

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S ANGLICAN PRO-CATHEDRAL IN THE TOWN OF TONAWANDA

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Scripture: Psalm 46; Jn. 16:33

"Finding Peace in a Troubled World"

A TROUBLED WORLD

I would like to begin by asking a question: When you look around this world of ours, what do you see? Some will say they see nature's beauty in the topography of our planet, they see the varied wildlife and plant life, they see the complexities of the natural world and the incredible expanse and detail of our universe. Others will add they see the wonders of the human body and brain, the incredible capacities human beings have to explore, build, create, innovate and communicate. These are all good things and they do reflect the reality of a Creator. We read in **Romans 1:20**, ***"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made,"***

But what else do you see? I see a world in turmoil. I see a world that has a lot of problems. And most of our problems have one source; they are the result of one thing – the self-centeredness and selfishness of the human heart, not our beating hearts but our human nature. And when it comes to mankind, when I look around, I don't see calm waters, I see troubled waters. I don't see peace; I see conflict. I don't see optimism, I see pessimism; I don't see hope, I see despair. Look around.

And lest we think that such things are just someone else's problem, I want you to look again, because all of us are in the same boat. We face the same issues, the same problems. We live in a world that is not right. And it has been true for every generation since the Fall of mankind. We can sometimes fall into the trap that our generation has it worse. It doesn't. Every generation will face adversity, tragedy and trouble. Jesus said 2000 years ago in **Jn. 16:33** , ***"In the world, you will have tribulation"***

And some may think, well, if there is a God, why doesn't He just come down and fix it. Have you not thought about that before? Why doesn't He just clean house? Well, while we may think that such a thing would be easy for the Lord, it is a bit more complicated than that. What has been set into motion by mankind's choices won't be fixed overnight because that is not part of God's plan. Believe it or not there is a purpose for all the challenges and pain that our selfishness brings; it is to get us back on the track that leads to life. It is to take us to that place that transcends this world: a reality that is not limited to the physical senses.

And the only way to get on the track that leads to true life is to find the One who gives life in the first place. We have to go to the source of all that is good, we have to go to God. For it is only in God that we will be able to make sense of the trouble in our world, and we will be able to rise above it and no longer succumb to it.

And that is exactly what we hear in our lessons today. What I am talking about is finding peace in the midst of the storms of this life. And when the Bible talks about peace, it is not talking about having no conflict in the world; it is talking about having no conflict within so that you can indeed rise above the

conflict in this world and be an agent of good for others and one that glorifies the Lord. Because if you have peace not only will it be good for your soul and your body, but it will be good for others because others will be looking to you for help. And then you can point them to the One who gives help freely to all who would seek after Him!

The wonderful thing is that God gives us all that we need to know in order to have peace. I want us to look now at **Psalm 46**. Now before we look at this Psalm it is important to put it in its historical context. **Psalm 46** is the first of three psalms – 46, 47, and 48 which are hymns of praise. And they are hymns of praise that celebrate the deliverance from a great foe. Who was this great foe? Do you remember when we did the study on the book of the prophet Isaiah and how a great miracle occurred during King Hezekiah's reign? Jerusalem and Judah had been surrounded by the Assyrian army under King Sennacherib, and no nation in the Middle East had been able to withstand his army but God supernaturally caused a plague to sicken and kill off most of his army to the point that they retreated and left the small kingdom alone (**2 Kings 18:13-19:37**.)

In recognition of this miracle, the words of **Psalm 46** were written down under the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit. Let's now look again at what they say. ***"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*** Such words were the inspiration for Martin Luther's famous hymn, *"A Mighty Fortress Is Our God."* God indeed is our refuge and strength – hence the imagery of a fortress. God is our place of safety and strength. But He's more than a place. He is both a person to go to and a person to be with us. It is His presence that brings both protection (refuge) and power (strength) and therefore help. To whom do you turn when you are in trouble or overwhelmed? God is the One. If I am going to have peace, I need to go to God. That is the starting point – our relationship with God. If our relationship with God is right, then everything else will follow. And when this Psalm was written, Christ had not come yet. They were looking for a Messiah and the Messiah eventually did come. And the Messiah is Jesus and Jesus is the Son of God and the Son of God is God in human flesh!

STRIVE TO ENTER THROUGH THE NARROW DOOR – Get your mind on Jesus!

And so **the first key** to having peace in this troubled world, the key to overcoming our self-centered and selfish nature is not just to know God but **to know Jesus Christ personally**. What did we hear in the Gospel lesson from **Luke 13:23-24**, ***"And someone said to Him, "Lord, are there just a few who are being saved?" And He said to them, "Strive to enter through the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able."*** Notice Jesus does not answer the question as to how many will be saved. He simply gets to what is most important – what will we do as individuals? The door of salvation is for all, but it is narrow in that there is only one way and it has to be that way; because it is only God who can save. He has done so through what Christ, His Son, has done on the cross. Too often, we think that it is all about what we should or can or have done. Not so, says Jesus. Salvation is simply trusting in what God has already done for you - His grace - and then letting Him change you from the inside out by following Him with your hearts. It is why Jesus says in **John 14:6**, ***"I am the way and the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through Me."*** And why speaking of Jesus in **Acts 4:12**, Peter declared, ***"And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."***

GET YOUR MIND OFF YOUR CIRCUMSTANCES

The second key is after we get our minds on Christ, we need to get our minds off our circumstances. Look again at **Psalm 46: 2***Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change and though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; 3*Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains quake at its swelling pride."

