

THE GOD OF JACOB IS OUR HIGH SECURE RETREAT

Hear again the Word of God for this Reformation Festival:

YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us;

(a) high, secure, retreat for us (is the) Elhoe of Jacob.¹

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

This is a festival day in the Church of the Reformation. For at least one generation of the faithful, in the United States, it is a day to sing the hymn that declares the wonders proclaimed in Psalm 46.² For some of us, our first introduction to that hymn came through the “Davey and Goliath” color, stop-motion, animated series which entered syndication in 1961. By 1972, the series was aired in seventeen of the top twenty U.S. television markets, with an estimated weekly audience of 1.9 million children. “Davey and Goliath,” shows and features were beamed into American homes as late as their Christmas special in 2004.

Some of you may remember that “Davey and Goliath’s” intro tune was a stylized rendition of the great Psalm hymn we sang this day. The notes of that hymn are those that at least one generation of us think of whenever we hear the rhythmic version of “A Mighty Fortress” that is found in our hymnals. You may be interested to learn, that for some of us who grew up as non-Lutherans with that series, it appears that we did not hear that tune connected to the Name of Jesus, or even the word, “Lutheran” in any

¹ *Psalm 46: 8 & 12, MT*

² Internet. <http://www.daveyandgoliath.org/kids/trivia.html>. Accessed 30 October 2018.

of the sixty-five syndicated and aired “Davey and Goliath” shows. (At least a couple of the six specials did talk about Jesus).

While Davey, and his dog, Goliath, did deal with some particular moral conflict in each show, it seems, outside of Lutheran circles, they really never got to name the One who is our Mighty Fortress.³ It seems that the shows’ producers wanted to keep a broad audience. That appears to be so much their thinking, that the 2004 Christmas special found Davey learning about the history and traditions of other religions, such as Judaism and Islam. Perhaps it is not so surprising that the Lutheran Church Body that originated the series has since then fallen even farther far away from the Word of God!⁴

Well, may the Lord not let us, and congregations like ours that hold to the true Evangelical (of the Gospel) confession of the Faith, fall into that pit. We freely confess to the world, as we have for centuries, that Jesus the Christ is the Son of God. He is the God Who is, for us, *our Refuge and strength, (our) help in trouble well-proved.*⁵ He is our Mighty Fortress. Did you hear of that being fulfilled in Jesus when you sang, *but for us fights the valiant One, Whom God Himself elected?*⁶

That truth was there, and the Psalm rings out the proclamation of Christ, as we sing, *ask ye, Who is this?* The hymn and Psalm resound with the theme of the Church’s struggle in the battles that still rage against us by an eternally defeated Satan.

³ An, “In house,” ELCA, version, “The Family of God,” did use the Name of Jesus, but that episode does not appear in any of the syndicated airing lists.

⁴ United Lutheran Church... Lutheran Church in America...Evangelical Lutheran Church in America.

⁵ *Psalm 46:2, MT.*

⁶ Luther, Martin. D. 1546. *Lutheran Service Book* # 656, “A Mighty Fortress is Our God,” St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, stz. 2.

Their teachings still ring true five centuries after the hymn began to circulate, and more than thirty centuries since the Psalm of the Day was composed.

Because of the order of this day's service, we do not usually hear the entirety of Psalm 46. Yet, it is important that we do hear its words from time-to-time. They are assembled in phrases that did move the sainted Luther to pen his great hymn. We are going to hear them following their header and ascription verse: *To (the) Choirmaster, to (the) Sons of Kore, according to Alamoth, (a) Song.*⁷ That indicates that the following appears to have been intended for singing by the Levitical choirs. Those choirs were composed of those who were from the priestly line.

So, they are fitting for you New Covenant priests to offer back to God in song! Hear the powerful words of the body of Psalm 46, some of which you have already sung a paraphrase:

⁷ *Psalm 46:1 MT.*

*God (is) for us (a) refuge and strength,
(A) help in trouble well-proved.
Therefore, we will not fear though (the) earth causes to change,
and the mountains shake in tumult into (the) heart of (the) sea;
They roar, they foam, its waters,
they tremble, (the) mountains, in its tumult. Selah.*

*(A) River (is there whose) streams make glad (the) city of Elohim,
the holy dwelling place (of the) Most High.
Elohim (is in) her midst; she will not be moved;
Elohim will help her before (the) dawn (of the) morning.
The nations rage; kingdoms totter;
He utters His Voice, (the) earth melts.
YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us;
(a) high secure retreat for us (is the) Elohe of Jacob. Selah.*

