

Well, like most young women of her generation, in 1902, Mary Anderson was visiting New York, and she got to and fro here and about by a streetcar.

And one winter day, she noticed that it was a really bad day.

It was snowing and sleet and ice, and just all chaos broke loose in the city.

And she noticed that there was just kind of drivers were driving around in a mad panic because they couldn't see out of their windscreen or their windshield.

And so, you know, we just kind of take windshield wipers for granted, don't we?

I sure did one time when mine stopped working in a rainstorm and I had to put my head outside the window to see.

We just kind of take those things for granted.

Well, Mary had an idea.

She went back to her home in Alabama, and she hired a designer, and they came up with what became the first manually operated windshield wiper.

Now, that was something that the creator of the iPod, Tony Fadell, called an invisible problem.

What is an invisible problem?

Well, there's a problem that we don't think is a problem because we're so used to it that we can't imagine anything different or better.

And when I was meditating on this psalm yet again this week, I kind of thought about that story and what he said about the invisible problem because for many of us, many Christians,

We can go about our daily life functionally unaware of the reality of God's presence in our life.

We can become, you know, problems kind of smash into our lives.

Things hit us unaware, and all of a sudden we're like those New York City drivers driving around in a mad panic trying to fix things.

The Bible describes a different reality.

The Bible describes the reality for God's people of the indwelling presence of God and that God dwells among his people.

This is a theological reality.

This is an eternal certainty if you are in Christ, that God dwells in and among his people.

Paul, the Apostle Paul in Ephesians described us that way.

If I could just paraphrase, basically Paul says that God takes a bunch of isolated individuals, puts his spirit in them, draws them together, and makes them a spiritual dwelling place of God's.

But somehow it's just not a given that we live our lives like that day to day, that we don't live our lives as God fully intended us aware and enjoying and living in the reality of his presence.

Martin Luther is a great reformer that, you know, lived in the 1500s and kind of sparked the Protestant Reformation.

And this is one of his favorite psalms.

I think we're going to be singing this in the coming weeks, actually.

And, of course, Mighty Fortress is our goddess based on this psalm.

But, you know, literally Martin Luther's life was in danger and in peril because he was just fearlessly persecuted.

preaching and teaching the gospel.

And this emerging church that was coming out of the Reformation, this gospel-believing church, was often in danger.

There was just problems and enemies assaulting them.

They were buffeted with problems every day.

And sometimes Martin Luther would turn to his friend and his co-worker, Philip Melanchthon, and he would say, Come, Philip, let us sing the 46th Psalm.

In other words, what he was saying to his co-worker, he was saying, we need to experience the reality of the presence of God among his people.

So this morning, I invite you, Pinewood family, come, let us study the 46th Psalms.

So whatever problems you're facing this morning, you don't face them alone.

You don't need to face them in a mad panic.

The Lord of hosts is with you.

We're going to think about God's presence kind of in three ways that it's just beautifully laid out for us in this psalm.

First of all, we're going to look at kind of the first paragraph, God's strengthening presence.

Secondly, we're going to look kind of in the middle section, God's gladdening presence.

And then lastly, we're going to look at God's commissioning.

presence so let's dive in god's strengthening presence verses one through three god is our refuge and strength a very present help and trouble therefore we will not fear though the earth give way though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea though its waters roar and foam though the mountains tremble at its swelling selah now you think what is sale sale

Scholars really don't know what it is.

It's some kind of interlude.

It could have been an instrumental interlude, a liturgical interlude.

Whatever it is, it's a great way to just pause and think and to meditate upon God.

And so right off the bat, we see this opening paragraph, the strengthening presence of God being described.

So this psalm actually begins kind of with a confession of faith that God is...

our refuge and strength.

He is a very present help.

It's kind of a confession of faith.

Refuge means shelter.

If you live in the north, kind of the Midwest, you know, it would be very wise if you lived in Oklahoma, if you lived in Tornado Alley, that you had access somewhere

to a storm shelter.

