

A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD

November 01, 2009

Rev. Bernt P. Tweit

Old Testament Lesson; Jeremiah 18:1-11

Epistle Lesson;

Gospel Lesson; Mark 13:5-11

Sermon Text; Psalm 46:1-11

On this Reformation Sunday, the portion of scripture that we focus on is selected verses, taken from Psalm chapter 46.

God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in 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 quake with their surging...The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.

These are Your words, heavenly Father. Lead us in the way of truth.
Your Word is truth.

Amen

Today there are going to be three books that I am going to be focusing on - God's Word - the Bible, the Catechism, and our Lutheran hymnbook. During the course of the sermon, we will touch base on all three of them.

It started at this time of year, 492 years ago, when Martin Luther nailed the 95 thesis to the castle church door in Wittenburg, Germany. And, the Reformation started. In those years, after the Reformation started, things were not easy for Luther and the

Lutheran Church. Luther, himself, a few times got quite ill. A couple of times, Luther went through severe depression. And there were even a couple of times in which Luther was taken into protective custody, once in 1521, when he was in protective custody in the Wartburg castle and once in 1529, when he was in protective custody in Coburg.

Well, it was during those years that he was in protective custody that he had an opportunity for moments of solitude, opportunity for prayer, and opportunity for personal Bible study. It was also during those years that Martin Luther translated the Bible into the language of the people. The Bible before that time was primarily in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, only something that the priests could read. But, Martin Luther wanted the Bible, God's Word, to be in the language of the people. Martin Luther said "All people must be able to read God's Word for themselves." And so, during those years that he was in protective custody, he did just that. He translated the Bible into the language of the people, into the language of his people, and that was the German language.

Also, Martin Luther, in 1528, went around to visit the churches and the schools to see what shape they were in, to see what the spiritual leaders of the churches and schools knew, and to see the state of the Christian education of the people. I want to share with you what he found, when he made those visits among the churches and the schools. This is from the preface of the small catechism. He said, "The deplorable conditions which I recently encountered, when I was a visitor, constrained me to prepare this brief and simple catechism or statement of Christian teaching. Good God, what wretchedness I beheld. The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching. Unfortunately, many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized and receive the Holy Sacrament, they do not

know the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments. They live as if they were pigs or irrational beasts. And now that the Gospel has been restored, they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.”

That was the condition that Martin Luther found the people to be in. That was the condition that Martin Luther found the priests to be in, those who were the spiritual leaders of the people. That is what led Martin Luther to write the small catechism and the large catechism, so that pastors would know what God's Word says, and so that in the homes, dads, moms, children, families could learn what God's Word says.

On this Reformation Sunday, as we look at the three books that I mentioned at the beginning of the sermon, let's look at the catechism. What is a catechism? A catechism simply is a book of questions and answers. The small catechism is a book of questions and answers pertaining to what God's Word says. So, this morning, let's do a little catechetical study, looking at some questions and answers of what God's Word says about sin, about Jesus, and about Heaven.

Question: **What should be your most important concern in life?**

Now, I am not talking about from a physical perspective. I am talking about from a spiritual perspective. What should be your most important concern in life? **It should be your soul**, because the Bible says,

**“What good is it for a man if he gains the whole world,
and yet forfeits his own soul?**

Question: **Why should that be of concern to us? It should be of concern to us because Jesus, on Judgment Day, is going to say one of two things.** He is either going to say, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” or Jesus is going to say, “Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Receive the inheritance prepared for you, since the creation

of the world.”

Which of those two things do you want Jesus to say to you? I think it goes without saying, we want Jesus to say,

**“Come you who are blessed by my Father.
Receive the inheritance prepared for you,
since the creation of the world.”**

Question: **Can we earn our way to Heaven?** And the answer is **no**. God's Word says,

**“All have sinned
and fall short of the glory of God.”**

God's Word says,

“The wages of sin is death.”

What we deserve, because of our sin is death and separation from God.

Question: **Well, how then can we be saved?** God's Word tells us.

**“God made Him who had no sin
(and that is Jesus)
to be sin for us,**

so that in Him we might receive the righteousness of God.”

And a wonderful thing has happened. Your sin has been placed on Jesus. He has become guilty of your sin. And, in place of that you have received the white robe of righteousness, of Christ. His perfect life, His atoning death for you has been given to you, as a free gift.

Question: **Can you then be sure that you have eternal life, with God in Heaven?** And, the answer is **yes**. You can be confident and you can be sure, because God's Word says,

**“The gift of God
is eternal life
in Christ Jesus our Lord.”**

That is why Luther wanted us to have the catechism, a simple book of questions and answers that tells us what God's Word says about our sin, about Jesus, and about how you get to Heaven. That is the

difference that our faith has with all other religions of the world. All other religions in the world say that you can get to Heaven by your good works, either fully or partially. It is only the Lutheran faith, that says,

**“We are saved by grace alone,
through faith alone,
in Christ alone.”**

That became the three key phrases of the Reformation. We are saved by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Martin Luther also believed that church music was for everyone to sing, not just the choirs, not just the priests. And so, the Lutheran church has become known as the singing church. When Martin Luther was in protective custody in a castle, as he was pouring through God's Word and particularly, as he came to the Psalms, and specifically to Psalm 46, which is our text for today, he read,

“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”,

he wrote the hymn, *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*. (We sang two verses before the sermon, and two verses after the sermon.)

**God is our refuge and strength.
An ever-present help in trouble.**

Particularly, it is verse two that gets at the many struggles that the people were having at the time of the Reformation. Verse two talks about the conflict that we have in life, the striving that we have in life, and the victory that has been won for us, through Christ. Look at verse two.

*With might of ours can naught be done.
Soon were our loss affected.
But for us fights the valiant One.
Whom God, Himself, elected.*

*You ask, "Who is this?"
Jesus Christ, it is
the Almighty Lord.
And there is no other God.
He holds the field, forever.*

Are you seriously ill? Are you sick? Are you undergoing severe depression? Are you troubled by your sin? If so, look to **God's Word**. If so, look to **Luther's small catechism**. If so, look to **our Lutheran hymnbook**.

In God's Word, we see that God is our refuge and strength. An ever-present help in trouble. God is that rock solid fortress. And even when we are enduring those times of physical sickness, mental depression, and being troubled by our sin, God's Word reminds us that He has given us a beautiful and loving Savior, who has saved us from our sin by Jesus' death on the cross.

Pick up the catechism. Luther's small catechism is a wonderful book of questions and answers. Again, it is answering questions dealing about our sin, about Jesus, and about how to get to Heaven.

Pick up your Lutheran hymnbook, because there you see it is solid to Christ. There you see many hymns speaking about the life and the atoning work of Jesus, our Savior.

Yes, when Luther was in protective custody, as he was in a time of personal Bible study and prayer, he came across Psalm 46. He penned this hymn that we sang two verses of and will sing some more in just a moment. ***A Mighty Fortress is Our God.***

As we go through times of trouble in our lives, praise God that He is our mighty fortress and He has sent to us a Savior. May we always be a church of the Reformation, one that clings to God's Word. We are saved by God's grace alone. We are saved by faith alone, in Christ Jesus, our Savior alone.

Amen