

Trusting God When All Else Seems Uncertain

Psalm 46

May 4, 2025

David Henderson

Worship Orientation (start of service)

Before we continue in our worship, let me tell you about our focus this morning. Today we are setting aside what we had originally planned in our series on the Book of Acts in order to address something that we think feels more timely and more pressing.

Since the start of the year, a new level of uncertainty has been introduced into our experience of day-to-day life here in the US – and not just here, but in many other parts of the world as well. My sense, in the scores of conversations I've had with people over the past four months, is that there is more of a sense of uncertainty in our nation now than there has been at any time since Covid, and 9/11 before that.

So this morning we're stopping to remind ourselves what's true. What's true about our circumstances. What's true about our God. What's true about our future. What's true about the source of our ultimate wellbeing. What's true about where things are going. What's true about who is in charge.

The service this morning invites us to remember how good and faithful and worthy of our trust God is, and to put our trust in him anew. So the tone of the whole service this morning will be quiet and reflective and intimate, inviting us to draw near to him as he draws near to us.

To lead us into our worship, I'm going to read Psalm 93. You might just close your eyes and let these words of hope and reassurance wash over you. Then remain seated as we go into our first worship song.

Psalm 93

- ¹ The Lord is king! He is robed in majesty.
Indeed, the Lord is robed in majesty and armed with strength.
The world stands firm
and cannot be shaken.
- ² Your throne, O Lord, has stood from time immemorial.
You yourself are from the everlasting past.
- ³ The floods have risen up, O Lord.
The floods have roared like thunder;
the floods have lifted their pounding waves.
- ⁴ But mightier than the violent raging of the seas,
mightier than the breakers on the shore—

the Lord above is mightier than these!
⁵ Your testimonies – the things you say are true about yourself –
 are completely reliable.
 Your reign, O Lord, is holy forever and ever.

Message

You can feel it in the air, can't you? It hangs over every conversation. Over the past four months a new level of uncertainty has been introduced into our experience of day-to-day lives.



A person views large waves as Storm Eowyn arrives in Porthcawl, Wales, on January 24, 2025. Toby Melville / Reuters

This picture of waves coming in off the coast of Wales during a storm in January captures the feel of things pretty powerfully.

Here in the US, where we are accustomed to stability and predictability, we have found ourselves experiencing more upheaval and unpredictability as a nation, and it's true in other parts of the world as well.

I hear it everywhere I go.

I spoke last week with a woman from South America who lives in our community. She and her husband became US citizens over a year ago. A few weeks ago her seven and nine year old children came up to her together and asked her, "Are we going to be deported?"

I spoke with the owner of a small business in our community. He said that tariffs have caused his supply lines to dry up on one end of his business stream and his customer orders to dry up on the other end, and he finds himself wondering if he needs to sell his business.

I spoke with another businessman who said he and his team stayed up all night the night before trying to figure out how to pivot their business and what in the world to do with \$5 million dollars of suddenly worthless inventory.

I've spoken with more than one retired person who has expressed concern about prices going up and retirement savings dwindling.

I spoke with a Purdue professor who told me that a member of his international team was detained at the border, and another member of his team, a government employee, was about to lose his job, and that one of his students was likely to lose her funding and be dropped from the program this summer.

I've spoken with a student of color whose DEI grant is being canceled, making it likely she'll have to drop out of school.

I've spoken with individuals from the Middle East who live in our community and who feel as though they have to watch their every step because of how divided our nation is and how angry everyone is and how quick people are to judge based on country of origin.

I've spoken with a number of our international students and have heard concern and anxiety about whether or not visas will be honored and funding will be continued and even whether or not they'll be sent home.

I could go on and on.

These are days of significant uncertainty.

I have a job. I have a place in a program. I have a place of residence. I have a savings account. I have a steady income stream. I have a predictable future. I live in a country and in a world where power is balanced and where relationships between nations and states are stable. All those things we can count on being tomorrow pretty much the same way they are today, we can no longer count on. And, actually, we never could count on them.

