

# Sermon Text For June 30, 2024

By Guest Minister Rev. Doug Friant

Deep Trouble

Psalm 46

Romans 8:35-39

He worries about his money. He is retirement age. He has been on the edge of retirement for the last few years- ready to hang it up- but he is worried. His retirement fund fell apart when Covid first hit- it has done great since then- but what if that happens the year after he retires? Or just when he really needs the money?

He reads everything he can- invest in this- do that- watch out for this- warning! Warning!- signs of trouble ahead. Deep Trouble

He worries. Down down down down down down in his heart

**She** is anxious. You could ask her about what..but the feeling is so persistent over the last few years- that she would probably just say- everything. She worries about all the things she is told to worry about- the economy, her health, government, politics, crime and immigrants- she is anxious- it is just part of her world now.

A recent business newsletter that fell into my email declared... the global economy proved to be more resilient than anticipated in 2023.bla bla bla- economic outperformance blah blah blah- notable decline in global inflation. Blah blah blah

It goes on, "But, while there would appear to be much to celebrate, most measures of consumer and business morale point to a generally depressed environment.

That blub from a random economic narrative, seems to say so much about the state of the world right now. There is much to celebrate, both globally and in the US. There is so much in the world that is good and lots to celebrate. We have gone through a global pandemic- and the US economy has been resilient. Almost every month- there is some new technological break through. -It happens so often- we take it for granted. The US has been a leader in the world in many ways. Life is Good...but ...but it is hard to even say these words without hearing a crowd of voices crying in descent.

Politics are a mess, immigration is a problem, food prices are so high, natural disasters are rising ..

I try to put this in perspective- I have a friend who is a missionary in Haiti. She is in the US now- her country is in a real crisis- not some political grandstanding crisis- but people dying- children suffering crisis. Our country- our lives- is really good compared to so many

There is much to celebrate but our lives ... our hearts are anxious. There is a pervasive consistent low level anxiety in our modern world. And it is not about who is president. There is – lurking in the back of our minds- the devastating possibility of global war, nuclear disaster, climate change, social upheaval. The world is changing quickly and we can't be certain where we are going... The fear of disaster washes in and out of minds- with the waves of the news cycles- like flotsam upon the beach.

And the word of the Lord to our anxious world is -

**God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though  
the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;**

This morning, we listen for the word of the Lord from this familiar Psalm in hopes of finding some quiet- some stillness for our anxious hearts.

Psalm 46 is a wonderful Psalm. It shows up in hymns and worship liturgy. It often provides strength in funerals or sickness. When I was a kid here in this church. We used the Presbyterian Hymnbook creatively titled- THE HYMNBOOK. In the back of the book- were various Psalms that had been laid out for unison or responsive reading. I vividly remember reading these powerful words:

**.> God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.  
Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though  
the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;**

**In the heart of the sea...**

A few weeks ago- I heard this psalm- and since then I've been captivated by the phrase- - heart of the sea. Images of an undersea earthquake or volcano came to mind. Disaster that might be felt but not exactly seen- but then the impact ripples out from the deep. Shaken to our core.

Deep trouble. Shaking Quaking trouble. There is no clear sign- about what the author is specifically thinking about- In our day- we could think of specific things-

a family worried about an aging parent, a spouse facing cancer, a family facing financial trouble, a couple in divorce, a person wrestling with shame, another wrestling with drinking...deep trouble that shakes the core.

Maybe the author is talking more about the feeling of trouble- more than specific troubles. That feeling that all is not well with the world- that something is wrong. Maybe the knowledge that a storm is coming- trouble is happening.

There are many people who feel that deep trouble- these days. Worried about money, worried about war, worried about guns and school shootings. We live on a diet of bad news- and doom scrolling- and then we wonder why so many people are anxious and worried.

Sometimes the fears that are most paralyzing for me are not even real fears. They are just the hint of a problem. Perhaps you know what I mean- I don't want to do that- because I **might** be embarrassed. I don't want to return that phone call- because she **might** be upset with me. The other week- I thought I had made a mistake at work. I was sure that I had- it wasn't going to be the end of the world- but it would be embarrassing- it would be a thing- after two days of avoiding it- I pulled out the file, checked all the paperwork....I found out that I hadn't made a mistake.

