

Reformation-First Sunday of End Time

November 5, 2017

Psalm 46

God Exercises His Rule in Christ

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Fellow-Redeemed,

The Reformation was not about a man nailing 95 theses to a church door. The Reformation was about a man nailed to a cross. The Reformation was not a revolution against the secular and ecclesiastical powers of this world. It was a struggle against the spiritual authorities in the kingdom of darkness. Would Jesus' words ring true? Or, would Satan's lies continue unchecked so that the gates of hell would prevail against Christ's church? The Lutheran Reformation was about Jesus' keeping his promise to Peter, to us and to all believers, "On this rock I will build my church and the gates of Hades will not overcome it." [Mt. 16:18]

We opened our service by singing a hymn closely associated with the Reformation, the first Sunday of end time. We have a more ancient song of similar thought in Psalm 46. Luther likely wrote A Mighty Fortress in the late 1520s based, of course, on Psalm 46.

What truths did the Psalm writer and Luther want to convey when they put pen to paper? What is the message as we observe the 500th Anniversary of the Lutheran Reformation? **God Exercises His Rule in Christ.** If Psalm 46 were a coin, it would have two sides; heads, the Holy Spirit has engraved the crises of life and the comfort God provides during those times. Tails, the Holy Spirit has engraved the final conflict and the perfect peace the end of time brings.

Crises come with the territory of life in a fallen world; the losses of health and job. There are the deaths of loved ones, tensions in the family. Some of our neighbors or coworkers ridicule our Christian faith. Christians should be united but false doctrine divides. At times, we may quake and cower like a helpless little rabbit looking up into the barrel of a hunter's rifle. Where can I run and hide?

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." A refuge is an impregnable fortress; a mighty fortress. It is the cleft in a rock face where the little cony can take refuge from the hunter who wants to kill it. Strength is the stronghold where a warrior's family is secure while he fights the enemy. God provides my daily bread. He gives his angels charge over my safety. He is the Lord of life and death. He had called me into his kingdom. He has forgiven all my sins for Jesus' sake.

God exercises his rule over the world in Christ. Paul wrote to the Ephesians, "And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way." [1:22, 23]

There are times when it may seem the very earth is giving way under our feet. I suspect many believers think along those lines in natural disasters. Injustice and violence take place daily which leads to uncertainty in the least and fear at the most. Waters roar and foam and mountains quake with their surging, literally and metaphorically.

More and more visible church bodies undermine, even attack, our and our fellow believers' faith by lying in God's name with false doctrine especially about the way to heaven. This is nothing new. Nor is it new that in the church, "the LORD almighty is with us, the God of Jacob is our fortress."

When Martin Luther and the reformers who came before and after him stood their ground on the Word of God, the Lord helped them free from every need that had them overtaken. Such things are precursors of the end time. Until the end comes, the church, "the city of God," will remain safe and sound because it is built on a river.

Many cities in our country were established and prospered because their founders build the cities on rivers; Detroit, Pittsburgh, Milwaukee, St. Louis to name a few. God has built "the city of God," on the forgiveness of our sins by the sacrifice Jesus made as our Substitute on the cross. This is the river of the gospel of Christ. Christ and the Holy Spirit dwell in our hearts through the Word and sacrament. These means of grace make the church strong and prosperous so that we will not fall. God exercises his rule in Christ; his kingdom of grace is Christ's rule over believers' hearts.

The Psalmist declares a second certainty. The final conflict will bring perfect peace at the end of time.

I can imagine Luther thinking his day would have been a good time for Jesus to come and take what was left of the church into heaven. Paul had the same hope. If only today were the day “he lifts his voice, the earth melts.”

We do not waver in our certainty that the end is coming soon. God will help his church “at the break of day.” This Hebrew idiom indicates that the darkness of night is short and only temporary. The church has endured false teachings and those who have gathered around them “teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” [2 Tm 4:3] for 500+ years since before the start of the Reformation. The church will continue for the few more days we have until it goes into eternity.

When that day appears, we are safe in judgment. The believer is like the wise person who stands under a doorway in an earthquake. This is where they tell you to stand. It is the strongest protection and safest place when the rest of the building collapses around you.

What will take place at the end? “Come and see the works of the LORD. The desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars to cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire.” All the warfare among men will cease as God takes his church into perfect peace in heaven.

We have perfect peace in Christ by grace alone, by faith alone, and by Scripture alone. With the same command Jesus used to quiet the wind and waves on the Sea of Galilee so his disciples would not drown, the LORD commands all people, “Be still and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.” For unbelievers this means be quiet in your opposition and know you will lose in the end. For believers it means do not cry out in worry and fear but know that the battle is not ours but Christ’s.

Our part of the church remains “militant,” fighting against Satan and his lies. However, the victory already is ours as God exercises his rule in Christ. In the end, all believers will be part of the church “triumphant.” No earthly government, no ecclesiastical powers can enslave our hearts. Jesus’ other promise has good application for the Reformation and for the end time, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” [John 8:31, 32] Amen. <SDG>