In fact, parents will tell you that live out there that if their kids, they know that their kids have a very designated safe place in Tornado Alley, it just brings them peace of mind.

So we see here that a refuge just means really a shelter.

The psalmist here, just to drive this home, he's displaying, he's kind of poetically painting for us chaos and instability in the big arenas of life.

And he gives us two big arenas in life.

One is the ground that we walk on, and the other is civilization that we live in.

Now think about the instability of the ground.

Back in 1990, Lisa and I were on staff with a crew.

I was actually in Manila in the Philippines in 1990.

I was in the tallest building in Manila, the Grand Hyatt.

It's a skyscraper when a 7.8 earthquake hit.

I've never felt so out of control of anything in my entire life.

What do you do when you're in a room of 100 people and everybody's running for the doorframe?

We just don't fit.

I just felt so out of control.

What about civilization?

Think about some of the great civilizations in the ancient world, Babylon with its beautiful city and gardens and technology and military.

A little later on, think of ancient Rome, the military might, the roads that they would put in.

I've actually walked on some of those ancient roads.

And even back then, you would think, you know,

How could a city or cities like that fall or falter or wobble?

How?

And what he's saying is this.

He's painting a dramatic picture.

The psalmist is saying, if the ground can shake, if civilizations can wobble, then everything else in life is gain.

And he describes the sea.

The sea in the ancient world describes just this chaos.

And it bursts our bubble up.

of our illusion of control for anything.

What the psalmist is saying here, if we can put it in modern vernacular, that God's strengthening presence is better than a doorframe in a 7.8.

God's strengthening presence is better than, you know, a storm shelter.

during a tornado.

Taking refuge in God, really what that means is this.

It means turning toward God in your time of trouble and turning away from all the self-reliant things that we try to build and insulate our lives with.

You know, we try to build financial fortresses, and there's nothing wrong at all with financial planning.

I hope you do that.

We try to build kind of health refuges, taking all sorts of vitamins, working out ourselves to death, doing all of these things because we can be just so worried about our health.

We build these educational fortresses around our children, just kind of hoping for the best.

And right in the middle of that, I think God just drops, he has a sense of humor.

You can't really see it on the surface, but he just drops this phrase in twice.

And I think it got a chuckle out of the Israelites.

He says this.

He said, the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Now, why is that so strange that he would say that twice?

Well, if you remember anything about Jacob, Jacob in the Old Testament, his name sounds like or kind of alludes to the fact that he was a schemer or a deceiver.

Now, God got into his life and changed his name to Israel.

He'd be kind of like one of the fathers and the patriarchs, but God's not referring to him as Israel, is he, in this?

He is referring to him by the name Jacob and schemer.

The God of the schemer is with us.

Because you see, all of his life, Jacob was a runner and a schemer.

He tried to get out in front of all of the uncertainties and the instabilities in his life because he thought, if I could run ahead and I can harness those things, I can find stability in my life.

What did God do?

Well, God kept pursuing and kept pursuing.

And basically, he said, we're going to wrestle this out.

And God wrestled him and permanently knocked Jacob's hip out of joint to teach him a lifelong object lesson.

You cannot run from God.

Stop trying to secure that safe place that we try to secure with our intellect.

and with our strength and with our work and with our ingenuity.

And if all else fails, if all of that fails and goes to pot, at least we can strive.

At least I have my striving.

And God was telling Jacob, stop the striving.

When we're striving, we forget, we lose sight that God is our refuge and strength, that he is the one that takes up the fight against our foes, that he is a very present help.

I love that phrase.

God is a very present help.

That phrase, very present, doesn't mean a lot.

God, you're a lot of help.

What that actually means is actual, actually as advertised.

that he is over you, that he is with you, that he dwells among you, but not even a cosmic revolt can keep him away from you.