*All of you come, behold (the) works of YHWH,
which He made – desolation in (the) earth.
He causes wars to cease unto (the) ends of the earth;
(the) bow He breaks, and He shatters (the) spear;
(the) chariots He burns with fire.
“All of you cause to be still, and all of you know that I Elohim;
exalted among (the) nations, exalted in (the) earth!”
YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us;
(a) high secure retreat for us (is the) Elohe of Jacob. Selah.*

That which you just heard attempts to preserve, in English, the word order of the Hebrew text. That is done for emphasis in your hearing. In addition, the text was divided for reading into three sections. Each section was concluded with a little word that may mean either, “pause,” “musical interlude,” or, “pluck the strings,” as the Greek language Old Testament rendered it. The Psalm begins with the generic word for God, which is in the plural form. It ends with the same word, defining that God to be the one of Jacob. Seven times, the number of God’s rest at the completion of creation, is that Name for God used in the 46th Psalm. Three times is God’s given Name, YHWH,

declared. Twice, in the verse that is repeated, according to Hebrew form, for emphasis, the Divine Name is attached to the word you know from our usually liturgy, "Sabaoth."

So, the Reformation Psalm begins and ends with God. It declares Him to be the Ruler of the Universe. It names Him as the Great I AM. It teaches that He is the ruler of the heavenly hosts.

How fitting this is as its use falls in the time of St. Michael and all angels? This is the time of the year when we celebrate the victory of One Who is Like God. He is the ruler of the heavenly hosts. He defeated Satan and his hosts, casting them from heaven to earth. That is why we who are in the Church, in every age, need to hear God remind us that He is *with us; (a) high secure retreat for us...*

The Psalm declares the truth that God is the Victor over all the evil that troubles His people. It proclaims that His wins extend from the heavens where He is exalted to the earth and its nations. God is the One Who holds power. We, the faithful, are the ones who benefit from His exercising His might over evil. Nations and created powers cannot prevail against Him. As you remain in Him, they cannot defeat you.

Hear again the opening division of Psalm 46:

*God (is) for us (a) refuge and strength,
(A) help in trouble well-proved.
Therefore, we will not fear though (the) earth causes to change,
and the mountains shake in tumult into (the) heart of (the) sea;
They roar, they foam, its waters,
they tremble, (the) mountains, in its tumult. Selah.*

Dear ones, the Psalm, the Word of God, inspired by the Holy Spirit, declares that God is for us. The Spirit teaches that God is our shelter and protection. We have reams of Scripture that teach that His help is ever there for faithful and repentant believers. You sang of that when you said, *He helps us free from every need.*⁸

Because of the witness of God's Word, you have no need to fear. It is interesting that this Psalm teaches very literally about catastrophic changes in the earth. Whether these are caused by human choices made through poor stewardship of this fallen creation, or the global changes are a result of the devolution of the cosmos brought about by Adam's Fall, the Psalm teaches we have no need to fear. Neither earthquakes, nor raging waters, mighty and unstoppable though they may seem, have the power to separate us from God's protection of our eternal lives in Christ. Our Psalm sings on:

*(A) River (is there whose) streams make glad (the) city of Elohim,
the holy dwelling place (of the) Most High.
Elohim (is in) her midst; she will not be moved;
Elohim will help her before (the) dawn (of the) morning.
The nations rage; kingdoms totter;
He utters His Voice, (the) earth melts.
YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us;
(a) high secure retreat for us (is the) Elohe of Jacob. Selah.*

That section declares where the protection of the Mighty Fortress that is our God is located most clearly. That is, in His Holy City. In days before the Advent of the Christ, that was in the earthly location named Jerusalem, in the region of Judah, in the ancient land of Israel.

⁸ Luther, Martin. D. 1546. *Lutheran Service Book* # 656, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, stz. 1.

Since Christ has come in the flesh, lived, died, conquered sin, death, and the devil, His Holy City has been, and continues to be, built of living stones. These, down to you today, have been built up upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets. In this Holy City, one beholds the New Testament Jerusalem of the Church where Christ, His people, and His pastors gather. Here, as the Psalm declares, there is a River. It is that which washes away sin, and brings joy to those who return to it daily as they, you, remember their baptisms. Here, God is found, with the people He has named holy. Here, in Word and Sacrament, He stands to forgive and give strength to us who daily fight in the battles that come against us on account of the Faith we treasure and share.

