

October 22, 2023
Pray. And Let God Worry.
Psalm 46

September 8, an earthquake hit Marrakesh, Morocco, killing at least 3000 and injuring 6000. October 7, an earthquake devastated Afghanistan, killing over 1200, and injuring 2500. Meanwhile, Tropical Storm Daniel hit Greece and Libya, killing an estimated 18,000-20,000 people (over 10,000 are still missing).

Of course, on top of that, we have the war between Israel and Hamas. And the war between Ukraine and Russia. And wars we hear less about, including in South Sudan and Yemen. And countries ripped apart by violence like Haiti and Mali.

And then we have political crises in the U.S. And, some might say, in Canada, as well.

Where's the hope in times of trouble?

When the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness, apparently aimlessly, eating Manna and quail day in day out – facing war with the Moabites and the Midianites – the sons of Korah (Exodus 6:24, Numbers 26:11) write this:

*God is our refuge and strength,
always ready to help in times of trouble.
So we will not fear when earthquakes come
and the mountains crumble into the sea.
Let the oceans roar and foam.
Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge!*

In our times we need to hear this message as well.

They go on, in words reminiscent of Ezekiel 47:1-12 (August 20 sermon):

*A river brings joy to the city of our God,
the sacred home of the Most High.
God dwells in that city; it cannot be destroyed.
From the very break of day, God will protect it.
The nations are in chaos, and their kingdoms crumble!
God's voice thunders, and the earth melts!
The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

The sons of Korah were writing BEFORE Jerusalem even existed, so they are not talking about Jerusalem. As in Ezekeil 47, they are talking about the reality that "*The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us*" - God is with us. And where God is present, He brings

comfort, strength, hope, and, ultimately, peace.

In the end, God will get the Israelites through the wilderness, past their enemies, and into the Promised Land. But that is all in the future.

In the midst of war, violence, and insecurity, the sons of Korah write:

*Come, see the glorious works of the Lord:
See how he brings destruction upon the world.
He causes wars to end throughout the earth.
He breaks the bow and snaps the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.*

It may seem ironic that "*the glorious works of the Lord*" bring "*destruction upon the world.*" But notice what God is destroying: "*He causes wars to end throughout the earth. He breaks the bow and snaps the spear; he burns the shields with fire.*"

In Isaiah, the prophet looks forward to a time when, "*The Lord will mediate between nations and will settle international disputes. They will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will no longer fight against nation, nor train for war anymore.*" (Isaiah 2:4, see also Micah 4:3).

Our God is a God who ultimately brings peace. Yes, we live in troubled, troubled times. But God is with us.

God will get us through the wilderness, through the natural disasters and the catastrophes of terrorism and war and will bring peace. But that, too, is all in the future.

In the meantime, what does God say to His people?

"Be still, and know that I am God! I will be honored by every nation. I will be honored throughout the world. The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Jacob is our fortress."

I get the sense the sons of Korah are worriers, too. They worry about natural disasters. They worry about geopolitics. They watch too much news.

When Moses – the leader of Israel when the sons of Korah were about – was overworked (he worried too much), he said to God, "*You have been telling me, 'Take these people up to the Promised Land.' But you haven't told me whom you will send with me. You have told me, 'I know you by name, and I look favorably on you.' If it is true that you look favorably on me, let me know your ways so I may understand you more fully and continue to enjoy your favor. And remember that this nation is your very own people.*" How did the LORD reply? "*I will personally go with you and I will give you rest – everything will be fine*" (Exodus 33:12-14). What is God saying to stressed out, overworked Moses?

What is God saying to the fear-full sons of Korah? *"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble ... The Lord of Heaven's Armies is here among us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Be still and know that I am God."*

God gives the sons of Korah – and us – a direct command: *"Be still and know that I am God."* That's not polite advice. Look at it. It's a blunt command.

I like the command. But it's very, very difficult to put into practice. Why?

