

BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD

Psalm 46^[a]

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
 an ever-present help in trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear, though the
 earth give way
 and the mountains fall into the heart of
 the sea,
³ though its waters roar and foam
 and the mountains quake with their
 surging.^[c]
⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad
 the city of God,
 the holy place where the Most High
 dwells.
⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
 God will help her at break of day.

⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
 he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us;
 the God of Jacob is our fortress.
⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done,
 the desolations he has brought on the
 earth.
⁹ He makes wars cease
 to the ends of the earth.
 He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
 he burns the shields^[d] with fire.
¹⁰ He says, “Be still, and know that I am
 God;
 I will be exalted among the nations,
 I will be exalted in the earth.”
¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;
 the God of Jacob is our fortress.

Matthew 6:25-34 Do Not Worry

²⁵ “Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothes? ²⁶ Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they? ²⁷ Can any one of you by worrying add a single hour to your life^[a]?

²⁸ “And why do you worry about clothes? See how the flowers of the field grow. They do not labor or spin. ²⁹ Yet I tell you that not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these. ³⁰ If that is how God clothes the grass of the field, which is here today and tomorrow is thrown into the fire, will he not much more clothe you—you of little faith? ³¹ So do not worry, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ ³² For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. ³³ But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. ³⁴ Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.

Message:

BACK IN THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY, A PANDEMIC ERUPTED OUT OF CHINA AND SWEEPED THROUGH EUROPE. IT WAS CALLED “THE BLACK DEATH” AND WE NOW KNOW IT AS THE BUBONIC PLAGUE. IT WAS SPREAD BY INFECTED RATS AND OTHER VERMIN AND

WAS COMMUNICATED TO HUMAN BEINGS BY FLEAS AND GERMS WHICH TRAVELED THROUGH THE AIR. AFTER A VERY SHORT INCUBATION PERIOD, THE DISEASE WOULD SPIKE A HIGH FEVER IN ITS VICTIMS AND SEND THEM INTO DELIRIUM. WITHIN A DAY OR TWO, BOILS AS LARGE AS HEN'S EGGS WOULD APPEAR ON THE NECK AND LEGS. WHEN THE BOILS BROKE, POISON WOULD ENTER THE BLOODSTREAM AND DEATH WOULD FOLLOW WITHIN THREE OR FOUR DAYS. IT WAS A HORRIBLE DISEASE.

ON AUGUST 2, 1527, THE BUBONIC PLAGUE STRUCK THE GERMAN CITY OF WITTENBURG, WHERE MARTIN LUTHER LIVED AND TAUGHT AT THE UNIVERSITY. EIGHT DAYS LATER, THE ELECTOR JOHN—THE GOVERNOR OF THAT PART OF GERMANY—SHUT DOWN THE UNIVERSITY AND ORDERED THE FACULTY AND STUDENTS TO MOVE TO ANOTHER CITY, WHERE THEY REMAINED UNTIL APRIL OF THE FOLLOWING YEAR. UNMOVED BY THE ELECTOR'S ORDERS OR BY THE PLEAS OF HIS FRIENDS, LUTHER DECIDED TO STAY AND MINISTER TO THE SICK AND FRIGHTENED PEOPLE OF WITTENBURG.

LUTHER AND HIS WIFE, KATIE, WHO WAS PREGNANT AT THE TIME, TURNED THEIR HOUSE INTO A HOSPITAL AND CARED FOR THOSE WHO WERE SICK AND DYING. WITHIN THREE WEEKS EIGHTEEN PEOPLE HAD DIED, INCLUDING THE WIFE OF THE MAYOR OF WITTENBURG WHO DIED IN LUTHER'S ARMS. BY THE END OF NOVEMBER THE PLAGUE HAD RECEDED AND IN DECEMBER KATIE WAS DELIVERED OF A HEALTHY CHILD, WHOM THEY NAMED ELIZABETH. FOUR MONTHS AFTER IT STRUCK WITTENBURG, THE BUBONIC PLAGUE WAS OVER.

