Confidence Replacing Fear

Thirds in the series “Do not Fear”

# Scripture: Psalm 46

# Key Thought: When we worship God, we have reasons for confidence.

# Intro:

Every day the news is filled with unsettling events from all over the world. But the most unsettling things are the fears we have about our own futures. Are these symptoms I am having just another ache and pain or are they something serious? Will I be able to keep my job? Can I buy the groceries I really need? How can I meet my bills? Will I have enough money for retirement? Can I depend on my child to be responsible with the car? How can I handle this issue with my child’s behavior? Such personal questions are where our fears and anxieties really begin to mount. Our questions and anxieties are different for different stages of life and unique to each one of us. But we all have what I would call fear-producers in our lives. It is a natural part of our vulnerable human situation. We just don’t have all the answers, can’t see into the future, and are sometimes short of resources of one kind or another.

The result is fear. And all of us know that responding to our discomforting circumstances with increasing fear is counterproductive. It not only doesn’t help solve the problems, it makes it more difficult for us to do so. So, even though fear comes naturally, we need to avoid getting really fearful. But how?

That is where our faith comes in. In Psalm 46, the writer has given us an inspiring faith testimony of facing difficult times and yet remaining confident in God rather than giving in to escalating fears. This is a rich Psalm and there are a multitude of ways to approach it. But today, I am looking to this Psalm for three paths to confidence in the face of our fears. I want us to trace some of the author’s thinking, to dig into his visualizations and see if God will not also inspire our minds and hearts to find our confidence in God as well.

# God, our ever-present help (v.1)

## As I prepared for the sermon on the Psalm, I was struck with the word “ever present”.

The Psalm begins with descriptions of times of trouble that are meant to help us connect with the times of upheaval that we experience in our own lives. The author chose two of the most frightening and disconcerting events that he had experienced as a setting for his call to faith.

## The first event is an Earthquake along the seacoast.

The Psalm mentions mountains quaking. But the word “earthquake” might be for us poetic language for a time of chaos, a time when things change too much, when our stability is shaken, when life seems out of control. Most of us can point to times in our lives when things felt like that. So “earthquake” just serve as an apt analogy for our times of trouble too. Like being in an earthquake, times of difficulty in life remind us of our helplessness, our vulnerability, our need for a refuge. In an earthquake, things that were stable before are no longer firm. When we go through trying times, it feels like that too. Things that we could rely on as stable suddenly are not.

**But when life gets out of control, we can reach out to God who does not change and is our ever-present helper.**

## The second description of trouble for the ancient writer was the siege of an ancient city.

In ancient warfare, a siege of one’s city was the most frightening scenario. When a city was surrounded by armies, no food or water was allowed in. The attacking army attempted to starve the city into submission. If the city had no internal water supply, the siege would come to a quick and miserable end as the defenders would either surrender or die of thirst within days. But if the city had a good water supply inside the walls, and a good store of food, they had a chance to outlast their enemies. But the water supply was crucial. More on that in a moment. But in a time of siege when the outcome was uncertain, the enemy played on the fears of those in the city. That was certainly the time to be confident in God who was always present. It was a different situation from the earthquake, but the spiritual response needed was the same.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear! Ps 46:1-2 NIV

The writer of the book of Hebrews teaches us the same truth but frames it in a situation that has a very contemporary ring. It has to do with our fears about money. Yet the lesson is the same. God is with us, so we do not need to fear.

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said,
“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.”

 So, we say with confidence,
“The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can mere mortals do to me?” Heb 13:5-6

Many of our fears today revolve around our financial stresses. But the Bible encourages us to in exactly those situations to rely on God. Remember the promise that we loved to quote,

My God will meet all your needs according to the riches of his glory in Christ Jesus. Phil 4:19 NIV

It too was written in a context of the discussion of finances. Paul had been talking about he could be content whether he had much or little and he had complemented the Philippians on their faithfulness in giving. Paul’s trust in God took away his financial fears.

# Streams and the house of God (v.4)

## Hezekiah’s Tunnel supplied water

Another phrase from Psalm 46 that caught my attention and inspired new confidence was in verse 4.

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells. Ps 46:4

When the Psalm was written, the river that was referred to was probably the stream of water that King Hezekiah had redirected into the city so that the city would have a water supply when it was under siege (2 Chr. 32:28). I am told that with special permission, you can still visit Hezekiah’s water tunnel today in Jerusalem. As I mentioned, a siege was one of the most frightening events in ancient warfare. If an ancient city had no source of water within the walls, it had to surrender quickly. But if it had a good source of water inside the city, it could be glad as the Psalm indicates. Note that twice in verse four of the Psalm, the writer makes a point to link the water to the name and presence of God. The river is in the City of God and it is in the city where the Most High has his dwelling Place, which refers to the Temple.

