

Drop What You Are Doing
Psalm 46; John 4:35-41
6/1/08

Cities of Refuge North America aids writers persecuted in their native countries by finding safe havens for them in North America, spaces where they may practice their craft freely, unfettered by censorship and political repression. Our work assists writers worldwide while enriching both communities and the literary landscape in North America.

This organization gets its name from the Old Testament. It was Joshua who instructed the people to establish cities of refuge in the new land. These were cities that provided safety for people who killed someone accidentally. This was not a premeditated murder, but accidental. This was especially important since there were no police to investigate. The family of the person murdered was responsible for investigating and avenging the death. These cities of refuge provided a safe place for the accused person to go until the case was settled.

There were highways built to these cities with bridges. The roads were rebuilt every spring after the rains. There were signs at every intersection pointed clearly the direction of the city. The gates were never locked so people could get in any time of day and food and lodging was always provided.

Psalm 46 begins with the proclaiming God is our refuge (not cities or organizations in America). God is our city of refuge. God is my refuge and strength an ever present help in times of trouble. This Psalm is about God helping us in our times of trouble.

The dangers listed in the Psalm are from nature and people.

The earth changing, mountains shaking in the ocean, water roar and mountains tremble – we know how powerful nature can be – earthquakes, tsunamis, mudslides, hurricanes and tornadoes! When the earth moved or water rose up, there was great fear. The Psalmist proclaims, even in the worse kinds of disaster, God is our refuge. We know all too well about the dangers of natural disasters – hurricanes and tornados, tsunamis, earthquakes and mudslides.

Another threat mentioned is armies – nations are in an uproar (threatening with swords, shields and war horses). This is another imminent threat. There are many dangers in life. This would include terrorist attacks, drugs and gangs fighting for the lives of our children. There is also death, sickness, and long-term illness, failure at work and relationships, financial debt, loneliness, depression, sadness, loss of direction. There are many dangers in life.

The psalmist says God is our refuge – our place of safety.

The famous line in all the Psalms – *be still and know that I am God! I will be exalted in the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.* These words come after God invites all those people or

forces of nature to come and see the power of God (desolations – laid waste, destroyed). The forces of nature, armies with dangerous weapons listen to God – God is telling them I am greater than you. I will be exalted. To be still means to stop what you're doing, let go or drop your activity.

Jesus uses this same power over the forces of nature.

This Psalm becomes a confession of trust. It claims that God has this power but also that God is with the people. God is a very present help. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge. God is in the midst of the city – Jerusalem. God's presence makes all the difference.

Martin Luther the great reformer of the 1500's wrote the great hymn, A Mighty Fortress is our God. Martin was a Catholic monk who asked the church questions about their interpretations of the bible and ways of church leadership. He was told to be quiet and not question the authority of the church. He could not resist. It is said that he and his companions sang this song walking into the church courtroom called the Diet of Worms. If he did not stop his new ideas, he would be excommunicated as a priest.

A mighty fortress is our God, a bulwark (wall of protection) never failing
Our helper amidst the flood of mortals prevailing (people attacking)
The ancient foe is the devil, crafty and powerful and armed with hate – no equal on earth.

Our own strength would fail – God choose the right man for our side
Christ Jesus, Lord Sabbath – meaning armies
It has been the same every generation and he must win the battles

Devils will threaten us but we will not fear because truth triumphs through us (again Jesus)
We do not fear the devil because on word makes him fall – Jesus

That word is above all earthy powers (dangers)
The Spirit and gifts come through Jesus
We can let go of everything in this life
Because his kingdom is forever.

1. God has power over all of creation. He will be exalted.
2. God is always present with his people – a very-present help!
3. We sometimes need to be still when we are panicking and not trusting in God's power and presence. "The right man is on our side" – Jesus.

There was a group of botanists who were searching for a rare flower in the Himalayas. Upon finding the desired plant on the side of a steep cliff, they offered a bribe to a young boy if he would let them lower him over the cliff to retrieve the plant.

The young boy told the botanists to wait a few minutes and he ran home. He returned a little while later with an older man and said that, if they let his father hold onto the rope, he would permit them to lower him over the side of the cliff.