AFTER THE PLAGUE ENDED, LUTHER BEGAN RECEIVING LETTERS FROM ALL OVER GERMANY, SEEKING HIS ADVICE ON HOW A CHRISTIAN SHOULD ACT WHEN A PLAGUE STRUCK. HE ANSWERED IN A LETTER WHICH CAME TO BE WIDELY DISTRIBUTED AND WAS ENTITLED: *"WHETHER ONE MAY FLEE FROM A DEADLY PLAGUE."*

IN HIS LETTER, LUTHER DISTINGUISHED BETWEEN DIFFERENT GROUPS OF CHRISTIANS. THOSE WHO BORE SECULAR OR SPIRITUAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR OTHERS—LIKE GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND PASTORS—MUST NOT FLEE THE PLAGUE BUT REMAIN STEADFAST—EVEN IN THE FACE OF DEATH. CHRIST SAID, *"THE GOOD SHEPHERD LAYS DOWN HIS LIFE FOR THE SHEEP, BUT THE HIRELING SEES THE WOLF COMING AND FLEES."*

WHEN PEOPLE ARE SICK OR DYING, THEY NEED PASTORS TO PROVIDE SPIRITUAL CARE AND TO COMFORT THEIR CONSCIENCES. LIKEWISE, ALL THOSE IN PUBLIC OFFICE, SUCH AS MAYORS, JUDGES AND THE LIKE, ARE UNDER OBLIGATION TO REMAIN AND MAINTAIN THE SOCIAL ORDER. IN ROMANS 13 PAUL HAD WRITTEN, *"THE GOVERNING AUTHORITIES ARE GOD'S MINISTERS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD."*

IN THE SAME WAY, LUTHER SAID, THOSE WHO WERE STRONG IN THEIR FAITH ARE BOUND TO DO ALL WITHIN THEIR POWER TO HELP AND ENCOURAGE THOSE WHO ARE WEAK. LUTHER WROTE: *"THIS I WELL KNOW, THAT IF IT WERE CHRIST WHO WAS LAID LOW BY ILLNESS, EVERYBODY WOULD BE SOLICITOUS AND WOULD GLADLY RUSH TO HELP HIM. EVERYONE WOULD BE BOLD AND FEARLESS; NOBODY WOULD FLEE BUT EVERYONE WOULD COME RUNNING. YET THEY DON'T KEEP IN MIND WHAT CHRIST HIMSELF SAYS: 'AS YOU DID TO THE LEAST OF THESE MY BROTHERS, YOU DID TO ME.' VERY WELL THEN, IF YOU WISH TO SERVE CHRIST, YOU HAVE YOUR SICK NEIGHBOR CLOSE AT HAND."* THE COMMAND TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR HOLDS IN ALL

CIRCUMSTANCES. IF WE TRUST GOD, GOD WILL TAKE CARE OF US: A MUSTARD SEED OF FAITH CAN MOVE MOUNTAINS.

ON THE OTHER HAND, LUTHER ADVISES, WE MUST DO EVERYTHING WITHIN OUR POWER TO EXERCISE GOOD STEWARDSHIP OF OUR OWN BODIES. THOSE WHO DISREGARD THE ADVANTAGES THAT MEDICINE AND PROPER HYGIENE CAN BRING ARE NOT TRUSTING GOD, BUT TEMPTING HIM. GOD HAS CREATED MEDICINES AND PROVIDED US WITH INTELLIGENCE TO GUARD AND TAKE GOOD CARE OF THE BODY SO THAT WE CAN LIVE IN GOOD HEALTH. IF ONE MAKES NO USE OF THAT INTELLIGENCE OR MEDICINE WHEN HE COULD DO SO, THAT PERSON FAILS TO BE A GOOD STEWARD OF THE BODY GOD HAS GIVEN HIM. AND THIS IS AGAINST GOD'S WILL, FOR IT IS WRITTEN: *"YOU ARE NOT YOUR OWN; YOU WERE BOUGHT AT A PRICE."* EVEN WORSE, IF HE FAILS TO DO WHAT CAN BE DONE TO PROTECT HIMSELF AGAINST INFECTION, HE RISKS BECOMING A CARRIER OF THE DISEASE AND INFECTING OTHERS.