How are you experiencing these days when the things you once thought you could take for granted are now no longer so certain?

* * *

The psalm we're looking at today, Psalm 46, is the perfect psalm for these uncertain times. It's a psalm of radical trust and deep rest even when everything else feels out of control.

It's also a psalm of reminding. It doesn't tell us anything new. But it reminds us what is true just when we need to hear it, because sometimes we can forget the truth, or lose sight of the truth, and we can start believing what our eyes are telling us instead of what we know to be true deeper down.

Would you turn to Psalm 46 with me?

Psalm 46.1

God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.

I love where the psalmist begins. He begins not with our circumstances, but with God, who is less visible but no less real, and with the things that are true about God, which we can so easily lost sight of.

Sometimes our circumstances are all we can see. As you may know, the word circumstance actually means "standing around." It refers to the people and events that crowd in around us and block our view. Sometimes they are all we can see. The psalmist begins by consciously pushing them aside, clearing the way for us to see clearly the One on whom we desperately need to rest our gaze.

There's another thing that's interesting about where he doesn't start. Notice he doesn't start with feelings. He starts with statements of truth. That's important, because when things get difficult we can start to trust our feelings too much and trust the truth that God has revealed to us not enough.

Remember the line at the end of Psalm 93 that we read at the start of the service this morning.

Lord, your testimonies – the things you say are true about yourself – are completely reliable.

And here's what God tells us is true about himself. We need to remember these things and affirm these things regardless of whether or not we feel them in a given moment.

God is:

1. God is *ours* – *our* refuge, *our* strength.
We bear his name. We belong to him. And he belongs to us. He has committed himself to us in covenant faithfulness. He is ours and we are his.
2. God is our *refuge*

He is a safe hiding place for us when we feel vulnerable and anxious and exposed and afraid.

3. God is our *strength*.

All wise, all powerful, all knowing, all capable, he joins his strength to our weakness, all of his "omnis" to our finite limits. Every time we come to the end of ourselves he meets us generously with his limitless resources.

4. And he is an *ever-present help* in trouble.

Every other place we turn, every other person we look to on, is a *partly* present help. Only God is ever present, always near to us and always available to us, always giving himself to us, always ready to be found by us, and always enough when we do.

5. He is an ever-present help *in trouble*.

Wait a minute. An ever-present help *in trouble*? That's not so reassuring. The kind of help I want when I am in trouble is to make the trouble go away! If he really wanted to be a help, wouldn't he just eliminate our trouble?

I think it's possible that this is the single biggest source of faith struggle and faith crisis among Christians in the US: the belief that because we have a good and loving and all powerful God, troubles should not exist. If I am experiencing trouble either I'm doing something wrong or God is.

But Jesus himself assures us that we will experience trouble as his followers.

John 16.33

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

He assures us God does not promise us peaceful *circumstances*. He promises us peace *independent* of our circumstances – peace that's rooted in him.

John 14.27

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.

As long as we think God promised us peace *from* trouble instead of peace *in* trouble, we will never experience the peace he promises us. We can't. Because we're looking in the wrong place for the wrong kind of peace.

God has a different relationship with trouble than we think he should. In his perfect wisdom he has determined that trouble can be used redemptively. The record of Scripture is consistent and unwavering in this regard. Scripture teaches that God uses troubles in a number of different ways to accomplish his holy and loving purposes:

Deepening our faith (I Peter 1)
 Teaching us to rely not on ourselves but on him (II Corinthians 1)
 Forming Christlikeness in us (James 1)
 Equipping us to comfort others in their difficulties (II Corinthians 1)

And so much more. But ultimately, it all comes down to this.

God made us *for* himself. So he uses trouble to drive us to himself.

And God made us *to be like* himself. So he uses trouble to form himself in us.