In 1876, a small church in North Carolina, Swan Corner, North Carolina, near the coast, it was smacked with a hurricane.

Now, we know a thing or two about hurricanes, don't we?

And it was badly damaged.

And so the congregation got together and they restored it.

And then it was smacked again.

And the congregation said enough is enough.

So they went looking for higher, more protective ground.

And they found a location they thought was perfect in the city, in the little town.

So they approached the owner, offered him a generous sum of money for the land.

And he said, no, I'm not interested.

Then another hurricane came, another year, smacked the little church, but this time it brought a severe flood, and the flood was so severe that it picked up the church off of its foundations.

The little church meandered down the stream and landed, you guessed it, right on this guy's property.

They go to the guy, and they say, again, we want to make an offer.

And again, he refused their money, but this time he says, I'm going to give you the land.

Who am I to resist the sovereign hand of God?

And that's the plaque they put on the church, the house that God moved.

It's kind of a silly story.

It's a true story.

But it reminds you of this, that nothing can derail or distract you

or deter God from completing that good purpose that he began in your life.

Do you believe that?

John Newton said this, whenever I sometimes just get riddled with anxiety,

John Newton, who wrote Amazing Grace, said this, that everything that you encounter comes from the hand that was once nailed to a cross.

That nothing in your future can separate you from the love or the strengthening presence of your God.

Amen.

the strengthening presence.

Second thing I want you to see this morning is this, God's gladdening presence.

Aren't you glad that God not only strengthens, but he makes us glad?

Look at verse 4.

The river, there is a river whose streams make glad the city of God.

The holy habitation of the Most High.

God is in the midst of her.

She shall not be moved.

God will help her when morning dawns.

We'll just stop right there.

So in contrast to the watery chaos that's going on in the first paragraph, now we're introduced to a life-giving river that makes the people of God's heart glad, happy.

And the psalmist is actually making an astonishing statement here.

Because of all the great cities in the ancient world, Jerusalem was not built beside a great broad river of water.

There's no river there.

So this is intentionally ironic.

It is to get our attention.

This is a spiritual stream.

The psalmist is speaking of this.

God's presence in the church in all the ages.

God's presence in the church in all the ages.

The image of a river flows all the way through the Bible, if I may say that.

You know, it begins in Genesis 2 where there's a river that's  
into the garden that waters the garden.

We see, we just kind of fast forward through the Bible, Ezekiel chapter 47.

The prophet Ezekiel has this vision of this river, and where does it start?

It starts from the throne of God, and it flows through the river, and everything it touches, it gives life.

but it started in the throne room of God.

Then we keep fast-forwarding, and we get to Revelation chapter 22, and John sees this great vision of a river of life, and it is bright as crystal.

It is flowing from the throne of God, and then he adds this, from the throne of God, like Ezekiel.

Revelation is just so packed with Old Testament imagery.

But then John adds this, it flows from the throne of God to  
and from the Lamb.

Now, the Lamb is a reference to Jesus as our ultimate sacrifice, the complete sacrifice.

The title connects Jesus to the Passover lamb in the Old Testament.

If you remember that story, just really briefly, the Passover lamb was killed on the night that the angel of death would pass over in Egypt to all the households.

And it was only the household that was marked by the blood of the lamb that was a refuge.

Only those houses were refuge.

And what made that house a refuge is what?

Not a really good secure lock or deadbolt.

It was the blood of the lamb.

Now think about that.

The only shelter from the storm of God's righteous and holy wrath that I deserved, that we deserve, the only shelter and refuge from that, my friends, is the blood of a lamb shed on a cross.

John chapter 7, the Lamb says, whoever believes in me, out of his heart flows rivers of living water.

See, here's the thing.



When you place your faith in Christ, you are united to Christ.

You are organically, you are united to him, and your in Christness becomes the most defining thing about you.

In Christ, that is your permanent address.

In Christ, that is your permanent abode.

