

I've never met anyone who enjoys being tested. There is a natural uncertainty when we are being examined in order to see whether our claims of skill or knowledge measure are real. We are thrilled when we pass tests which caused us particular concern or uncertainty. We are thrilled when we excel at tests, and most of us find it difficult to restrain sharing our joy with one another when that happens.

A crisis is a test of sorts. Our responses to crisis vary. Our current one particularly so, as some find the quietness restorative, while others find the shut down profoundly difficult, and still others are taking it in their stride.

An unknown crisis of varying forms serves as the backdrop to Psalm 46. The Psalmist is describing apocalyptic events which would inspire Hollywood blockbuster movies. Our translation doesn't get at the power of the imagery.

**The earth** is being shaken and altered. Mountains are being uprooted and dropped into the deepest parts of the sea. The whole world, in other words, is topsy-turvy. The sea is a threatening, chaotic and fearful thing in Scripture and in human consciousness in general. The sea is in such an uproar that the mountains bordering it are shaking as a consequence.

**The nations** meanwhile are suffering their own convulsions of war. Some are overturned entirely and thrown down. Others rise up in violence. For the Psalmist, this is not an abstract observation. His own city is under threat here, and when ancient cities fell, the violence was terrible towards everyone, not just the enlisted soldiers, but all citizens regardless of age and gender.

But the Psalmist, in the midst of this testing, is not afraid, because as awe inspiring as the cataclysmic convulsions of nature may be, and as terrifying as the march of mighty armies entering into conflict and the collapse of nations and empires may be, there is one over All towards whom true reverence and godly fear must be shown.

God the mighty fortress – Luther’s famous hymn uses the opening line of this Psalm as a launching pad. God is a mighty fortress and a very present help in time of trouble, **therefore** we will not fear. Though everything is shaking, if God, the unshakable one, is in the midst of us, we won’t be shaken. Help will come.

The Lord is sovereign over the world and over the nations. If we forget this, then we are going to default to the uncertainty and anxiety that comes with putting our trust in chance and circumstance – the very things which seem to turn against us and are causing us distress.

We’re reminded again, as I’ve said before, that while various nations, corporations or networks of people are pretending to plan the course of the world, little things come along and confound our plans and disrupt everything and we are left reflecting upon just how fragile all our plans are, how fragile are all our structures and edifices which we build.

Are we afraid? Are we uncertain? Do we think that God is not in the midst of our own various troubles? The troubles the Psalmist describes are no mere fairy tales. Something happened to shake them. But God was with them.

I’ve been reminded myself over the last few weeks of the importance of intentionally facing the Lord and directing towards Him my own struggles and even the mixed character of my faith. We’re being tested, and perhaps some of us have found that we either in some way (not in all ways perhaps) but in some way failing the test, or perhaps recognizing that there are areas upon which we need to focus both our prayers and our activities in response to the Lord and learning to trust in him.

Here’s the thing... We are the Lord’s, and he is the Teacher. His intention through all of this is not merely to test us and reveal weakness, but to test us so that we may be more receptive to his teaching and comfort.

This must be the key lesson we all learn through our current crisis. "Be still and know that I am God". We may make plans. Governments may seek to govern in the best way for their people, or a corrupt way, or as is most often the case, a mixed way of benevolence and selfishness. The course of the world will contain its ups and downs in terms of natural disaster and old and novel illnesses. But over all we need to face the Lord and recognize that we have no place of protection except in him.

Thanks be to God, through the Psalmist, we have grounds to pray and embrace this truth for ourselves and as a community.

Let us pray...