

Stillness and Peace: Nothing New

“*There’s nothing new under the sun.*” As you well-know, I didn’t make that up. That’s King Solomon speaking almost a full thousand years before the birth of Jesus, and even then the context in which he spoke these words shows that he was lamenting how all the wretched sinfulness and terror and tumult he was facing was already “old news.” The fact is Christians have had to deal with the terrible consequences of sin ever since they first fell into sin. Adam, Eve, Cain, Abel... it’s been bad for a LONG time. Pandemics, wars, rumors of wars, violence, infanticide (the murder of babies), corruption, natural disasters, anxiety, fear of one’s own mortality, greed, perversion, licentiousness, faithless doubt, idolatry, haves and have nots... that’s us in a nutshell, and history shows that it’s all been around for a LONG time. There really is nothing new under the sun.

And yet... here’s a reality that is so often forgotten or ignored: The fact that there is nothing new under the sun is also *sweet Gospel balm* to our tired and anxious souls. Consider the words of Psalm 46 (our Old Testament lesson for today), which joyously proclaims: “*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*” King David, the author of this beautiful psalm, certainly knew the joy and the peace of being safe and secure in God’s unconditional forgiving love and mercy. It should come as no surprise that Martin Luther also found great peace and comfort in this particular psalm. Luther, as all of you well-know, was no stranger to fear and terror and corruption and greed and murder. He was a marked man precisely because he dared to call sin what it is—sin. He dared to call the lie a lie, even if the lie was *status quo*; i.e., “*this is what we’ve always done.*” He dared to call people—some very powerful people—to repentance. In short, he dared to speak the Truth of God’s Word and will. Not surprisingly, Luther lived the rest of his life as a man marked for death, endlessly hunted and pursued by those who called themselves servants of Christ, all because he feared God more than man.

And it’s out of all that fear and terror and death and chaos that Luther hears the sure and certain promise of God’s presence and peace. “*God is our refuge and strength, our very present help in trouble. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress.*” This Gospel Word of assurance fills Luther’s heart with joy; joy that takes root in his heart and bears the fruit of faithful hymnody. “*A Mighty Fortress is Our God.*”

Here’s the thing: I’m not here today to give you a little Reformation history lesson. It helps, but it’s really not our focus today. What I want you to focus on today is the very thing that Luther focused on; the very same thing that King David focused on—*the unbreakable, unshakeable, unconquerable peace of Almighty God.* There is nothing new under the sun. It’s true of all the sinful terror and

“politics as usual” that have plagued us and beaten us down since that fateful day in the Garden of Eden at the beginning of time, and it’s also true of the Gospel promise and peace that confronts and puts to death all these fears and terrors and anxious doubts. There is nothing new under the sun.

I want you to consider what God is speaking *to you* in these words of this particular psalm. He gives you a very clear and terrifying image of a world that is absolutely crumbling and coming undone at the seams; a world that you are very familiar with and call “home.” The earth is giving way, the mountains are being quaked and rocked and moved into the heart of the sea. The waters are roaring and foaming and raging. Mighty mountains of rock and earth are trembling like jello. Nations are raging and warring and fighting, kingdoms are tottering...the very earth is melting away and being pummeled with desolation after desolation. These are the words of Psalm 46, penned a thousand years before the birth of Jesus, but they could just as easily be the front page headlines in our news this morning. ***The more things change, the more they stay the same.***

In the midst of all this terror and tumult and shaking and quaking, the psalmist tells us that there is ***Almighty God, our mighty and unshakeable fortress.*** Out of the very midst of all this fear and sin and death and destruction, the voice of God pierces the darkness and the fog of war, commanding us: ***“Be still, and know that I am God. I’m right here. I’m with you always. I’ve got it handled. Be still.”*** I’m sure you’ve never really given this much thought. Why would you? After all, it’s fairly clear and self-evident. Be still. Stop all the running around and acting like Chicken Little, throwing your hands up in the air and crying and wailing that the sky is falling. Be still, and know that I am God.