And when we are connected to Christ, we receive the cascading river of Niagara Falls of grace upon grace upon grace upon grace in your life.

But here's the thing, we're also connected to other people, to other Christians, to others who are in Christ.

And out of that, out of the church flows this life-giving message of the gospel.

You can trace that gospel river not just down throughout the Bible, but all the way through, coursing through all of church history.

But everywhere this river flows, it refreshes and it restores this gospel river where the defiled are cleansed and those who are thirsty are satisfied.

It is where God dwells, the city where God dwells.

It is a place where the word is preached and the sacraments are given and received and the Holy Spirit indwells and habits the praise of his people.

And I hope you are standing in that river both feet.

It is so easy to lose sight of this.

It is so easy to let the busyness of life set the agenda and we forget about where the presence of God is experienced so powerfully.

that we can let frustrations, because people are messy, right?

And we can let the frustrations of ministry and doing life with God's people knock us off our game, and we just start dipping in and out.

Or maybe it's just disappointments in ministry can make us cynical and hard, and we forget this gladdening statement, but there is a river that makes glad the city of God, the people of God.

You know, one of the things that Lisa and I love to do since we moved here in Fleming Island is we love to go on walks together.

And we've noticed this.

Our streets kind of run perpendicular to the St.

John's.

And so when we're walking down the street, I don't care how hot it is outside, we get this wind tunnel going.

As we're walking closer and closer and closer to the St.

John, then we turn on River Road, and it's just like this wind tunnel is so refreshing.

And then we turn, and we go ahead, we turn left on Clay, and we start trudging up Clay Street towards 17.

And then all of a sudden, that breeze dies.

All of a sudden, that heat sears.

The sweat starts pouring, and it always happens around the Funyak compound.

I can never figure that out.

I don't know if it's JD or Jay.

You know, a few years ago, the Westminster Confession, we just celebrated our Fourth of July, right?

Independence Day.

Woo-hoo!

350 years ago or so, there was the anniversary of the Westminster Confession of Faith, and it was observed in London.

England, of course, and Eric Alexander preached a series of sermons, and he asked this question I want you to think about.

He said this to those who were in attendance.

He said, what is the most significant thing that is happening in history right now?

How would you answer that?

If somebody just came up to you today and said, what is the most significant thing happening in the world today?

And he gave the answer, and the answer is this.

The most significant thing happening in history right now is that God is building the church in Jesus Christ.

And he said this.

This just really grabbed me.

The rest of history around it is just scaffolding.

And what he meant by that is this.

A few years earlier, he had been to Westminster Abbey where many of the events were held for that celebration.

But he had been to Westminster Abbey earlier than that.

Many of you have visited that storied church.

And he said he was disappointed at that particular visit because the stone was just dingy and smudged and black.

And then there was scaffolding all over the place.

It just kind of ruined the whole thing.

But he said, now he could see what was happening.

Now at this celebration, a cleansing was taking place.

The pristine splendor of the white shone was shining.

And this was the point that God is doing something similar to the church.

The Holy Spirit is using our lives as building material to build a spiritual house.

And the scaffolding is still up and it looks like a mess.

He said there will come a day when Jesus will come back and the scaffolding will come down and the wonder of wonders of the world is the beauty of Jesus in the midst of his church.

And that should make, no matter what is smacking you in the face right now, that should give you hope.

That should make you glad.

That should make you glad.

Glad to have the strengthening presence of God and glad to have the gladdening presence of God, but we're not finished yet.

There's something yet to come in the last paragraph.

It's God's commissioning presence for us.

Look with me in verse 8.

Verse 8, the psalmist says, Come, behold the works of the Lord, how he has brought desolations on the earth.

He makes wars cease to the end of the earth.

He breaks the bow and shatters the spear.

He burns the chariots with fire.

Be still!

and know that I am God.

I will be exalted among the nations.

I will be exalted in the earth.

The Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our refuge.

Selah.