THE BOTTOM LINE IS, DO WHAT YOU CAN TO PROTECT YOURSELF AGAINST INFECTION AND DO WHAT YOU CAN FOR OTHERS WHO NEED YOUR HELP. AND ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT OUR GREATEST ADVERSARY IS FEAR.

ONE OF LUTHER'S FAVORITE PSALMS WAS THE 46TH PSALM—OUR PSALM FOR TODAY. IT IS THE PSALM THAT INSPIRED HIS GREAT HYMN, *"A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD."* PSALM 46 HAS MUCH TO SAY TO US DURING TIMES OF TROUBLE—LIKE NOW.

LET'S TAKE A LOOK AT IT. *"GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND OUR STRENGTH, AN EVER PRESENT HELP IN TROUBLE."* DID YOU HEAR THAT? *"AN **EVER-PRESENT** HELP IN TROUBLE."* OUR GOD IS NOT A GOD WHO CREATED THE UNIVERSE, WOUND IT UP AND WALKED AWAY TO LET IT RUN DOWN ON ITS OWN. OUR GOD KNOWS US, WALKS WITH US, LOVES US AND CARES FOR US—LIKE A FATHER KNOWS AND LOVES AND CARES FOR HIS CHILDREN.

THE HEBREW WORD FOR GOD'S UNCONDITIONAL LOVE FOR HIS PEOPLE—HIS GRACE—IS *CHESED* AND *CHESED* REFERED TO A WOMAN'S RELATIONSHIP WITH THE CHILD IN HER WOMB. SHE LOVES HER CHILD, CARRIES HIM WITH HER WHEREVER SHE GOES AND CAN'T WAIT FOR HIM TO BE BORN SO SHE CAN CRADLE HIM IN HER ARMS.

IN THE SAME WAY, GOD LOVES US, CARRIES US WHEREVER WE GO, AND CAN'T WAIT FOR US TO BE BORN AGAIN SO HE CAN CRADLE US IN HIS ARMS. LIKE A MOTHER'S CHILD, WE OFTEN CAUSE GOD GREAT PAIN, BUT HE CONTINUES TO LOVE US AND CARE FOR US ANYWAY. HE IS OUR EVER-PRESENT HELP IN TIMES OF TROUBLE.

"THEREFORE WE WILL NOT FEAR, THOUGH THE EARTH GIVE WAY AND THE MOUNTAINS FALL INTO THE HEART OF THE SEA, THOUGH ITS WATERS ROAR AND FOAM AND THE MOUNTAINS SHAKE WITH THEIR SURGING POWER."

I THINK WE CAN AGREE THAT OUR PRESENT CONCERNS WITH THE VIRUS DON'T QUITE REACH THE LEVEL OF MOUNTAINS SLIDING INTO THE SEA, BUT SUCH AS OUR CONCERNS ARE, WE CAN BE ASSURED THAT GOD, WHO KEEPS HIS EYE ON THE SPARROW AND NUMBERS THE VERY HAIRS ON OUR HEAD, WATCHES OVER ALL THOSE WHO, *"...TRUST IN HIM TO KEEP THEM ALIVE IN FAMINE AND DELIVER THEM FROM DEATH."*

GOD IS IN CONTROL AND HE LOVES US, BODY AND SOUL. SO, AS PAUL WROTE, *“REJOICE IN THE LORD ALWAYS! I WILL SAY IT AGAIN: REJOICE! LET YOUR FORBEARING SPIRIT BE EVIDENT TO ALL: THE LORD IS NEAR!”* THE LORD IS ALWAYS NEAR.

“THERE IS A RIVER WHOSE STREAMS MAKE GLAD THE CITY OF GOD, THE HOLY PLACE WHERE THE MOST HIGH DWELLS. GOD IS WITHIN HER, SHE WILL NOT FALL, GOD WILL HELP HER AT BREAK OF DAY. NATIONS ARE IN UPROAR, KINGDOMS TOTTER; HE LIFTS HIS VOICE, THE EARTH MELTS.” WITH THREE WORDS GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE. HE SAID *“LET THERE BE...”* AND THERE WAS. WITH THE SAME WORDS HE WILL ONE DAY DESTROY THE UNIVERSE.