Well...here’s the thing: This is more than just a simple command, and certainly more than a mere suggestion or advice. ***This is God’s authoritative, performative Word;*** the same Word that He spoke to raging storms that terrified His disciples and threatened to swamp and sink their little ark and send them to a dark, deep, and watery grave. ***“Be still”...and it was.*** This is God’s ***authoritative Word*** that created out of nothingness; that shaped and formed dark chaos into His light-filled good creation. This is His ***performative Word;*** Word that does what it says and accomplishes His purpose and will. Whilst everything else in life is tottering and teetering and crumbling and falling; whilst everything else in life is coming undone; whilst all hell is breaking loose all around us, God’s performative Word of peace pierces through the dark and stormy clouds of chaos and brings peace; a peace that surpasses all human understanding; a peace that can only come ***from*** Almighty God, and a peace that is only known ***in*** Almighty God.

This Word of peace does exactly what it says. It gives you peace; peace to stand firm and be still and trust in the fact that God is in charge, and He is working

all things for good, and He has you in the palm of His hand. Nothing and no one can ever snatch you from Him, in spite of how tough or difficult things may get in life. Folks: Just listen to that performative Word of peace and victory that the Word-made-flesh proclaimed out of the midst of that dark hell and agony of the cross. Here on a wretched tree hung the One who became the curse for all sin. Here on this tree of death the sinless Lamb of God humbly and obediently suffered the full wrath of His Father's just anger and punishment for sin—your sin, my sin, and the sin of the entire world. The Father poured out all His righteous wrath on Him, precisely so He wouldn't have to pour it out on you. Here is when the sky turned blacker than night. Here is when the earth quaked and mountains crumbled. Even the very house of God suffered “damage,” that huge curtain that separated God from man being rent; torn in two...from top to bottom, from heaven to earth. And it's out of the midst of all that tumult and terror and death and destruction that Christ Jesus calls out, “*My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?*”

I know what you were thinking. You were expecting to hear, “*It is finished.*” Before that cry of victory, Christ faithfully calls out to ***His God***...all while suffering the full wrath and punishment of sin; in spite of suffering true hell—being forsaken and forgotten by God and left ***utterly bankrupt*** of His love and grace. ***No one else on this side of eternity has ever or will ever experience this hell.*** Christ did...for us...for you...in full. In the midst of that hellish forsakenness and darkness, Christ never lost faith. In spite of all the terror, tumult, death, and destruction, Christ never lost faith. **God remained “His God.”** And when that hellish wage was paid in full; when the full measure of wrath had been completely poured out and the last drop and dreg of divine punishment had been consumed, this is when He cried out in victory, “*It is finished.*” This is when the mighty fortress of God's grace, mercy, and peace beamed brightest and towered tall over all humanity so that all could see and hear and behold the depths of God's unconditional and incomprehensible love for His fallen and sinful creation.

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: This [*the crucifix*] is what God Himself has baptized you into. This is your reality, right now and into all eternity. Here in the font God Himself reached down through the water and spoke His ***performative Word*** to you, snatching you from the bonds of sin, death, and the devil, and putting His name upon your head and your heart, ***stilling you in His peace and grace***, marking you as one redeemed by Christ the Lord. Here, in just a couple of minutes, Christ your Lord will kneel down from heaven and once again ***reach out and still you***—in the very midst of this quaking and shaking veil of tears—stilling you with His performative Word; peaceful stillness that He gives to you in, with, and under the real and tangible elements of bread and wine. “*Take and eat. Take and drink. Be still. Be at peace. You are forgiven. You belong to Me, and I am with you always. It is finished.*” It's that simple. It's that powerful. It's your reality, right here, right now.

May this ever-present and eternal peace of Christ be your rock, your fortress, and your peace all your remaining days, no matter what life may throw at you. There is nothing new under the sun. May this *unchanging and unfading* peace of Christ, which surpasses all understanding, be and remain with you always. Be still. Be at peace. There is nothing new under the sun. There is nothing new under the cross.

AMEN