

Lord, we pray for what you give, What you offer, healing for circumstances to change, for strength, for a quieting of our hearts in trouble or a breakthrough.

But Lord, the thing that we pray for most of all is the prayer that you answer every single time without fail that we pray it, and that is that you would give us yourself.

We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

Well, hello friends.

Up until a week and a half ago on Wednesday at about 1:15, I thought that the message that I was going to be preaching on this morning was going to be a let's dive in deep message on the issue of politics from a Christian perspective. And I was really looking forward to it. On that Monday that I'm referring to, a week and a half ago was the gathering day for my Covenant group, which is a group of a dozen other pastors that I get together with once a year. This is our 35th year of getting together and it turns out it was a wonderful break.

Well, so here's a picture that was taken at about one o' clock on that Monday. I'm mountain biking with two of my very closest friends, Danny and Richard, on the awesome Fonta Flora bike trail, mountain bike trail and the Lake James State Park. And if you've been there, great place to ride. I can't wait to get back. Well, 15 minutes after that picture, I was taking an easy turn.

Coming out of it, I hit a light layer of pine needles and my front tire just shot out from underneath me and my full weight came down on my left collarbone. And I knew immediately that I had broken it. And an X ray at a nearby hospital confirmed that. Now I'm aware that when it comes to collarbone breaks that in nine out of 10 cases, the way you treat them is just put a sling on and let them heal in whatever shape they happen to be in. So that's what I was anticipating.

They gave me a sling and they sent me home. And I thought, awesome. Finally, when I was born, my mom and dad seriously were gonna call me Edwin. But on the day I was born, I talked them into calling me David instead. And then for 67 years, I've been collecting rocks and now I finally have a sling.

If you see any giants you have problems with, let me know.

So I was hoping this would be in the 9 out of 10 category. And the first inkling that it wasn't going to be was when I was being released from the emergency room at the hospital in North Carolina. And the RN who released me was a young man who had long hair and had that kind of Carolina mountain biking vibe. And he came in and he started to tell me that I was going to be released. And he looked over at the screen at my X ray and he went, "Sweet."

Well, for three or four days, I recouped at my friend Richard's house. They take beautiful care of me. But I realized progress was going much slower than I'd hoped. So my dear friend Andrew graciously hopped on a plane and flew down and then drove me back up. And by the grace of God, I was able to get in to see Dr. Hubbard the very next day that his office was open.

It was just the grace of God that allowed that to happen. So he walked into the room, sat down and looked at me, looked at the screen and said, oh, yeah, you're definitely gonna need surgery about that quickly. And he said, in fact, I think this needs to be at the top of my surgery priority list. So that was plot twist number one. Surgery required.

It's a two to six week recovery period followed by another month or two of rehab. Not after the injury, which you'll remember is almost two weeks ago, but after the surgery. And then the clock starts over again, which is going to be Tuesday morning at 11. Well, in our Wayfinding sermon series, I was going to be preaching three of the next four messages as we tackled some of these really hard, challenging issues that are pressing down on us so much and wearying us at such a deep level. Things like politics and things like what an appropriate response to foreigners in our midst is, and things like AI and things like social media.

So we're going to need to put all of those things on hold until I recover, because I was planning to do most of those messages not at all because the rest of the preaching staff isn't able to handle them. They are more than able to do so, but primarily because those are topics that I've just spent so much time reflecting on and studying, exploring. And I was really looking forward to the opportunity to shepherd us together as a church family through those conversations. So that means that the messages need to get pushed back until I recover. Which leads to plot twist number two, which is, as it happens, I'm slated to be on renewal leave this summer.

We'll tell you more about that in a few weeks. It's something that we offer to our staff and this summer happens to be my turn in the rotation, which means that now we have to push those kind of dive into the really challenging issues back to all the way to the fall. And I don't like that. But what I love about that is that means that these college students who are. I love that response.

Thank you. I love it. The college students who we are sending off into their summer adventures today will be back with us to be part of those conversations. So, really looking forward to that. Which means suddenly now we need to kind of redo the series we're in right now, which we've done.

So all of this, it turns out, has just been a great chance for me and for us to trust in the Lord and to watch him work. And as I've been preparing the message for this morning, it has not escaped me how incredibly relevant this passage was to my own specific circumstances. God is our refuge and strength and ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear. Though the earth give way, though the mountain bikes fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quiver with their surging.

Well, just, just a little bit more about this series and where we're going to be going over the this next month. I think we've all been sensing that God is doing something really special and important in this wayfinding sermon series and that this is something that God has really led us to. I think we've experienced it together in our worship and in the messages that have been communicated. So it really did feel. I mean, it's one of my first thoughts after I wiped out is it really did feel as though the evil one caused to happen as a way of undermining this really cool thing that God is doing in our midst right now.

