

**Psalm 46**  
**Sermon Series: Be Still and Know**  
**Lauren Baske Davis**  
**6.14.20**

*God is our refuge and strength,  
a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,  
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though its waters roar and foam,  
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.  
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 the city; it shall not be moved;  
God will help it when the morning dawns.  
The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;  
he utters his voice, the earth melts.  
The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.  
Come, behold the works of the Lord;  
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.  
He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;  
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;  
he burns the shields with fire.  
'Be still, and know that I am God!  
I am exalted among the nations,  
I am exalted in the earth.'  
The Lord of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

**Sermon**

When Pastor Wendy and I talked about this “Be Still and Know” sermon series, we debated about it because of the violence that’s in the psalm. We wondered aloud, “Is that what we as a congregation need right now?” But then we watched the killing of a Minneapolis community member—George Floyd. And we watched (and participated) in public outcry that roared at George Floyd’s murder, following the killings of Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and so many others before them. And we stuck with this psalm.

Yes, there is disaster and violence in this psalm. And there is disaster and violence in the Bible—*because* there is disaster and violence in the world. *And*, the psalmist reminds us, that God is in the world, too. The psalmist names the truth of violence and disaster, and then makes a statement about God getting people *through* those times of violence.

Remember how the psalm starts out? “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” Then the psalm goes into the unpredictability of human experience. The unknowns of the world. The earth changing, the mountains shaking, waters roaring, nations in uproar, kingdoms tottering. I don’t have to tell you that these are experiences as true to life over 2,500 years ago when this psalm was written, as they are now. In this time where we are

in midst of exposed racism. As we are all beginning to see, some for the first time, violence, unconscious bias, and generations of hatred have existed for hundreds and probably thousands of years.

*But* here's the truth of it: God is in the midst of it too. The psalmist declares, "God is in the *midst* of the city," *in* the conflict. *In* the cries for justice. The psalmist asserts, God will help. God will make weapons unusable. Even make wars cease. And all of those points in the psalm lead up to the line that has made this psalm so well known: so, "be still and know that I am God."

Now, many of us have read that line contemplatively. Meditatively. There's a lot of richness in reading "be still and know that I am God" contemplatively. It's like a balm. But scholars say that this line should be read more like a shout. One scholar<sup>1</sup> likens "be still and know that I am God" to the scene in one of the Harry Potter movies where the great hall of the castle is filled with the cacophonous noise and chattering of students, and Dumbledore's voice booms over them all, saying "QUIET!"

Can you imagine it? "BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD!" Maybe after everything that's been going on, this psalm has more to teach us in this time than we realized.

"Be still and know that I am God!" challenges us to have the faith to shut our mouths for a moment. To know that God is in the mix. To know that it is *God*—not buildings, not institutions—God, who is our refuge. That's important in shaky and vulnerable times. To have God as our refuge, when all other shelter seems flimsy and suspect. You see, it's not to say that we are invulnerable or that bad things don't happen. All too clearly, we know that they do. But just as much we *know* the realities of disaster and violence, the psalm reminds us we must *know* that God is there too, seeking to be a safe haven.

UCC Minister Kaji Dousa told a story years ago, about experiencing her first earthquake in California. She was troubled by it. And when she spoke to long-time Californians, they basically said, "yeah, this is how it is."

Dousa said, "I couldn't understand how the rest of them took this [earthquake] so calmly. My house shook. Why would this feel normal?" But then she answered herself. Why would this feel normal? "Perhaps because it is. The earth shakes all of the time. Some of us just tend to live on more stable ground and do not perceive the movement. But for many, ground shifts are a daily reality. This is what it means to be poor, what it means to live without a safety net. What incredible privilege I enjoy to be lulled into the perception that the ground on which I stand is firm." Then she shifts her perspective. "Well, maybe [the ground on which I stand] is [firm], because that's what our faith offers us: solid ground in the midst of a shaky earth."

Friends, I have no doubt that things feel shaky right now. For so many reasons. In so many ways. Things are shaky. For some, as Rev. Dousa says, the ground is always shaky, and it is only our privilege that has lulled us into thinking that it isn't. So if we *are* feeling shaky, remember that there is a difference between danger and discomfort. If you are feeling shaky, is it danger or discomfort? What has privilege lulled us into taking for granted, and what do we need to let go of—shake free *from*, perhaps—to work within ourselves and in our own ways of life to let go of for the sake of better life for others? For Black lives in particular?

A therapist I saw on social media posted on the topic of addressing white privilege and fragility. She wrote, "shakiness is where the growth begins." And when things are shaky, we

---

<sup>1</sup> Rolf Jacobson, Luther Seminary Sermon Brainwave for Christ the King Sunday, 2019.

need the power and the presence of God's love. For some, things are always shaky and life is dangerous. If you are white, the shakiness you're feeling likely isn't danger. It's discomfort. And you're going to be okay, so do the work of dismantling racism within yourself and helping those around you do it too. Because others aren't safe, until we let our shakiness move us to sustainable change.

Dr. Barbara Holmes, president emeritus of United Theological Seminary in the Twin Cities, has written about the civil rights marches of the 1960s. She says, "While children were escorted into schools by national guardsmen, the song "Jesus Loves Me" became an anthem of faith in the face of contradictory evidence. You cannot face German shepherds and fire hoses with your own resources; there must be God and stillness at the very center of your being...." Then she continues, "Like a *spiritual* earthquake, the resolve of the marchers," strengthened by faith, reclaimed hope with every step they took. Because their marching "was a result of an enacted faith, grounded deeply in the holy stillness of God."<sup>2</sup>

Shakiness and stillness you see, my friends, are both necessary parts of our experience. And maybe we who are most privileged need them both in conjunction with a God who both says, "I am here with you, among you in the violence," *and* "I am your refuge and your solid ground." Thanks be to God. Amen.

---

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Barbara A. Holmes, [\*Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church\*](#), 2nd ed. (Fortress Press: 2017), 45–46, 50, 52.