

SERMON

Psalm 46

The Lord is our Rock

Nunawading and Waverley, 30-10-22

Dear friends in Christ,

We are comforted by the words, **the Lord is my shepherd but the Lord is my rock or the Lord is my fortress**, do not evoke compassion it seems. Rock is a reference to a rocky bluff or a steep mountain which affords safety. From the rock, people would be secure from enemies much like the wall of a fortress. Indeed, a fortress could be built on a craggy hill top. Verse one clearly expresses the comfort of a rock: **God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble.**

Why do we need a rock today? Haven't we outgrown these ancient beliefs that came about because people were insecure and needed the assurance of a religion? We live at a time when human ingenuity can afford us great protection. Science and technology are our saviours. For example, vaccinations were produced at record speed to combat the pandemic of Covid 19. Perhaps I can say something that will be helpful.

I was in a certain congregation and came under a sustained attack by some malevolent individuals. Our Lord Jesus loves broken and twisted people, too and he welcomes them into his presence. Anyway, their undermining went on until I was forced to leave. At the time, I found that no one could rectify the situation. The Lord was my rock and my heavenly Father used this personal experience of evil to deepen my appreciation of his word and how relevant it is. There is a real problem within humanity, a problem that goes deep into the soul, as any victim will tell you. Yes, you can think we have outgrown God until you face a crisis that undermines your view of the world and all the security you thought you had.

Luther faced a church profoundly corrupted that turned on him as soon as he raised concerns, as he did in 1517, when he nailed his 95 theses, points of debate, on the Wittenberg church door. The sale of indulgences was only the tip of ice berg. Bishops had assumed civil powers; the church was governed by laws and traditions rather than the gospel of Christ. It forbade the reading of the Bible in the vernacular. Positions of power were literally bought and sold. Priests were poorly trained. And worst of all, salvation was by the merit of fasting, prayers, the kissing of relics, self-mortification, masses for the dead, buying indulgences,

donations and other evils rather than through the kindness of God, his undeserved grace revealed in the suffering and the victory of his Son.

However, Luther's world had fallen apart earlier than 1517. When he entered the strictest monastery, the Augustinian priory of the Eremites in 1505, he could find no peace. He threw himself into study, prayer and worship. He lay on the floor for hours on end in repentance. He drove his confessor to distraction with his constant searching of his conscience, detaining him for hours in the confession box. Yet, he felt worse and worse. Only when he came to that simple verse in Romans 1:17, **that righteousness comes through faith**, did the gates of heaven open to him. He found his rock. Luther discovered, and I put this simply, that the Bible has a single message: human beings do not save themselves; only God saves them, hence the gift of his Son, Jesus Christ.

I can give you a modern example. Chris Garnaut is the brother of well-known academic Ross Garnaut. Chris runs a very successful finance and investment company. He has everything. One day, he was told he had cancer and, on that day, he realised he had nothing. He thought, too, that he had outgrown God but cancer took the ground from beneath his feet and he stared into the abyss. Then he began a journey back to his catholic upbringing and discovered Jesus Christ, or rather, he was found by Christ; he found a rock he could stand on. He is recovering from his cancer now but he devotes a lot of his time raising funds for the rebuilding of Ukraine.

God, whom we know as our Father in Christ, **is our refuge**. Rock signifies his strength and protection directed at his children. Our Father is here with all of his promises of deliverance but we need to grasp them by faith. This is where knowing about Christ is not the same as knowing Christ, the Christ of all compassion, victorious in death, and living in glory. It is why the psalmist says: **The Lord Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress** and then ends, **Be still, and know that I am God**. Christ is willing to be here with you but we must stop, stay still and actually trust that his almighty love and power are being poured into our lives.

Rock evokes something unchangeable in the nature of God but it is really more to do with the person we go to for refuge. **The Lord is our rock**.