**Therefore we will not fear, though mountain shake in the heart of the sea, the sea roars -the mountains tremble.**

**And in contrast- the city of God shall not be moved.**

**Nations are in an uproar, kingdoms totter but the Lord makes wars to cease and breaks the bow**

There is trouble- deep quaking- and then stillness- there are nations tottering- destruction- and then wars cease- and stillness.

According to archeological evidence- there was an earthquake in the northern kingdom of Israel- around 750 BCE (about the time of King Uzziah of Judah) . Perhaps that is the backdrop of this passage- the nation of Israel literally tottering, the Mediterranean sea- roaring with a Tsunami, while the city of Jerusalem was safe.

Perhaps people felt God had saved them from a literal disaster... the mountains quaking in the heart of the sea

For us the sea- might conjure up images of summer beach trips or beautiful cruises. But the Israelites were dessert people- the seas held trouble- monsters and storms lurked in the deep. Nothing good came from the sea. So even generations later- they sang about God's triumph over the disaster.

Herman Gunkle and other OT scholars – have pointed out – that in the ancient world- water and chaos are often linked and are opposed to creation. God doesn't just create- God wrangles the chaos of the deep and pushes the watery trouble back into its place. In the book of Genesis- the earth is formless and void- and the spirit moves over the deep. And God speaks- and creation begins to push back the darkness- push back the chaos. God gathers the soil- into dry land and separates the watery chaos.

But the psalmist knows that sometimes the deep still rumbles off in the distance- trouble and destruction- still lurking out there on the edge of our good world. Chaos- threatens to break out...and yet God is our refuge and strength therefore we will not fear- though mountain shake in the heart of the sea.

This psalm paints a picture of God – fighting back the chaos. God quieting the wars and more importantly- God quieting the hearts of his people.

**Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth." (Psa 46:10 NRS)**

Yet God's plan for victory is not the same as our image of victory. God's desire not the same as ours. We should not pretend that there is not real trouble- real danger in the world. It is easy to speak of trusting God when all is well. Easy to declare that God will protect us- when there is no real danger.

Our reading from Romans- is one of the most triumphant readings in the bible- it declares God's absolute power and authority to protect us- but what makes the reading so powerful- is not the nice words- but the courage- These words are uttered- knowing that the world- had taken so much from some of these early Christians.

The early Christians faced- terrible hardships yet they did not lose hope.

God will not forsake us. Our eternal home is secure- but that doesn't mean we will not face some trouble in this life- deep trouble- earth sharking- world changing trouble.

But God is our refuge and strength- we do not need to let fear run our lives.

Maybe there are scary things in your life- deep things- you would rather not face- a health concern you are worried about, a problem in a relationship- you would rather not address, a work situation- you have put up with because you would rather not face the consequences- I think we all feel some of the ground tremors of the modern world- political chaos, economic uncertainty, social change.

Being a Christian doesn't mean that we don't have to face some scary things. But God does not forsake us.. the Lord quiets our anxious hearts- so that we can face troubles and be not afraid. The Lord humbles our proud hearts- that we can exalt our maker and grow in new ways, God forgives, and heals and helps- that we can live – new life in the Lord. Selah- exalt the Lord it is time for a new section of life. Selah- time for a new refrain...The Lord almighty can turn the waters of chaos and destruction into a spring of new life- living water. Therefore we need not fear. The Lord eats the darkness and creates light. Selah

**The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah**

## The Reading

Our first reading is a psalm. The psalms are liturgical poetry. As we listen to this one- here are a few things to listen for...it starts with some footnotes - we don't know a whole lot about these but they remind us that the psalms were not just narratives but music and drama. At several places there is the word "Selah" The word basically means exalt or praise. It is often used to make a change in the text or a scene change in the action. You might think of it as a pause or breath.

As you listen to each section- pay attention to action and stillness. The mountains quake and tremble- but the city of God shall not be moved, etc.

<sup>NRS</sup> **Psalm 46:1** <To the leader. Of the Korahites. According to Alamo. A Song.> God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

<sup>2</sup> Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;

<sup>3</sup> though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. Selah

<sup>4</sup> There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High.

<sup>5</sup> God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns.

<sup>6</sup> The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts.

<sup>7</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah

<sup>8</sup> Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth.

<sup>9</sup> He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.

<sup>10</sup> "Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations, I am exalted in the earth."

<sup>11</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Selah  
(Psa 46:1-11 NRS)

<sup>35</sup> Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

<sup>36</sup> As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered."

<sup>37</sup> No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

<sup>38</sup> For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers,

<sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

(Rom 8:35-39 NRS)