Bottom line, for the follower of Christ, trouble is a gift because through trouble God is seeking to give us the greatest gift of all, which is himself.

You may remember in Hosea chapter 2, God tells his people he will strip away all of their false sources of confidence, all of the things they've been wrongly looking to for peace instead of to him, and he will lead them out into the desert and there he will pursue them and woo them and draw them to himself.

In God's hands upheaval is a gift because it gives us the chance to remember that nothing else and no one else is really capable of bearing the weight of our trust and confidence:

Not our friends or our loved ones
 Not our school or job security
 Not the growth of our portfolio
 Not the health of the economy
 Not the stability of our government or of the world order
 Not anything in this world

Only him. Which leads to the next two verses.

Psalm 46.2-3

Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
 and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
 though its waters roar and foam
 and the mountains quake with their surging. *Rest*

In the biblical worldview, after creating everything from nothing, God pushes back the chaotic seas and raises up solid ground.

Land represents the stable, ordered realm in which life and God's provisions are enjoyed, raised up amid the wild and uncontrolled seas. Mountains, chiseled out of solid rock, are the most solid part of the solid ground. And they represent not only a place of safety to hide in, but also the place where God himself can be met.

And the waters of the sea, wild and storm tossed, seem like a realm that has no order. And for that reason the waters of the sea came to be thought of as the realm of the forces of darkness.

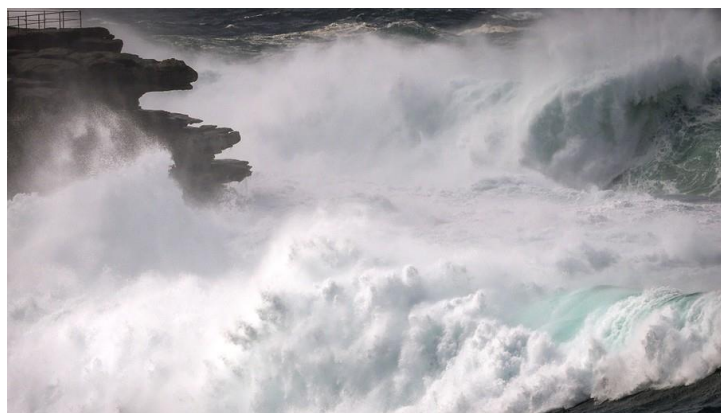
So imagine, says the psalmist, not just seeing the solid ground and the unbudging mountains erode away and get swallowed up into the sea, but imagine what seems to be the realm of the evil one taking over the realm of order and peace that God himself established, and even threatening to overtake the domain of God himself.

Even if that is how things *seem* to us, we will not fear. Why? Fear comes from believing that our circumstances somehow have the last word. That they are determinative. Not so.

The word "therefore" in verse two points us back to the proper starting point in verse one. We will not fear because of what is true about God. Our troubles don't determine how we view the trustworthiness of God. The trustworthiness of God determines how we view our troubles.

That is a complete shift in perspective. Speaking of a shift in perspective, look at what happens in the next two verses.

It's easy for us to forget that the very same crashing waves can be seen in two *very* different ways. As a reason for dread . . .



. . . and as a reason for joy.



A surfer rides a large wave at Bondi Beach in Sydney on April 1, 2025, as large swells and high winds hit the east coast of Australia.
David Gray / AFP / Getty

Next, in verses 4 and 5, the psalmist takes us to the throne room of God, and now we look at the chaotic and raging waters from God's perspective.

Psalm 46.4-5

There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.

Suddenly the terrifying chaos, the raging uncertainties, that seem to be eroding away at the very order of things, is seen from God's perspective.

Now the wild and chaotic sea is a river and streams – the word "streams" suggests canals that have been laid out and dug out according to an intentional design – a river and its streams bringing life-giving and joy-inducing sustenance to the people of God. All our troubles are not having the last word. God has the last word over all our troubles. What seems out of control to us is well within the control of God, kept within its banks.