IN THE MEANTIME, OUR MISSION IS TO DO WHAT WE CAN TO GLORIFY HIS NAME AND DRAW PEOPLE TO HIS SON. TROUBLED TIMES LIKE THE ONE WE ARE GOING THROUGH PROVIDE A WONDERFUL OPPORTUNITY FOR US TO DRAW PEOPLE TO GOD'S SON BY SHARING OUR FAITH IN HIS PROVIDENCE. FOR A BELIEVER THESE ARE TIMES OF OPPORTUNITY!

“COME AND SEE THE WORKS OF THE LORD, THE DESOLATIONS HE HAS BROUGHT ON THE EARTH. HE MAKES WARS CEASE TO THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, HE BREAKS THE BOW AND SHATTERS THE SPEAR, HE BURNS UP THE CHARIOTS WITH FIRE.”

GOD MAKES WARS AND GOD MAKES PEACE. OUR MAIN WAR IS NOT WITH ISIS OR NORTH KOREA OR RUSSIA; OUR MAIN WAR IS WITH OUR ENEMY SATAN, THE FATHER OF LIES AND DECEPTION. IN JESUS' OWN WORDS, *“HE WAS A MURDERER FROM THE BEGINNING, NOT HOLDING TO THE TRUTH, FOR THERE IS NO TRUTH IN HIM. WHEN HE LIES, HE SPEAKS HIS NATIVE LANGUAGE, FOR HE IS A LIAR AND THE FATHER OF LIES.”*

TROUBLED TIMES ARE NOT ONLY TIMES OF OPPORTUNITY FOR BELIEVERS, THEY ARE ALSO OPPORTUNE TIMES FOR SATAN TO DO HIS WORK. ONE HAS ONLY TO CONSIDER THE FEAR AND CHAOS THIS VIRUS HAS INSPIRED IN PEOPLE. OR THE POLITICAL POSTURING IT HAS PROVOKED. OR THE ECONOMIC HAVOC IT IS WREAKING.

MAKE NO MISTAKE--SATAN HAS GREAT POWER—FAR MORE THAN WE HAVE. *“AND STILL OUR ANCIENT FOE, DOTH SEEK TO WORK US WOE; HIS CRAFT AND POWER ARE GREAT, AND ARMED WITH CRUEL HATE: NO ONE ON EARTH HIS EQUAL.”* YET *“ONE LITTLE WORD WILL FELL HIM.”*

AND NOW THE GREATEST VERSE IN THE PSALM: *“BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD; I WILL BE EXALTED AMONG THE NATIONS, I WILL BE EXALTED IN THE EARTH.”* *“BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.”* “BE STILL” DOESN'T MEAN “DO NOTHING.” “BE STILL” MEANS TO REMEMBER THAT EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON GOD. DO ALL THE GOOD YOU CAN DO, BUT REMEMBER THAT EVERYTHING DEPENDS ON GOD.

MARTIN LUTHER AND HIS WIFE KATY STAYED WHEN OTHERS FLED THE BUBONIC PLAGUE. THEY INVITED THE SICK AND DYING INTO THEIR HOME AND CARED FOR THEM—PUTTING THEMSELVES AND KATY'S UNBORN CHILD AT RISK OF DEATH EVERY SINGLE DAY. THEY DID EVERYTHING THEY COULD DO BUT THEY ALSO KNEW THAT EVERYTHING DEPENDED ON GOD. AND GOD MINISTERED THROUGH THEM, PROTECTED THEM, SUSTAINED THEM AND DELIVERED THEM OUT OF THE JAWS OF DEATH. FOUR MONTHS LATER, THE PLAGUE WAS OVER—AS THIS ONE WILL BE. ISN'T IT MARVELOUS WHAT GOD CAN DO? SO LET'S ALL BE STILL AND KNOW THAT HE IS GOD. AMEN.