The Psalm promises that the Voice of the Lord goes forth. It is doing so even now, as His Word is proclaimed. That voice drives back the evil in the world, and reminds us of God's gracious provisions for us, when it declares, as the second section ends: *YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us; (a) high, secure, retreat for us (is the) Elhoe of Jacob.*⁹ Now to the last section of this Psalm of God's protection of you, His people, as we hear again:

*All of you come, behold (the) works of YHWH,
which He made – desolation in (the) earth.
He causes wars to cease unto (the) ends of the earth;
(the) bow He breaks, and He shatters (the) spear;
(the) chariots He burns with fire.
“All of you cause to be still, and all of you know that I AM Elohim;
exalted among (the) nations, exalted in (the) earth!”
YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us;
(a) high secure retreat for us (is the) Elohe of Jacob. Selah.*

⁹ Psalm 46: 8 & 12, MT

The Psalm, and today's Psalm hymn, move those who are singing them from beholding God's protection now, to the time when all that stand against us will be removed from us forever. This section explains what it means to have God with us now – that is, that He will be on our side forever. There we sing of the time when time will end, when God will toss the evil one and all evil and death and Hades into the eternal Pit. Dr. Luther's hymn expressed that eternity in the presence of Christ with these words: *Though these all be gone, Our vict'ry has been won; the kingdom ours remaineth.*¹⁰

Dear ones in Christ, that declares the time when Christ comes on the clouds in power, majesty, and glory. That will be the Day, the Last Day, when all that war against Christ, and His Church – you – will be forever bound up and separated by God from you, the Church, and His Christ. The Word even gives you a word of comfort to hold onto until that great and glorious day: *"All of you cause to be still, and all of you know that I AM Elohim; exalted among (the) nations, exalted in (the) earth!"*¹¹

Whenever the world presses in upon you, whenever you feel the tribulations of the devil and his forces, whenever you understand the temptations your sinful flesh are presenting to you, know that you are truly free – *to be still* – to know that God is the One Who still causes all things to be for your benefit. Then, reclining in His Word, receiving His promises, you continue to receive the promise that His Word declares:

*YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us;
(a) high secure retreat for us (is the) Elohe of Jacob. Selah.*¹²

¹⁰ Luther, Martin. D. 1546. *Lutheran Service Book* # 656, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God," St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, stz. 4.

¹¹ *Psalm* 46:11 MT

¹² *Psalm* 46:12 MT.

Let the chaos of sin rage about. Remain Christ, in the secure fortress of His Word! God has lifted you up, and He will give you relief from all your enemies.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Reformation Festival (LSB One-year series)
Psalm 46; Revelation 14:6-7; Romans 3:19-28; Matthew 11:12-19
October 31, 2018

Pastor Michael A. Morehouse

Soli Deo Gloria

Translation, second draft:

*God (is) for us (a) refuge and strength,
Help in trouble well-proved.
Therefore not will we fear in (the) earth's causing to change,
and shake, the mountains in tumult into (the) heart of (the) seas.
They roar, they foam, its waters,
they tremble, (the) mountains, in its tumult. Selah.*

*(A) River (is there whose) streams make glad (the) city of Elohim,
the holy dwelling place (of the) Most High.
Elohim (is in) her midst; not will she be moved;
He will help her, Elohim, before (the) face (of the) morning.
They rage, nations; they totter, kingdoms;
He utters His Voice, melts (the) earth.
YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us;
(a) high secure retreat for us (is the) Elohe of Jacob. Selah.*

*All of you come, behold (the) works of YHWH,
which He did – desolation in (the) earth.
He causes to cease, wars, unto (the) ends of the earth;
(the) bow He breaks, and He shatters (the) spear;
chariots He burns in fire.
All of you cause to be still, and all of you know that I Elohim:
exalted in nations, exalted in earth!
YHWH Sabaoth (is) with us;
(a) high secure retreat for us (is the) Elohe of Jacob. Selah.*

NOTES:

And I saw another angel flying in mid-heaven, having (the) eternal Gospel, (which he was proclaiming) - Good News upon the ones continually sitting upon the earth - and upon every nation and tribe and tongue and people – saying in (a) great voice: “All of you fear God, and all of

you give Him glory, because it comes – the hour of His judgment. Also, all of you worship the One making the heavens and the earth and seas and springs of water!”¹³

¹³ Revelation 14:6-7.