## Ezekiel’s vision of water from the Temple

But the reason that I was struck by this verse is that it touches a theme that we see other places in Scripture as well. During the exile, the prophet Ezekiel had a vision in which he describes an increasing and life-giving river of water flowing out from under a restored temple of God. The prophet makes special note of the water’s source –at the Temple. He is told how the volume of water is increasing tremendously. This is an abundant stream of water (Reminds us of John 10:10). And the prophet spends some verses telling of how the water in this stream is so life-giving that it restores life even in the Dead Sea itself (Ezekiel 47:1-12).

Swarms of living creatures will live wherever the river flows. There will be large numbers of fish, because this water flows there and makes the salt water fresh; so where the river flows everything will live.
Ezek 47:9 NIV

It is a transforming stream!

## John’s Vision

Then I remember that the Apostle John, when he wrote down the Revelation given to him, included a vison which also mentions a life-giving river which is associated with the city of God and comes from the presence of God. In Revelation chapter 21, John describes the new Jerusalem, the heavenly city, as it comes down out of heaven from God. Chapter 21 and 22 of Revelation are pictures of God restoring the creation and completing the vision of healing and renewal the prophets had projected. It is a climactic moment for our salvation. In chapter 22, John talks about the river of the water of life.

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. Rev 22:1, 2

This river flows from the presence of God, in the middle of the heavenly Jerusalem. It also makes the residents glad because it gives life to the trees on either side– trees which provide fruit and healing for everyone.

So we can see that the picture from Psalm 46 that the writer glimpses, “There is a river which makes glad the city of God,” is an inspired utterance that becomes an archetype, a word picture which the Holy Spirit used repeatedly in the Bible to help us understand what God was doing. He was sending a source of life-giving spiritual refreshment which would renew and invigorate just as a stream of water invigorated a desert landscape.

## Jesus’ Promise

When Jesus spoke with the woman at the well, he used the same idea.

Jesus answered, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” John 4:13-14 NIV

Notice that the water of which Jesus spoke can be described in a very similar way to the waters described in the three passages that we have talked about. The water Jesus recommended comes from his presence, the presence of God, and it gives life!

Now let’s apply this to you and me. What are the situations in our lives where we need the life-giving water that Jesus has to give? Where is our life under siege by the enemy? Where has our life become dry and devoid of the kind of wholesome and healing moments that it should have? These are the kind of places into which the Spirit of God would like to breathe new life.

### The first time

Of course, God’s spirit can’t breathe new life into our lives very well unless he’s been invited in. We do that when we give hospitality to Christ in our lives, when we confess our own need of Jesus, acknowledge our sins, ask forgiveness and believe that what Jesus has done is for us personally. When we make a spiritual beginning like that, we open the door for the Savior to come into our lives (Rev. 3:20), for his Spirit to be active in our life, and for the life-giving water of life to begin to flow freely inside us, bringing refreshment, renewal and revival to our thinking, our relationships and our spirits.

### Every time

But even after we have done that, there are times in our lives when we will need to call for more of God’s spiritual refreshment. Thank God we have more of God’s promises to give us confidence when fears assail us.

This is what the high and exalted One says—
he who lives forever, whose name is holy:
“I live in a high and holy place,
but also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit,
to revive the spirit of the lowly
and to revive the heart of the contrite. Isa 57:15 NIV

Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint. Isa 40:31 NIV

# Rest in God's sovereignty (v.10)

## We need rest for our souls

A third phrase from this Psalm that never ceases to arrest my attention is the powerful command, “Be still ….

Obeying this admonition is a major effort for us. In my last parish, I lived a few hundred yards from Interstate 90. It provided constant noise and perpetual movement out our front window--maybe at 2AM Christmas eve it would slow down. It became for us a symbol of so many of our lives today. We are people of constant motion, constant noise, 24/7 living. One big reason we are out of touch with God is that we do not stop to be still as this Psalm directs us. Another reason we seem unable to stop is the restlessness within ourselves.

Jesus’ used this same command “Be still” when he was on the Sea of Galilee in a small boat with his disciples during a storm (Mark 4:39). Immediately, there was a great calm that amazed the fishermen he was sailing with.

**Friends, I suggest to you this morning that the command, “Be still” is God’s timeless command to the chaos of our lives.**

## A Sovereign God is our resting place

The question is whether we will hear it and do something about it. But we really can’t do anything about it unless we have a place of rest, a refuge from the storm, a haven to which we can go where there is quiet to be found.

If we keep reading this Psalm, we find the answer.

“Be still and know that I am God.”

God is our haven, God is our refuge, God is our source of rest. We rest in the sovereignty of God. Do we know how to work that all out and explain how it works? We certainly do not. We just trust that somehow, even when things happen that we know are not good, and bad things do happen in this world where there is so much evil, even then, we still must rest our souls in the sovereignty of God. “Our God reigns,” we sing. We need to trust in that truth.

 Jesus said to us,

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Matt 11:28 NIV

There’s that word again, rest. And where do we find it? We find it by coming to God. We find it by coming to our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. We find it by resting in the Father’s care. The apostle Peter certainly knew what the search for soul rest was about.

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7