is precisely during these times that you can count on the strong presence of God. That’s the promise of this psalm. He will be your refuge and strength. You will not be alone. In him you are safe come what may.

For we believe that God came and lived in our disoriented world in Jesus Christ. We believe God was present as he lived and taught and healed and laughed and enjoyed the company of his friends. In the good days, that is. But we believe God was present in the dark times too, when he was pursued and tested by the religious authorities,

when he was betrayed by his friends, when he was arrested and battered and mocked, when spikes were driven through his limbs. It is precisely then that God in Jesus was a most present help for us. Even as he dies, he becomes our refuge, our mighty fortress, a place to hide from our enemies of sin, death and the devil.

The waters will roar and foam in our world, and mountains will fall into the heart of the sea. But he will be your refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore you need not fear. Instead this psalm recommends, compels actually, orders us

Be still
And know that I am God!

He has the world in his hands. He has you in his hands. You are his baptized child; nothing can separate you from his love in Jesus Christ.

“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 . . . Be still, and know that I am God. . . The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

Addendum: As you know, we are not allowed to worship together for now. We will, however, remain in touch at least through these means. For now, at least, if you wish to come in during office hours and use the sanctuary for quiet prayer, please do so. Wave at Dee, say “hi” but please don’t sit down for a nice long visit. She has things to do, and we need to keep her healthy. (By the way, she did not ask me to say that. I just feel very protective of my secretary.)

Meanwhile, we have God given duties with our neighbors in mind, right? For instance, Mary Rollert has a list of our members who are 62 years old or older. If you are willing to call them by phone and check in some of them every now and then, please let Mary know. Mary’s phone number is (920) 248-1044.

Thanks. I’m preparing a sermon this weekend that will also address Coronavirus but from a different angle. And Pastor DeNoyer’s midweek Lenten series will also be continued on this website. So, we’ll do our best to keep in touch. God bless and keep you! DKG