But then at the very same time, I have, and we as a team all have such a deep and abiding sense that there is not anything that can thwart what God is doing in our midst. And God's good and loving purposes will not be undermined by this. And we can trust him even with this injury and the shakeup to the preaching plan, that this is all part of God's larger purposes for where he has us as a church right now. So the evil one undermining God's work. Yeah, seems so.

But God having the last word nonetheless. Absolutely. So amid all of that, we have been given a chance through my injury and the restructuring, all this, to just rethink the series a bit. As we come into late spring, we've been reminded this is always an exceptionally busy and distracted time for us as a church family. A really important time for us to begin to slow down, wrap up the academic year, jump into the summer and find some rest and replenishment.

So what we've decided to do during this month is to spend more time wrestling with some of the kind of interior questions of faith in a weary world, questions of trust, peace and rest and hope and joy, and what the source of those things is when so much around us is so burdensome. So I'm excited to see how God continues to lead us and speak to us together. Well, this morning we're walking, as I said, through Psalm 46, which I think is the perfect place for us to wrestle with trust and hope and what those look like. Specifically from a pilgrim's perspective. You remember, a pilgrim is someone who comes to recognize that this world is not the home for which they were made, but is the land that they live in and they are traveling through on their way to their true home.

Listen to this passage that we're going to be reading each Sunday during this series from 1 Peter, chapter 1 Peter writing to God's chosen people who are living as foreigners, put all your hope in the gracious salvation that will come to you when Jesus Christ is revealed to the world. Live as God's obedient children. Don't slip back into your old ways of living. Be holy in everything you do. Just as God, who chose you is holy, so live in reverent fear of him during your time here as pilgrims, as temporary residents.

For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from this empty life that you inherited. And it was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. God chose him as your ransom long before the world began. But now, in these last days, he has been revealed for your sake. Through Christ you have come to trust in God, and you have placed your faith and your hope in God because He raised Christ from the dead and gave him great glory.

You were cleansed from your sins when you obeyed the truth. So now show sincere love to each other as brothers and sisters.

Love each other deeply with all of your heart, for you've been born again and not to a life that will quickly end. Your new life will last forever because it comes from the eternal living Word of God. This is the good news that was preached to you. Amen. This world is not our home.

We are pilgrims passing through this world on our way to our true home. So here's the primary idea that I think we are presented with in this psalm this morning. The art of being a pilgrim is the art of learning what to let go of and what to take hold of. And on our way through this world to the world to come to the extent that we lay hold of the wrong things and let go of the wrong ones, to that extent we will experience weariness in this world. And the opposite is true as well.

To the extent that we lay hold of the right things and trust and hope in them, and let go of the right ones, to that extent we will experience peace and rest that is not dictated by the painful and uncertain circumstances that surround us in this broken world of ours. So in addition to those passages we've just read from First Peter, two familiar sets of passages remind us of our pilgrim status, and we've touched on these in the past couple of Sundays. The first set comes from the Book of Hebrews, and it focuses on Abraham and those who follow after Abraham as examples of ones who are walking in this world by faith, with their eyes and their hearts fixed on something outside of this world, something beyond this world. In Hebrews, chapter 11, Abraham is described as one looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. I love that imagery.

Chapter 11 goes on to describe others like him, foreigners and strangers on earth, longing for a better country, a heavenly one. And then in chapter 13, for here we do not have an enduring city, but we are looking for the city to come. So all of those remind us that here in this world, we are strangers and foreigners. The second set found in Paul's writings shifts a perspective the other way around, looking from within the spiritual realm. So in Ephesians 2:19, it says, within that realm you are no longer foreigners and strangers to the things of God, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.

The same thing comes through in Philippians chapter three, verse 20, which says, we are citizens of heaven, and we eagerly await a savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ. Those passages remind us that while we are foreigners here, our citizenship, our true home, is elsewhere in the spiritual realm. Now, there's a really interesting and sometimes confusing dynamic at play here. The spiritual realm is a realm that some see and enjoy and participate in fully, but others do not. I shared two weeks ago the wonderful story by C.S. Lewis called *Till We Have Faces*, in which Psyche, the main character, lives in a magnificent palace that this world cannot see. She wears elegant robes that this world cannot feel, and she. She feasts at a banquet table that this world cannot taste.

There's a sense in which that experience is shared by every person who is a follower of Christ. What they see is different from what we see.

