**Good Shepherd Lutheran Church**

**Watertown, WI**

**“Our Fortress”**

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*Psalm 46*

There aren’t a lot of fortresses being built nowadays. The world is much different than the time of the Psalms. Fortresses were a place that one could flee to during an invasion and be protected. Walls, towers, moats, and the like protected those inside from whatever was outside. For most of human history, fortresses were quite common and were an effective way to protect people and important trade routes. The advent of long-range artillery and military aircraft, however, has made them quite useless.

Yet, the metaphor still resonates strongly with people. Fortresses may have become obsolete, but the need to be protected from danger has not. We live privileged lives here in America. In some sense, we may live on the edge of war, but we do not have marauding armies wandering around us looking for cities to sack.

So, if there aren’t enemy armies surrounding us, why am I still afraid? Why do so many people live in fear? We may not live in a warzone, but we still have a right to be afraid. In a warzone, fear is much simpler, our everyday fears are much more complicated.

Crime is all around us: thieves, murderers, human traffickers, drunk drivers, people trying to steal your identity or your credit card information. We also have more to fear than just crime: unexpected hospital bills, viruses, cancer, falls, strokes, broken bones, crashing stock markets, rapid inflation, rising costs, loss of our jobs, a surprise car bill, a surprise bill from a plumber or electrician. We are afraid of losing the few friends we have, not getting into the school we like, and failing to reach our dreams.

We are afraid our kids will abandon their faith, or abandon us, or will never come back. We are afraid of dying alone. We are afraid our spouse doesn’t love us anymore, that our past will catch up with us, that people will find out what kind of person we really are. We are afraid that no one cares about us, that no one really knows who we are. Even without a physical army outside the walls, there is still plenty to be afraid of.

I don’t know about you, but personally, I am a problem solver. I see a problem, and I try to solve it. There are some who will tell you that if you believe more, if you have stronger faith, if you say the right prayer, all these problems will go away. I want desperately to tell you that. I want to tell you that if you put your faith in Jesus, all your problems will go away, and you won’t have anything to be afraid of. I want to tell you that if you live a faithful life, you won’t have to worry about your kids falling away. But unfortunately, I can’t tell you that because it’s not true. Living a faithful life will protect you from some of these problems, but not most of them.

Notice the exact words of our Psalm for today. God is a help IN trouble, THOUGH the earth gives way, THOUGH the mountains shake. Your faith in God will not stop troubles from coming, but He will be your fortress in the midst of trouble.

Trouble comes to everyone, whether we believe or not. Life isn’t easy. Everyone has different ways of coping with troubling times. We all have different fortresses we run to. Maybe we run to alcohol or drugs, family or friends. Maybe we throw ourselves into our work either believing that more money will help us or maybe work just becomes a distraction. Maybe we run to our phones when we are in the middle of trouble just to not have to think about it for a little bit. Some people run to self-help gurus and books.

Other people run to the government and politicians. Our politicians certainly would like you to run to them. Just turn on the TV and Trump or Harris is going to tell you exactly how they will fix all your problems. Exactly how they will protect you from all your worries. But they can’t do it. It’s all just vain words; they don’t really care about you, and they don’t really want to protect you. They just want you to vote for them.

We have all run to one or more of these things in the face of trouble at various times in our lives. But our favorite fortress to run to is ourselves. We look to our own strength and our own resolve and believe that, with just a little hard work, if we just follow God’s commands a little bit better, if we can just hear the right inspirational message, or hear the right parenting tip, all our problems will go away. But they won’t.

Jesus promises His disciples this very thing in my favorite verse of the Bible, 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.” In this world you will have trouble, you will have tribulation, you will have many things to be afraid of! But in Christ, you will have peace!

He is our mighty fortress, He is the only one who can protect you and truly loves you and wants what is best for you. He is the only fortress that will never let you down. Even the church may let you down at times, even your pastor will let you down, because the church is made up of fallen and sinful people, and your pastor is one too. Jesus is the only fortress who will help you withstand all the turmoil and troubles of this world. All the other fortresses that we build are weak and fragile. It is only Jesus who will give you true peace.

Faith in Christ doesn’t remove the troubles of this life, but it gives you perspective. Faith in Christ allows us to see the bigger picture. It allows us to see the dangers and the worries of this world as momentary and fleeting things. It helps us to understand that the gift of eternal life is far more valuable than anything else we have in this life. It is far more valuable than all of the other good gifts that God has given us.

Luther describes this well in our opening hymn. “Take they goods, fame, child, wife, though these all be gone the victory has been won, the kingdom ours remaineth.” As bad as things get here on earth, and they will get bad, Christ’s death on the cross has overcome it all.

In your baptism, you have been brought into Him. You are safe inside His fortress. Though the evils of this world rage around you, you are safe in Him. The waters of your baptism are the waters of the river that makes the city glad. Your baptism reminds you that you have been claimed by Christ. It reminds you that as bad as things get, you belong to God. Your God is in control of all things; He makes nations rise and fall, storms rage and cease, He breaks the bow and shatters the spear!

So, as Jesus says, take heart! Have courage! Be still and know that He is God. Keep trusting Him, rest in Him. When your life gets difficult, when it feels like things are out of control, flee to Him and He will rescue you. He is a very present help in trouble. Even when you lay dying, He can and will rescue you. Even in your death, He will draw you closer to Him.

When it seems like God has lost and sin has won, God’s greatest victory is proclaimed. He snatches you from the devil and the guilt of your sin and brings you to Himself to give you eternal life. One day, we will see the fullness of His victory. One day, Christ will rescue our bodies as well. The dead will be raised, and our enemies will be gone forever. All of heaven and earth will be swallowed up into the fortress of our God forever, and on that day, all our troubles, all the things that cause us fear, will finally be gone.

In the name of Jesus, Amen.