Let me just say something here about "the city of God" in verse 4. In the Old Testament, that was understood to be referring to the temple on the temple mount in the city of Jerusalem in the land of Israel – all of which was understood to be an earthly echo of the heavenly reality, the true royal court in the heavenly realms, where God was actually seated on his throne ruling over all the earth.

So stepping back, "the city of God" refers to the place where the people of God live and where God lives among them and they can access him.

But when we go from the Old Testament to the New Testament, we go from the Old Covenant to the New Covenant, so we have to shift our perspective. Because we are

under a new covenant, we don't read the Old Testament *alongside* the New Testament, we read it *through* the New Testament.

You remember in the Book of Acts, which is in the New Testament, in chapter 2, the Spirit of God, represented by flames of fire, divides in the temple courtyard and comes to rest on each Christian believer.

So if "the city of God" is the place where the people of God live and where God lives among them, and they can access him, then the city of God now is not a place on a map, but wherever the rule and reign of Jesus as king is recognized, and God by his spirit dwells within his people.

[For more on this, see Galatians 6.15-16, which redefines "Israel" as the Christian community: "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation. Peace and mercy to all who follow this rule—to the Israel of God."]

We, the followers of Christ, the Christian church, are now the city of God. God is within us. We will not fall, unlike the mountains in verse 2 and the kingdoms we'll read about in verse 6. The psalmist tells us that, in the hands of God, the raging uncertainties and chaos are reduced to a life-giving, joy-producing, thirst-quenching river that makes the people of God glad – because the river leads us to the throne, and to him who sits on the throne.

Verse 5 says God will help us at break of day. Night is the time of darkness, when we lose sight of what God is doing. Our vision is swallowed up. Break of day is when the light begins to filter in and we begin to see. Things as they really are are revealed. Including God on his throne, ever working all things together for good. But even when I don't see you you're working.

Now the imagery shifts from the physical world to the geopolitical world, but all the same truths apply.

Psalm 46.6

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

Nations are in upheaval; kingdoms fall. God speaks, and the kingdoms of the world – seemingly the most solid of all things – melt like a snowflake.

There is a lot of speculation about the "wars and rumors of wars" that Jesus spoke of when he discussed the end times with his disciples. But a lot of people miss the fact that, according to the New Testament, the end times began with the Jesus' first coming and they will conclude when Jesus returns, whenever that is. You can see that in Hebrews 1.2, written in 60 or 70AD, where it says "In these last days." Until his return, wars and rumors of wars will be the normal state of human affairs. Paul writes in II Timothy 3.1:

You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times.

It will be the normal state of things that nations rise up against nations, that nations will be in an uproar, that kingdoms will rise and then tumble down. Nations seem like secure things. But history shows that they're not. Only God is. One word from him and they melt away. God remains in charge, and he has the last word in how things unfold – not the nations and kingdoms of the earth.

We come now to the two lines that are the centerpoint of the psalm.

Psalm 46.7

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

We're back again at the beginning of the psalm: taking our eyes off of the circumstances and remembering again what is truest of all.

The Lord Almighty . . . that's the phrase "Lord Sabaoth" that Martin Luther uses in his hymn *A Mighty Fortress is our God*. It means "the Lord of hosts": the Lord of a multitude of servants who belong to him, who go out at his word, in his name, and do his bidding. *He*, the Lord of Hosts, is with us. The Lord of hosts is *with* us. With us. No matter how much the ocean seems to be rising and the ground beneath our feet seems to be eroding away. We need not fear, for he is with us.

For the people of God, the presence of God is *the* defining reality. It is the one thing we can ask of God and know he will always answer: "Lord of hosts, give us yourself. Right now. In this fearful moment. In this uncertainty. Give us yourself." And he will.