I'm a worrier. I know I shouldn't be. But I am. If there were a "Worriers Anonymous" group, I would be a charter member. But, of course, worry doesn't actually solve anything. Some pundit once said, *"What gets accomplished when you put the world's best worriers in a room for a day?"* Answer? *"Absolutely nothing."*

I keep busy. Very busy. When things get stressful, anxious, and challenging, my default is to work harder. Of course, I want to solve the problem. That requires work. Keeping busy also keeps my mind off of things – like worrying too much. And keeping busy helps me think I'm in control. If only I do enough, smart enough, long enough, I can fix it.

I feel guilty. I know I ought to trust God. I ought to be able pray, placing all the things that stress me out – from global geopolitics, to the church, to my kids – in God's hands, and then relax. I do that. I do pray, daily, for my kids. For our church. And for bigger challenges in the world. But I still feel stressed. I still worry.

At some point, we lose energy, we ache, our digestions act up. Along with those symptoms go emotional ones – depression, irritability, and anxiety. Socially, we turn in on ourselves, we pull back from others, we become short tempered. Most seriously, our spiritual life dries up - we don't have time to pray, study, come to church. It all becomes too much.

In our twisted culture, we sometimes actually pin those symptoms like medals on our chests: *"I have a hiatus hernia, heart murmurs, AND panic attacks."* Crazy. I had one friend who used to boast about how many heart attacks he'd had.

I know I need to be still, but I don't know how to do it. So ...

First, I have to admit I have a problem. I want to be in control. I want to solve every problem. I watch too much news. I worry too much. I need to recognize what's happening to me. Denial doesn't help. I have to confess to myself, my family/friends and to God that my body, relationships, and spirit is suffering. That is hard to do.

Second, I need to make quality time for those who are important to me. If I were to make a list of the five priorities in my life, my relationship with God and family/friends would be at the top. My relationships are the greatest source of satisfaction and enjoyment in my life. They are also the easiest things to crowd out of my life.

One statistic I read reported fathers spend an average of a minute per day giving focussed attention to their junior high children. With preschoolers, fathers average 37 seconds/day in focussed, on-on-one conversation or play. When we think of how important relationships are to us, we need to reflect so our time commitments reflect our priorities.

Third, I am too busy NOT to spend quality time with God. If I do poorly spending quality, focused time with my family and friends, I admit I am probably doing even worse in my relationship with God. Yet in my list of priorities, He is at the top.

In the midst of the U.S. Civil War, Abraham Lincoln said, *"I have been driven many times upon my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had no where else to go. My own wisdom and that of all about me seemed insufficient for that day."*

I need to hear that. Martin Luther once said, *"I have so much to do, I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer."* I admit, I can't pray for three hours.

- Some of us find a set prayer time hard. Our minds wander. Paul writes, *"Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you"*(1 Thessalonians 5:16-18). Little prayers, all through the day, work well. When something comes up, pray about it there and then.
- Some of us find silent prayer really difficult. It may help to have music on. Or something to focus our attention on. It may also help to go somewhere private where you can speak your prayers aloud.
- Often, we don't know what to pray. How do I pray wisely for Israel/Gaza? For Russia/Ukraine? For our politicians? For our Indigenous neighbours? I find more and more I pray, naming the situation, and trusting God to know what's best. As Jesus prayed, *"I want your will to be done, not mine"*(Matthew 26:39).
- Prayer is more than me simply telling God my problems. It's also me trying listen to what God is saying to me. It can help to have a pen and paper handy.

Do really believe the words of Psalm 46? *"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble ... Be still and know that I am God ... the Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress"*(Psalm 46:1, 10-11). If God really is God, if He really is our refuge and strength, if He really can help in times of trouble, and if He really is with us ... then can I actually trust Him? And if I do trust Him, can I pray and let God be God?

Martin Luther also said, *"Pray, and let God worry."* *"Lord, I want your will to be done, not mine."* Try it. God says to us, *"Be still and know that I am God."* *"I will personally go with you and I will give you rest – everything will be fine."*

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