And that goes both directions, because when we begin to see the reality of the spiritual realm, more and more we begin to see the shortcomings of the world that's presented to us through our senses and to realize that there is something more, something that is truer to the people who don't understand, who have not been awakened by God. In the spiritual realm, the kingdom can feel like a fantasy world that doesn't really exist. But for those who do and who find their rest and their peace in God, that spiritual realm is ultimately more real than this merely physical world through which we are traveling. So that's what Psalm 46 is about. Lifting our gaze from the things that our eyes so convincingly tell us are true and fixing our gaze on that heavenly realm that puts everything in a different perspective.

It's about letting go of the right things and laying hold of the right things. So let's walk through it. Psalm 46. We're told at the beginning of the psalm that this is a psalm written by the sons of Korah. The sons of Korah were musicians from the tribe of Levi.

And I think 11 of the 150 Psalms were written by them. Now, I think the thing that is significant about this is that these psalms were written during the period that's known as the exile. Assyria had marched into the promised land, had conquered the Israelites, had humiliated them and. And hauled them off into a foreign country. So they are writing this psalm in the context of feeling painfully the daily experience of being aliens and strangers, of being outsiders in exile in a foreign land.

This isn't theory, but this is reality for them. Here's how the psalm starts. God is our refuge and our strength and ever present help in trouble. Right off the bat, the writers begin not with what they see in their circumstances, but with what they know to be true in their souls. And I think that's instructive for us.

The right now, this world reality, whether or not we recognize it or see it in a particular moment. The right now, this world reality is that God is our refuge. He's a safe shelter from storms and from danger. God is our source of strength right now. When we feel weak and overwhelmed and overcome, when it's all too much.

And God is always present. I love this. The Hebrew forever present or always present is a form of the word to find. And it means he is always to be found. God is our readily found, right here help who comes to our relief each time we find ourselves in times of difficulty and distress.

So that's what's true about God. Always. Even when the evidence seems to the contrary. God is present. God is at work.

He shelters us, he strengthens us whenever life gets hard, like right now.

So then, in verses two through five, the psalmist introduces an incredibly powerful metaphor that traces all the way back to the very first chapter of the book of Genesis. You may remember that the first moments after creation, the image that's used is of deep bottomless, endless water shrouded in darkness, without any shape or any structure, just a chaotic sea. But the Spirit of God is hovering over those dark waters. And then God begins to speak differentiation and order into creation. And one of the most important of those and defining of those moments takes place on day three of the creation account, when God raises up land in the midst of the water and he begins to make the water recede.

Ever since God inspired Moses to write that account of creation, the formless chaos of water and the firm solidity of ground were used as metaphors by God's people to describe two different realms. One. One was chaotic, where nothing was sure or certain or solid, and it all felt like it was outside of God's control. That was the realm of the sea, the abyss, the deep, the leviathan that lived in the deep. And then the other realm, that felt sure and solid and certain and was always confidently under God's control, and that was the ground ruled over by the towering and majestic mountains.

So now in verses two and three, the psalmist brings us into that imagery to describe the feeling that he has that right now things are no longer under God's control and that chaos is beginning to have the last word, that it is eroding away God's world of order and strength and certainty. Can you identify with that feeling?

He says, 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. So here are these two realms, the earth and the sea. But it now seems like the forces of creation are being reversed and the earth is giving way and the mountains are being dislodged and the ground is quaking and breaking apart. And in the face of this surging sea, it feels like nothing less than creation being undone somehow. It seems as though the chaos is stronger than the Creator.

This is how it seems when we look out the window onto this chaotic world of ours. Isn't it like the chaos is getting the upper hand, like the powers of undoing are greater than the powers of creating?

But even though that is what our eyes are telling us, even though that is what our news feed is delivering to us, we will not Fear, the psalmist says, we will not remain in dread. Why? Well, for two reasons. One, he already told us in verse

one, it only seems like things are out of God's control. But here's what's true, as seen through the eyes of faith.

God is our right here, right now, without fail, never far away, strength and shelter. Whenever things get hard, therefore, we will not fear. And we also won't be afraid because of what he says next in verses four and five. And here the psalmist does something that a number of the writers of scripture do. Isaiah, Daniel, Ezekiel, John in the Book of Revelation, where they shift our vantage point from this physical realm in which we live and they bring us, they shoot us out of that physical world and into the spiritual realm, straight into the throne room where God lives and rules unwaveringly.

So notice now as we make that shift of perspective, where the waters of chaos are. Now 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 fail. God will help her at break of day.

