

In the middle of Jerusalem, the City of God, there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God. First off, there's no river in the middle of Jerusalem. It's the desert. Not much water there. Maybe a little stream. But apparently there *is* a river whose streams make glad the city of God.

What is that river? It's not the Connecticut, or the Nile, or the Amazon. And yet, it is large enough to make God glad.

Is it the River of Dreams? Bill Joel sings a great song about the River of Dreams. I put the song on the Southampton Congregational Church Facebook page this morning if you want to see it. Billy Joel sings of walking in the middle of the night in search of something missing from his soul. From mountains of faith, through the valley of fear, through the jungle of doubt, through the desert of truth, and finally he wades into the river that runs to the promised land.

Billy Joel sings of the ups and downs with which we are all familiar. He sings of life.

Friends, the river that makes God glad is the River of Life.

It is us.

*We* and our lives are the river that makes God glad. After all, our bodies are made up of 65% water, you know.

What we do, how we act, and what we make a reality is what makes God glad. The river that makes God glad is how we respond to life's ups and downs.

Though the earth should change,  
    though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;  
though its waters roar and foam,  
    though the mountains tremble with its tumult should earth change, even when the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam,  
    though the mountains tremble with its tumult

The Psalmist gives us encouragement when life flows into those valleys and crevasses and the waterfall churns. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help.

When we reach out to God for that help – that is when God is glad. Acknowledging that God is the energy of life, what makes the river flow, what directs and detours the water toward the vastness of the sea, is how we keep ourselves right-sized. When we recognize that God is God and we are not, we worship.

And when we give ourselves over to God, we land in the pool of the peace that passes all understanding. And that, too, makes God glad. Peace.

It's not the kind of peace that comes from everyone pretending that everything is ok.

Not the kind of peace that results from ignoring what is happening in the world around us, pretending that it doesn't matter.

Not the kind of peace that comes from people ignoring behavior even though it drives them crazy.

The peace that makes God glad is the flow of love and care that travels through our shared life as citizens of the Kin-dom of God.

That river of love flows through everything that happens in God's city, God's world, because God is love. That is the beautiful new reign of God becoming real in our midst.

Sometimes it can be the most challenging to imagine the beautiful new reign of God becoming real in our midst when we are confronted with the struggles that continue to pervade our world. But Psalm 46 reminds us that God is more powerful and more loving than all of the difficult things of this world by giving us a vision of a future where things are different.

God makes wars cease to the end of the earth; breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; burns the shields with fire. That's some power right there!

When we journey on the river – in rafts, gondolas, or even an inflatable unicorn – when we do that together, we create a flotilla of peace. And that is what God wants – peace. God sent the Prince of Peace:

<sup>33</sup> I've said these things to you so that you will have peace in me. In the world you have distress. But be encouraged! I have conquered the world." (John 16:33)

And the letters to the early Christians emphasize peace as well:

To the Colossians: Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. (Col 3:15)

And to the Philippians: And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. (Phil 4:7)

Life isn't always easy, friends. Sure, we have wonderful, beautiful days that fill our spirits with joy. We spend time with family and friends. We have success in a project or vocation. We experience a holy moment with God in nature or even over our morning tea.

Today's psalm reminds us that even when things don't go our way, God is there to help us.

It reminds us that we are in both the desert and in the Promised Land. The very first verse tells us that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. And to emphasize that, we get the recurring statement I verses 7 and 11 that

<sup>11</sup> The LORD of hosts is with us;  
the God of Jacob is our refuge.

The God of Jacob is a very special reference: remember Jacob was the one who wrestled with God through the night – God doesn't give up on us especially when we don't give up on God and demand a blessing. And Jacob had the beautiful vision of angels climbing up and down the ladder, reminding us that we are intimately connected with the spirit world. In that dream, <sup>3</sup> Suddenly the LORD was standing on it and saying, "I am the LORD, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. <sup>14</sup> Your descendants will become like the dust of the earth; you will spread out to the west, east, north, and south. Every family of earth will be blessed because of you and your descendants. <sup>15</sup> I am with you now, I will protect you everywhere you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done everything that I have promised you."

In the midst of all kinds of difficulties, personal, cultural, political, God is a very present help. God can be heard. God will bring peace.

“Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.”

So often we think peace means silence or stillness, nothing happening. Even when we are told to be still and know that I am God, I don’t think it means that we should just sit like a bump on a log. Too often the Christian community uses that phrase as an invitation or an excuse to ignore or withdraw from a violent and noisy world. Being still does not always mean doing nothing. Maybe being still means not getting rattled amidst the turmoil.<sup>1</sup>

The church is not a place to come to hide from the turmoil. It’s not that kind of refuge.

The North African bishop, St. Augustine, was a keen psychological interpreter. Even though this Psalm is often read as a military, social, or political statement, he consistently read the Bible through the lens of individual struggles with faith, despair, and hope. Augustine argues that God’s refuge is available only upon the individual’s realization that there is no refuge in the self, or in the world, and so it is fruitless and misleading to fight—or pray—for it.<sup>2</sup>

This is because God is not a refuge from the world and its excesses, but a refuge *in it*, in the sense of a reorientation away from self-protection and its errors. Perhaps, therefore, refuge has nothing to do with protection.<sup>3</sup> Augustine made the poignant claim that refuges are sometimes not places of strength, but instead weaken those who would flee to them.<sup>4</sup> If we run and hide, we can do nothing to counter current or prevent future difficulties or struggles, right?

The refuge we find in God is portable and motivating. It is encouragement to stay the course. To plan our work and work our plan even when we come across a dam because God is there, in the midst of it all, offering the same blessing to us that God made to Jacob.

If last week’s Psalm 23 is heartening for us, imagine what Psalm 46 can do – after all, 46 is twice 23, right?

Psalm 46 declares trust with utmost confidence in images of safe and glad cities fed by God’s streams of help and mercy, the end of wars, and all nations celebrating together. This psalm of praise offers us a model for proclaiming God’s reign this day!

When we boldly step into the River of Life, God is made glad.

Psalm 16:7 reads “When the LORD takes pleasure in anyone’s way, he causes their enemies to make peace with them.”

We then know that peace will come. God will make it so. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary\\_id=1828](http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1828)

<sup>2</sup> Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 4: Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ) (Kindle Locations 11372-11376). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

<sup>3</sup> Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 4: Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ) (Kindle Locations 11386-11388). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.

<sup>4</sup> Feasting on the Word: Year C, Volume 4: Season after Pentecost 2 (Propers 17-Reign of Christ) (Kindle Locations 11369-11371). Presbyterian Publishing Corporation. Kindle Edition.