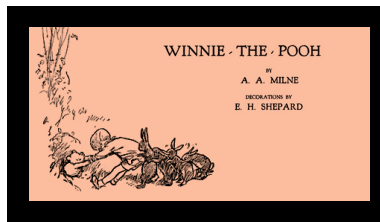


Psalms for Today – Psalm 46

Psalm 46

Mark 4: 35-41



In 1926, English author Alan Alexander Milne, better known simply as A.A. Milne, published a book that would introduce a new character that has remained in the hearts of children and adults ever since.

Winnie the Pooh had the ability to capture the imagination and tug at the emotions that so many people hold dear. But he was also able to take a complex idea and state it very simply.

I'll give you one example of the wisdom of Winnie the Pooh, this one from the 2018 film *Christopher Robin*.



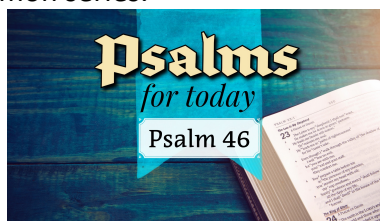
In this film, Christopher Robin has grown up. He's adult now. He's busy. He's got things to do. But he rediscovers his old friend Pooh bear. And Pooh reminds him of some important things.

One of those things is that “doing nothing often leads to the very best something.”

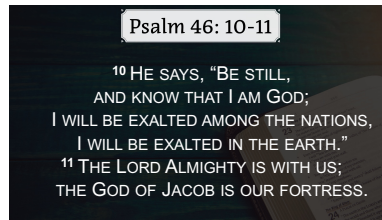
Doing nothing leads to the very best something. What a thought, right? Said in a way only Pooh bear could say it.

It's this very sentiment that we're going to be talking about today. And no, I'm not going to be telling you to take more vacations or naps. It's a different kind of “doing nothing.”

And even though what we talk about today isn't the wisdom of a stuffed bear, it's another unrivaled form of wisdom. Because we're going back to Psalms again this week for the second entry in our Psalms for Today sermon series.



Today, we focus on Psalm 46. In order to see the wisdom in Psalm 46, we're going to read it a little bit *out* of order. We're going to actually start with the end, and then go back and work our way through the rest of it.



So let's start today with verses 10 and 11 of Psalm 46:

*¹⁰ He says, "Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth."*

*¹¹ The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

Be still, and know that I am God.

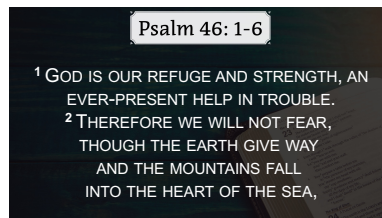
These words have inspired hymns and songs of praise. They have been printed on bookmarks and stickers and Bible covers.

They are repeated over and over because they are beautifully simple, but also because they give us two extremely important directions.

First, be still.

Second, know that I am God.

What we are doing this morning is really diving into these two instructions. We are looking at what it means to be still and when we need to be still. We are looking at what it means to know that God is God.



Let's begin with being still. To do that, we're going back to the beginning of Psalm 46. Let's read the first six verses:

*¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,*

Psalm 46: 1-6

³ THOUGH ITS WATERS ROAR AND FOAM
AND THE MOUNTAINS SHAKE
WITH THEIR SURGING.

⁴ THERE IS A RIVER WHOSE STREAMS MAKE
GLAD THE CITY OF GOD,
THE HOLY PLACE WHERE THE
MOST HIGH DWELLS.

*³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.*

*⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.*

Psalm 46: 1-6

⁵ GOD IS WITHIN HER,
SHE WILL NOT FALL;
GOD WILL HELP HER AT BREAK OF DAY.

⁶ NATIONS ARE IN UPROAR,
KINGDOMS FALL;
HE LIFTS HIS VOICE, THE EARTH MELTS.

*⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.*

*⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.*

These groups of verses lead off with similar reminders: that there is security and safety in God. That's very important and we'll get to that soon.

But we need to address everything else that's in this passage. Because everything else here is not secure and not safe.

CHAOS



We are told about the world crumbling around us. We are told about the waters roaring and foaming, the mountains shaking. We're told about nations being in an uproar and kingdoms falling.

It almost sounds like, well, it almost sound like everyday life.

Every day on the news, and seemingly every minute on social media, we are reminded of the chaos that exists in the world.

We see fights and brawls recorded and posted for likes and views.

We see violence and shootings, many of which happen in our schools.

There are wars currently being fought and fear of further conflict.

We have another election season coming up, and unfortunately far too often that means months of vitriol, arguing, and blaming each other.

And that's all outside of the church. We can't ignore the unrest that is happening inside the church. Our very own denomination has experienced tension and turbulence in recent years.

And by the way, if you are not already, please be in prayer for General Conference that is happening as we speak.



All this raging and turbulence in life reminds me very much of our reading from Mark just a little bit ago. The disciples were in the middle of raging and turbulent waters.

Can you picture what they were doing in that boat? I picture panic, high-tension, lots of movement...battening down the hatches, or whatever it is one does in a storm on the water.

I think that's evident in their accusation of Jesus in that moment, probably the only one of them that is sitting still. Actually, not just sitting still...he was napping! They wake him up and confront him with, "Don't you care if we drown?"

Not that we ever need any help in this regard, but we are so often encouraged to be just like the disciples in that boat. We're urged to jump into action, to say or to type the first thing that comes to our minds, to spring into action immediately.

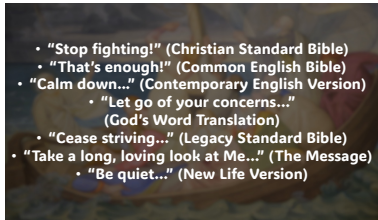
If we go back to that story in Mark, as Jesus rebukes the wind and the waters, I think his rebuke equally applies to the disciples in this moment. I think it should apply to us as well.