The holy place where the Most High dwells refers to the royal palace in the royal city, where in the royal throne room the Most High, that is the king above all kings, rules because God is within and on his throne. There's no foaming of water, there's no surging of sea. The river is calm and under control, it's contained within its banks and it is serving the needs of the city, that is, of the people of God, making it glad with water to drink, irrigation for plants to grow, and providing beauty for all to enjoy. It only appears as though chaos is having the last word, when in fact a river whose streams make glad the city of God is the expression. What a powerful symbol of all that seems so chaotic and out of control, actually being contained and controlled in and in its proper place within the purposes of God.

When after the long night, the sun rises at the break of day, all will be revealed to be under God's complete control. Therefore, we will not fear. So now, as we move from the first half of the psalm to the second half, the psalmist moves from a metaphorical description of what's going on in the world to a real life reality description. He looks around him and he sees in his own nation, in the nation surrounding his. And he hears as word comes to him from the ends of the earth, Word of nothing but chaos and upheaval.

Every direction he looks, nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall.

The power plays the political scheme of the nation seems to be having the last word. And that can feel terrifying. I mean, when you think about it, what determines our well being more than the nations and the kingdoms seemingly? Our health, our security, our stability, our livelihood, our economic well being, the moral and ethical climate of the nation. It all seems as though nothing is more powerful in shaping things as they are now than the nations in which we live.

And that also raises the question, well, what is more powerful than the nations? And it seems as though nothing is. It seems as though these nations and their rulers have the last word. The nations and their leaders are answerable to no one. And the chaos is greater than the order.

But then look at the second half of that verse. The Lord who spoke order into existence at creation speaks again. He lifts his voice and the earth melts when it hears it. The nations don't determine reality. The God who rules over the nations determines reality.

The nations and their power seem great to us, but God is greater. God is sovereign overall. He is on the throne. And his loving and holy purposes will prevail even in the vicissitudes of political powers. Which leads us to this simple and beautiful refrain that shows up now and then again at the end of the psalm.

The Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. The Lord Almighty is how the NIV translates the Hebrew, but I think the sense here is much more robust. It says something like Yahweh himself, the God who marches out in front of the hosts of heaven. He is the one who is with us.

And the phrase is with us is that familiar one that we know from the Christmas story Emmanuel Immanu. God is with us in a world in which the nations make a show of their military might. The God of the regiments of the universe is with us. God's people. God is our safe fortress.

The picture is of a refuge that's built at such a secure height and such a solid way that nothing below can reach it. It's

untouched by all the foaming and the surging that takes place far below.

So the God who has every spiritual resource available to him is with us. He is our safe house. Nothing can touch us. That's what's true, whether or not we see it or believe it. But it's so easy to struggle to see it and to struggle to believe it.

AW Tozer, in his book *The Pursuit of God*, writes this. Our trouble is that we have established bad thought habits. We habitually think of the visible world as real and doubt the reality of any other. We don't deny the existence of the spiritual world. But we doubt that it is real in the accepted meaning of the word.

The world of sense intrudes upon our attention day and night for the whole of our lifetime. It's clamorous, insistent and self-demonstrating. It doesn't need to appeal to our faith. It's here assaulting our five senses, demanding to be accepted as real and final. But sin has so clouded the lenses of our hearts, Tozer says, that we cannot see the other reality, the city of God shining around us.

The world of sense triumphs. The visible becomes the enemy of the invisible, the temporal of the eternal. And that is the curse inherited by every member of the Adam's tragic race.

You think about this. God will feel absent to our spiritual senses and the evidence of our physical senses will eclipse our sense of our spiritual well-being if we are not actively gazing on God, if we are not setting apart time at the start of every day to spend time with the Lord, to look for him and to look at him, and then to walk through each day in conversation with the Lord, speaking to him and listening for him, reminding ourselves that that is more true than anything we see around us. I hope that that's how you start each day and that's how you walk through each day. And that's what lets the psalmist sing, and that's what lets us sing. The Lord Almighty, the God of hosts is with us.

God of Jacob is our fortress. So the psalmist wraps up the psalm by saying, come and see what God does in verses 8 and 9, and then come and hear what God says in verse 10. Let me just touch on these quickly first. Come and see. Come and see what the Lord has done.

The desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes war cease to the ends of the earth. He breaks the bow and shatters the spear. He burns the shields of fire. The present tense here is sort of a universal above time present tense.

This is what is always true and will ultimately be true. This is the work that God is always doing. And the word desolation here is key to our understanding this section. This is kind of a technical term. It was first used in Deuteronomy, chapter 28 and 29.