Think about that.

Very quickly, I want to just kind of share with you this.

The great purpose of the church, he's kind of outlining it here, and he's saying, the psalmist, what he's doing is he's reflecting on the great victories of the Lord.

And we see that two ways in which the church is to celebrate in God's victory.

In our confession of faith, did you catch it today?

It said that we are the church of God and we celebrate the presence of God.

I loved it.

That was perfect for this Sunday.

And there's two ways that we kind of celebrate and we experience God's victory.

And first of all is we bear witness to it.

We bear witness to it today.

So we're to be pointers.

We're to direct others to look at the mighty acts of God.

Now, we don't know exactly what

specific event in history that this psalm may have been a victory there's many victories of the lord in the old testament it could have been one of many some of them believe it was the victory over snack rib who's mocking god's people and isaiah ties a lot of these details to psalm 46 we we don't really know but just pick one of the victories where god just routed the enemy by the power of his word and there were shields and bows scattered everywhere pick your victory

What do we do?

And so what God is inviting his people to do here in Psalm 46 is to peek over the walls and celebrate the victory.

And how do we do this as New Testament believers is this.

We point others to Jesus Christ because of his sacrificial death, his perfect life on our behalf, his glorious and triumphant resurrection.

Jesus has conquered the power of sin, as Dennis alluded to today.

The sin that you are no longer slave to sin.

That Jesus has plucked the stinger out of death and that he has put Satan on notice.

and we point others to that.

In fact, Jesus said, told his disciples, I want you to go out now, right before his ascension, I want you to tell other people about that, and here's the thing, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

And the second way that we participate and we experience and we celebrate God's victory is this, not only do we bear witness, but we are to be still before him.

He's not talking about being spiritually passive.

He's not talking about signing a monastic vow of silence.

What is he talking about?

He's talking about this.

Just come before the Lord with reflection and trust over his sovereignty.

You've probably heard this.

I say it dozens of times during my month.

You can think of God's sovereignty as the pillow on which you can lay your head and sleep at night.

You can rest on his sovereignty.

His sovereignty, my friends, is your sanity.

And a life that testifies that the sovereignty of God is your sanity and rests in him exalts God in ways you can't imagine.

I'm going to close with this.

Doug Kelly tells the story of an American missionary by the name of E.M.

Hamilton, and E.M.

Hamilton served the Lord in China in the 1930s, and he had a co-worker by the name of John Vincent.

And one day, John Vincent was accosted by thieves at gunpoint who demanded all of his money, and the thieves were astonished by John Vincent's kindness and his calm demeanor.

And they said, well, we don't think you understand us because we have a God and we can take your life and you don't seem very scared.

And John Vincent just coolly looked at them and said, you know what?

You can pull the trigger.

You can take my life and that's all you can do.

I'll go immediately into the presence of my Lord and I will be in his presence and his glory and his joy.

And you can't do anything about that.

And they shot him dead.

Now, how do we know that he actually said that?

Because one of the thieves was very struck, awestruck by John Benson's courage, and he investigated those claims.

He investigated the truth about Jesus.

He became a Christian.

See, E.M.

Hamilton wrote a poem in tribute to his friend.

I love this poem.

Afraid of what?

To feel the Spirit's glad release?

To pass from pain to perfect peace?

The strife and strain of life to cease?

Afraid of that?

Afraid of what?

To see the Savior's face?

To hear His welcome?

And to trace the glory gleamed from wounds of grace?

Afraid?

that afraid of what to enter into heaven's rest and yet to serve the master blessed from service  
good to serve his best afraid of that in my lap my favorite line is the last one afraid of what to  
do by death what life could not

Baptize with blood a stony plot till souls shall blossom from that spot.

Afraid of that?

The very ground is baptized with your tears and your blood.

God makes sacred.

and brings about a harvest that you can't imagine.

Therefore, we will not fear.

The Lord of hosts is with us.