The God of Jacob: the phrase reminds us that we belong to God by his choosing, as an act of grace, according to his pleasure and will. He is with us, he chose us, and we belong to him. The God of Jacob is our fortress. The word refers to a high tower, a secure stronghold, high and out of reach of the chaotic oceans, the chaotic nations, and whatever other danger rages far below.

And that high tower is him, his arms around us. We are safe because we are held by him.

Deuteronomy 33.12

Let the beloved of the Lord rest secure in him,
for he shields him all day long,
and the one the Lord loves rests between his shoulders.

Deuteronomy 33.27

The eternal God is your dwelling place,

and underneath are the everlasting arms. (ESV)

For the people of God, the presence of God is *the* defining reality.

Psalm 46.8-9

Come and see what the Lord has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.

"Come and see! Behold!" It means seeing not with your physical eyes but with the eyes of faith. Right now, human power and pride and ambition and greed and prejudice and injustice and vindictiveness seem to have the last word. But they will not.

Come and see! Behold! It isn't invisible when you know where to look. God will have the last word over all human power and pride, all inhumanity against humanity, all that fails to reflect his holy and loving purposes.

He is working *in* history to fulfill his purposes, even while the waters rage, though his purposes in a given moment are not always clear to us.

And he will fulfill his purposes at the *close* of history, when he finally puts all things right, when there will be, as Revelation 20 says, no more sea.

So we need not fear.

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."

It's been translated in a number of different ways:

Be still
Stop fighting
That's enough
Cease striving
Be quiet

Literally it means to loosen your grip, let go. So much of human history, and so many of our own stories, are about grabbing, clinging, holding on to anything and anyone but him. God says: "No. Enough. Stop clinging to human beings or human circumstances. The only thing to cling to is me."

Look at these two wonderful verses side by side.

Psalm 46.10

Loosen your grip, and know that I am God;

Deuteronomy 31.6

He is the one who goes with you ;
he will never leave you or loosen his grip on you.

God says: Loosen your grip on everything else but me.

Do you remember the story we studied on Easter morning, when Jesus came to Peter in the midst of his storms and stilled the waters and quieted his heart at the break of dawn?



Breakfast at Dawn (2012), Mike Moyers

The night can be long and dark, the waves can seem huge and threatening, the storm can be fearful and overwhelming, but Jesus is the one who says to the waves around us, "Peace! Be still." And he says the same to the waves crashing around in our hearts.

And then again comes the refrain.

Psalm 46.11

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

God gives us himself. Our hope, our peace, our trust, our confidence, is found not in any person or any circumstance. The only sure thing is *him* – his goodness, his love, and the good he is working in all things. Trouble is part of life with him, but with him, it

never has the last word, because it always shepherds us into his loving arms and his loving purposes..

I asked Kelsey Patton and Shubby Ebunoluwa if they would write a song using the refrain from this psalm and the phrase "be still."

I'm going to ask them to come up now, along with the worship team. As they come up I want to invite you to do a few things. First, they will sing their song through twice. I'd encourage you to remain seated, and close your eyes, and let these words wash over you. The second time through, you are welcome to quietly sing along if you wish. We'll have the words up on the screen. Then the worship team will lead us in our closing song.

As we close, I invite you to allow this to be a time just between you and the Lord. Seeking his face, inviting his presence, listening to his voice. How is God inviting you to take him at his word this morning, and to trust him in a new and deeper way in the midst of your life's troubles?

Teresa of Ávila (1515-1582) wrote these words into her prayer book and they were found when she died. They capture the spirit of this psalm and the heart of our hope in such a beautiful way. Listen to these words, and then be led into a posture of rest and trust by Kelsey, Shubby, and our worship team.

Let nothing disturb you.
 Let nothing frighten you.
 All things pass.
 God never changes.
 Patience attains everything in the end.
 Whoever has God lacks nothing.
 God alone is enough.

Closing Song:

The Lord Almighty is with us.
 The God of Jacob is our fortress.

Be still. Be still.
 Be still. Be still.

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