

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
November 3, 2013**

End Times 1

Psalm 46

An Ever-Present Help

- 1. *It was 1521 and Luther needed help***
- 2. *Our bond with Luther***
- 3. *Our Ever-Present Help is Seen***

Hymns: 200 – 204

Distribution: 390,389

Closing: 514

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

The year was 1521, it was late spring, and Martin Luther needed help. In one of his defining moments as a courageous reformer, Luther had just stood in front of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, one of the most powerful men in the world alongside Pope Leo X, and told him defiantly that he could not, he would not recant what he had said in protest of the Catholic church's wayward teachings. Luther had already been excommunicated from the Catholic church and declared a heretic, but now after defying the Emperor, he would be condemned as an outlaw as well. When the Edict of Worms was signed by Charles on May 26, Luther became a wanted man. His rights as a citizen were not to be respected, his books and writings were to be burned and it became every good Christian citizen's duty to turn Luther in to the authorities, dead or alive. Martin Luther needed help if his life was to continue even a day longer.

That help came in a mysterious way. As Luther travelled home through the forest-lined roads of Germany, his small travelling party was ambushed. Armed horsemen appeared out of nowhere, grabbed Luther, and disappeared as quickly as they had appeared. News spread quickly through Germany about the kidnapping, and there was uncertainty about what had happened to Luther. Many feared that he was dead.

But it turns out, this kidnapping was a plan devised by friends to keep him safe. Luther was taken captive to a mighty fortress rising high above the German forest -- The Wartburg. It was in that fortress that he found safety and help as he hid anonymously

for the next 10 months. To make the disguise complete, Luther grew a beard, trained as a knight and changed his name to Knight George. Luther's life was safe. He received the help that he desperately needed.

Yet, in actuality, he wanted no part of that help. Initially, he was an unwilling guest in the Wartburg, thinking it cowardly to hide while others fought his fight. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, "I did not want to come here. I wanted to be in the fray." In the moment, Luther was blind to the great danger that surrounded him and the help that he absolutely needed. Without the Wartburg, he would have been dead in days. His reforming work would have been over just as it was getting started. In the moment, Luther seemed unappreciative of the help in the way in which it came, speaking of his unhappiness with the plan and his desire to be outside the walls of that fortress. Luther struggled with the help that was given to him.

And in that way, we share a bond with Luther.

How often, as we go through life, don't we also need help, but fail to realize it? We underestimate the dangers and the temptations. We overestimate our own strength and ability to withstand and overcome. There is a reason that we sing "*We walk in danger all the way*;" because our enemy the devil is always on the prowl, looking to devour us. Yet, so often we are naively blind to all the real threats to our spiritual welfare that there are in this world.

Then, how often don't we dislike the help we are given even as it provides just what we need? We look at the paths that we are led down in life and say, "This isn't where I want to go." We look at the people who lovingly care and help us and say, "This isn't the way I wanted it."

Just like Luther called out as he stood in front of Emperor Charles, "God help me," we also pray often, "God help us," but then we proudly turn back to our own strength and ability or foolishly scoff at the ways in which God might answer those prayers. We search for strength and refuge in so many places other than the fortress provided by God's almighty love. We worry rather than just trusting that God, our Refuge, is doing things that will help.

What we risk not seeing are the wonderful, if not mysterious, ways in which God serves as our ever-present help in trouble. What we risk not experiencing are the glorious, if not unexpected, outcomes that result through the guidance that God brings into our lives as our refuge and strength.

Just look at what happened for Luther during that protested time of protection inside the walls of the Wartburg. Luther thought that he needed to be out fighting the battles of the Reformation. However, inside the walls of that fortress, in quiet solitude that

he would not find anywhere else, Luther accomplished work that had profound and lasting results. First, Luther would put the Bible into common people's hands. For hundreds of years, the Bible had been inaccessible to many as it was found only in Latin. In the Wartburg, Luther translated the Bible into German and within 10 years, 200,000 copies were distributed. He put the Bible into people's hands so that they could read for themselves what God had to say about their salvation. Secondly, in the Wartburg, he began to write hymns. Luther thought it very important that people be allowed to participate in worship, proclaiming in songs that moved their emotions what God had done for them.

What we see is that in addition to keeping Luther safe, God was also working to spread the message of his Word in ways that Luther could not have imagined when he protested his stay in the Wartburg.

What a reminder it is for us, that God's ways are not always our ways. Through unexpected, even unwanted help, look at what God accomplished through Luther as he sat behind those walls which at first seemed to Luther like a prison.

We can be sure that the same will happen for us as well. Even when we question if it is really help that God is giving, he still is working for his good and ours, in spite of our doubts. Even when we protest the roads that he takes us down, he is still leading down paths that he knows are for our best. What a comfort to know that God is in control.

Though he protested at first, Luther eventually saw God working as his ever-present help even as he was forced behind the walls of that fortress. In 1528, Luther thought back to his time in the great fortress at Wartburg while looking at the words we heard from Psalm 46. **“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”** As he read those words, Luther was reminded that as God serves as our fortress, refuge, strength and help, he often does so in ways that we may not expect or understand. As he thought about God's ever-present help, he penned the words to the familiar Reformation hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, a hymn based on Psalm 46, a hymn reflecting on the many ways that God helped Luther during the Reformation.

Today on this day where we give thanks for the guidance and protection that God gave to Luther, may we also take time to think back to the ways that God has helped and protected us in life, even when we didn't think we needed help or doubted the ways in which he gave that help. Surely, the times where God has been our refuge and strength are uncountable. He is an ever-present help even when

we don't see him as such. He is our fortress even when we think we aren't in danger.

As we celebrate the Reformation, as we read Psalm 46, as we sing *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*, may God give us eyes that look only to him as our source of refuge and strength. May he give us faith that trusts in him to always be there as our ever-present help in trouble. May he give us confidence that knows that even as everything in this world changes and falls apart, our Mighty Fortress cannot crumble or fall.

“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.”

Psalm 46

- 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. *Selah*
- 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.
Selah
- 8 Come and see the works of the LORD,
the desolations he has brought on
this earth.
- 9 He makes wars cease to the ends of the
earth; he breaks the bow and
shatters the spear, he burns the
shields with fire.
- 10 “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.