This is the imagery of natural disasters, but a little later we have reference to devastation inflicted by man. We read in verse 6 that **"The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered;"** The media are increasingly devoted to fear-inducing subject matter: terrorism, wars, environmental catastrophes. If we focus on such dangers and forget that God is our refuge in all circumstances, we will become increasingly fearful. But what does the psalmist say? **"Therefore, we will not fear."** Why? Because God is greater than any dire circumstance. And He will give us peace! For **4***There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy dwelling places of the Most High. 5*God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns." The truth is that every day God's grace and power are at work in countless places and situations. God showers not only blessings but also outright miracles on our planet, and yet the media takes no notice.

I am reminded of what happened to the Apostle Peter and the other apostles in the boat when a storm arose on the Sea of Galilee. They saw Jesus walking on the water and Jesus called Peter to come toward Him. Peter took the step of faith and got out of the boat and began walking on the water; but when he stopped focusing on Jesus, he sank. Do you remember what distracted him? The circumstances of the storm. Does it mean we are to ignore reality? No. But we can't let our circumstances rule or control us; we need to look to the Lord who is in control of our lives despite our circumstances.

KEEP GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

What is the third key? We find the answer in the last part of our psalm. ***He raised His voice, the earth melted. 7***The LORD of hosts is with us; ***The God of Jacob is our stronghold. 8*****Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has wrought desolations in the earth. 9*****He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. 10*****Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.** ***11***The LORD of hosts is with us; ***The God of Jacob is our stronghold.***

What is the key? It is found in the words, ***"Come, behold the works of the LORD," and – "Cease striving and know that I am God;"*** In other words, **keep God's perspective.** How do we do that? It is to remember who God is, what He has done, and what He has promised. He is in control of human history. There is no power in nature or man-made that is greater than God. He created us for a purpose, and that was to know Him and to love Him and to know and to love other people. To maintain God's perspective means to remember what God has done in the past, how He has proven faithful time and time again. And to maintain God's perspective is to know what He has promised. We need to remember what He has said when it comes to His people. And specifically this means His promises. What has God promised? Listen to these verses for a moment: **Jeremiah 29:11: "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."**

Romas 8:28: "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

Do you believe them? Why not? They come from the very heart of God. Whose heart do you really trust? Man's? Your own? Or God's? It is why we are told to **"Cease striving and know that I am God."** (v. 10). It is sometimes translated *"Be still"* and literally means "take your hands off, relax." God knows what He is doing, and His timing is perfect (v.5). When It is all over, He will be exalted (v. 10), and you will be blessed. In other words, stop trying to do things on your own and stop getting anxious about everything. Don't worry, trust God! Don't fear, trust God! Strive in your trusting in the Lord and seeking after Him. Strive to keep your focus on Jesus! To keep God's perspective is to follow the wisdom of Jesus who said in **Mt. 7, "Whoever hears my words and does them, will be like a man who built his house on the rock, and when the storm came and the winds blew and the flood waters came, that house remained because it had been founded on the rock. But whoever hears my words and does not do them is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and when the storm came....great was its fall!"**

The truth is God has designed our world in that we don't know the future. And this is a good thing. If you knew the future and everything was going to be perfect, there would be no need for faith and therefore no opportunity for spiritual growth. And if you knew the future; and everything was going to be terrible, that would lead not to faith but to despair. But the good news is that while we don't know the future, we *can know* the One who holds the future; and when we trust in the Lord, the future is always good, for He is the One who can take the rotten things of this life and turn them into blessings. And afterwards, we can look back and see how God indeed not only brought us through the hard times, we can see all the good that came out of it.

I am reminded of a man that many here knew, Fr. John Mears. He was called home to the Lord five years ago this month after 99 years on this earth. Fr. John never knew his father, and his mother could not care for him due to mental health issues. Hence, he was raised in an orphanage. Some might think that was a bad break! But Fr. John would tell you that the orphanage was really a blessing from God. For it was at the orphanage that he learned about Jesus. Jesus gave him peace despite being an orphan. As he got older, Fr. John heard a missionary speak of the needs in the Philippines. He felt the Lord calling him into ministry and to serve overseas. So he was ordained deacon and then a priest in Manila, Philippines in 1939. His fiancé, Grace O'Connor, soon joined him there and on February 8, 1940, they were married. They gave birth to their daughter in September of 1941. Three months later the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor. The Japanese then invaded the Philippines in early 1942. After fleeing to the mountains, rather than being killed by the hostile Muslim tribes, Fr. John and his wife surrendered to the Japanese. They were then interred in a civilian POW camp. Though they never were abused by the guards, they lived in squalid conditions for three years and were severely famished before being set free by American troops in 1945. So did they live happily ever after afterwards? No. Fr. John's life would have highs and lows after the war – losing his first wife to cancer and a son in a car accident, remarrying and losing his second wife, to a heart disease. But God blessed Fr. John with a third wife, Dorothy, and they were married for over 20 years before the Lord called him home in 2011. Through it all, one thing kept Fr. John going. It was the peace of the Lord! He did not have an easy life. It was filled with troubles. But if you were to meet Fr. John you would recognize that he had the peace that only Jesus can give. He had the peace that surpasses all understanding. Jesus said, **"In the world you will have tribulation,"** but He also said, **"but take heart, I have overcome the world!"** In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, AMEN!