And if you know your way around the Old Testament a bit, you'll recognize that as the places where the blessings and the curses are laid out, obedience brings blessing, disobedience and rebellion against God brings this word desolation. So what God is saying is he will not let the nations get away with it. God is saying here it doesn't matter what nation it is, God will bring the full weight of his displeasure down on any nation that chooses to defy Him. It won't happen. It may not happen immediately, it may not happen in our lifetime, but it will happen eventually.

Part of the way that the nations rebel is constantly warring against each other and grabbing for more and more. And it says, he will make their wars cease to the ends of the earth. He will break their weapons of war. He will destroy their ammunition. He will burn their vehicles they use to wage war.

That's a better translation than shields. So he says, come and see what God does. He rules over the nations. He will cause their warring to cease. And then it says, and now come and hear what God says.

Verse 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. So we come now to one of the most familiar of passages in the Old Testament, but perhaps hearing it in a little bit of a different and more sweeping context.

You remember that I said that the key to understanding this passage is the art of being a pilgrim, is the art of learning what to let go of and what to take hold of on our way toward the world to come.

The phrase, "Be still," has been translated lots of different ways. Cease striving. Enough. Stop fighting. Be still.

But the Hebrew word behind this phrase has to do with your grip, what you are holding in your hand. Literally, it says, loosen your grip, slacken your grip, release your grip, and know that I am God. Two other passages help us make sense of this passage.

In Deuteronomy, chapter 4, verse 31, it says, God will never leave you or forsake you. And that word, forsake is this same word. He will never leave you or loosen his grip on you. And in 1st Chronicles 28:9, it says, we should never forsake or loosen our grip on him. So when the psalmist says to us, when we are living in these days of chaos and uncertainty, as we are now, we are called to loosen our grip.

He is telling us to loosen our grip on everything that isn't God, and to cling to God alone. Our peace, our rest, our well being, can only ever be found in him, in the one who rules on the throne. Our eyes are so persuasive. It is so tempting to believe that our circumstances determine our well being. But it isn't true.

Only God has the power to determine our well being unless we let something else determine it. And God calls us to be still to loosen our grip, to let go of everything else and to cling to him and not to cling to some specific outcome.

There are so many things to cling to. The current balances of power, the current resident, the Oval Office, the current interest rate, the current standard and poor index, my current blood work, my current bank statement, my current employer. None of those determine our well being. None of those are worth our clinging to. God calls us to loosen our grip on everything else but Him.

The storms and the waves do not elude God's rule. He brings them into a stream that makes glad the city of God.

Every time that a circumstance doesn't line up with our desire or our hope or our expectation, that is occasion for us to look upon our earthly circumstances with a pilgrim's eyes, to turn to God, to lay hold of him and to invite his perspective and his peace. Let me end with this wonderful quote from Peter Kreft from his great book, *The Mystery of Joy*.

He writes, when Jesus appeared to his disciples during the storm at sea, he was walking on the water, riding the waves as if they were horses. When Jesus says to them, it is I do not be afraid, he tells them, it is the fearsome storm that brings him to us. He has tamed it, and he rides it like a cowboy. He is there in it, on it, moving it, and he is in the wind as well as in the waves. Our fears, like the waves, can be ridden and conquered if we are in Him.

Kreft says, he who made or allowed both storms, the interferes and the outer waves, can also unmake or disallow them. And he says, since Christ is our joy, and since we can see him by faith, even in darkness and fear, we can find joy even there, not only in our sufferings, but even in our fears, which his perfect providence is allowing to enter into our souls. For now he is really present in the storm as well as in the stilling of the storm. He is deliberately prolonging the storm, whatever it is, for a reason. And the reason is love.

This is how Kreft concludes, the reason for everything is love. Which brings us back to the refrain, the Lord Almighty is with us. The God of Jacob is our fortress. The God of all of heaven's armies is right here with us. He Himself is our place of safe refuge.

He holds us out of reach from all the foaming and surging of the sea below. And I think this is the sort of awareness that the psalmist is getting at in Psalm 16 when he writes this, I have set the Lord always before me because he is at my right hand. I will not be shaken.

Would you pray with me?

Because being a pilgrim comes down to what we lay hold of and what we let go of. In this prayer, I just want to encourage you to consider what are your hands clinging to right now that you need to release, that you need to let go of?

You might think about just physically opening your hand as a way of releasing those back to God.

And where do you need to take a fresh grip on God?

Where do you need to cling to him in new ways? I encourage you to close your hand as a way of tightening your grip on him whose grip will never release you.

Jesus, we belong to you and we cling to you, our living hope, while we pass through this world and our true home for all of eternity.