"Quiet! Be still!"

"Be still, and know that I am God."

I often use the NIV translation for our scripture readings. It's just what I'm familiar with and what I understand best. But sometimes, I think it helps to look at a variety of translations to get a feel for what's being communicated in the text.

So let's look at what some other translations say about being still.



“Stop fighting!” (Christian Standard Bible)

“That’s enough!” (Common English Bible)

“Calm down...” (Contemporary English Version)

“Let go of your concerns...” (God’s Word Translation)

“Cease striving...” (Legacy Standard Bible)

“Take a long, loving look at Me...” (The Message)

“Be quiet...” (New Life Version)

Are we getting the picture?

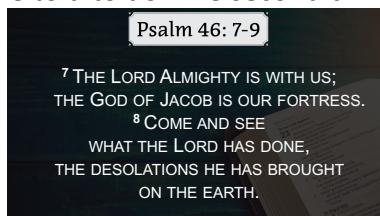
In the middle of everything that is not peaceful, what is our immediate response? We seem to have this kneejerk reaction to get up and do...well, whatever we can! What are we doing? We don’t know! Why are we doing it? Because we need to do something!

We need to examine how we respond when the world seems to be imploding. What is the first thing we do when nations are in an uproar, when kingdoms are falling, when seas are tossing?

Meeting panic with panic, meeting fear with fear, doesn’t reflect what Jesus says in the middle of the storm. It doesn’t reflect what Psalm 46 says when the world is crumbling.

Be still.

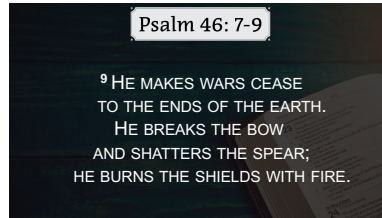
But that’s only the first thing we’re told to do. The second thing is to know that God is God.



Let’s continue Psalm 46, now with verses seven through nine:

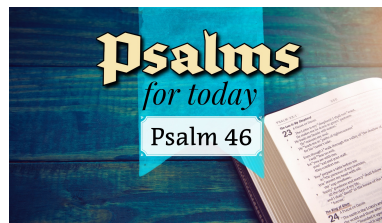
*7 The Lord Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.*

*⁸ Come and see what the Lord has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.*



*⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.*

The God of Jacob is our fortress. Perhaps that God is God starts with knowing that God is our fortress. It's very similar to the first verse that tells us that God is our refuge.



A fortress is a safe place in the middle of chaos. Battles rage around it, but the fortress itself is a safe place.

But we need to remember that these are safe places in the middle of chaos. A refuge doesn't make the rest of the world better. A fortress doesn't make the war around it cease.

This passage tells us that He makes wars cease, but we know that wars still happen.

This passage tells us that He breaks bows and shatters spears and burns shields, but we know that people still fight?

So how do we know that we are safe with God?

We know that we are safe with God, that He is our fortress, because He has already shown us we are safe with Him. He has already brought desolation, and in this sense desolation is a good thing. It speaks of the end of those who would do us harm.

In Israel's history, they could look back on the Egyptians, the Babylonians, and more to see that though their enemies reign for a time, eventually their reign ends and God broke that bow and shattered that spear and burned that shield.

I know that we can look back in our history and see everything God has cared for in our past. Maybe it's our own personal pasts. Maybe it's our shared past as a nation. God has cared for any number of things in our lifetime and in our history.

If we know that God cared for that battle we fought yesterday, then we know that He is caring for the battle we are fighting today and the battle we will fight tomorrow.

Be still. Slow down. Take a breath. Be quiet.

Knowing that God is God. He has cared for us in the past. He will do it again in the future, even if in the present it might not look that way just yet.

I want to end today's sermon with this. We're going to sing a song in just a little bit that you may know. It's called "The Solid Rock (My Hope is Built)," and it's a little bit of a remixed version of the classic hymn.

But one line stuck with me this week: "On Christ the solid rock I stand / all other ground is sinking sand."



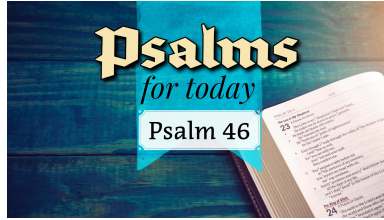
Quicksand is something that has been featured in so many movies and cartoons, and honestly it's a bit over-hyped. Humans will never fully sink in quicksand, but that doesn't mean it's easy to get out of.

If you ever happen to find yourself in quicksand, you're going to be tempted to make some big moves to get out of it. But that would be a mistake.

Moving rapidly in quicksand introduces more water into the mixture of sand and clay. And more water means that you start to sink faster.

Once you're in, the pressure as it settles will make you feel stuck. Pulling on a friend's outstretched arm or a nearby vine like you see in the movies won't help either.

Instead, the key to getting out is knowing the trick. You need to know what works. And the trick is smaller movements with your legs. Smaller kicking motions introduce just enough water that will allow you to crawl out, but only if you do it slowly and methodically.



In other words, slow down. Stop flailing around.

Know the trick. Know what to do when you're stuck.

When everything around you screams for you to jump into action, when the world seems to be caving in and you're tempted to jump into the fray, when tragedy and wars and chaos rage around you and you don't know how to respond...be still.

Be quiet. Let go of your worries. Look to God.

And know that He is God. Know that He has delivered before and will deliver again. Know that He is our refuge, our fortress, our safe place in times of trouble.

And if that's too many words to remember, there is the shorter version.

It may not be Winnie the Pooh wisdom, but it's better.

Be still, and know that I am God.

And all of God's people said...