

In my Friday eblast I confessed to only this week catching that the great Reformation Psalm 46 doubles the beloved Psalm 23. 23 + 23 is 46. Had you noticed? I'll never forget it now. But the connection between these Psalms is more than mathematical.

Psalm 46 makes the same claim as Psalm 23. They assert they will not fear **though** difficulties abound. They don't deny life's difficulties, but fearing them isn't how they respond. The word "though" in these Psalms stands out in light of the nightly news.

*"Ye **though** I walk through valleys, - valleys of shootings, of war, of climate crisis, ye though, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me."* And echoed in Luther's Psalm 46 paraphrase *A Mighty Fortress*, *"**Though** life be wrenched away, whatever the wrenching – it cannot win the day."*

I've been savoring these "**thoughts.**" Ye, though we walk through valleys, though life be wrenched. The news is wrenching, so much so that I don't like to listen later in the evening. Our personal lives have enough bumps and bruises, let alone absorbing the world's pain and then try to sleep.

It makes me wonder where people turn who have no greater love to trust in, no surer promise. It is the audacious promise of scripture that I've discovered is the news to listen to at the end and beginning of the day.

This is what Luther taught – to let the first and last words of the day be words from God. He got this from the Psalms. *Lord, open our lips, and our mouths will show forth your praise.*

Turning to Scripture is what we do – from Luther on down. We sang, *God's Word is our great heritage, and shall be ours forever.* By Word we mean God's voice, God's promise to come, to be with us, to be for us, to surprise us with intervening grace. Word means God's self-revelation in Christ – word made flesh, dwelling among us.

To be Christian is to stake our lives on this discovery that God isn't ethereal. God is concrete – in the flesh, in word, in sacrament, in gifts of grace finding unanticipated ways to reach out and love us. We sing, *without your grace we waste away like flowers that wither and decay.*

Grace is the claim we receive at Holy Communion. Jesus is truly present. It's not a memory of things long past. Jesus is here now, in, with, and under these gifts of bread and drink, as he said he would be.

Christian faith isn't based on feelings, but on promises enacted in community, tested, trusted over time. This is why it's reliable – it's not based on feelings – emotions going up and down at the drop of a hat. Scrooge once said, feelings can be altered by “a bit of bad beef.”

We call the Bible “holy” because it's Word set aside through the ages, Bread we receive anew in every age, grounding us in the promise of God's love that keeps endowing us with gifts to share with others, bringing us our greatest joy.

Lutherans are big on vocation. We're not here just to make a living. We're here to respond to God's love through lives of generous giving.

The reliability of Psalms 23 and 46 isn't in their exact wording – like the only version that will die is the one I memorized as a child. Words get expressed newly in every age, but the essence remains. The Psalms are reliable because they attest to God's promise to come to us, abide with us, sharing our joys and sorrows, surprising us with grace.

Someone who shares our joys and sorrows has got to be real. When you have a joy or sorrow shared, you know something real has happened. The Bible tells us over and over – God is *real* – coming, abiding, loving, giving 2<sup>nd</sup> chances, showing up. *God is love*, says The 1<sup>st</sup> Letter of John.

Perhaps we can see it a bit like chaos theory. There's more to it, I know, than the so called “butterfly effect,” but I find it believable that a butterfly wing flapping in one part of creation may well create waves as far away as Berkeley, Ukraine, the West Bank, and other places for which we pray.

God creates everything in consideration of everything else. Scripture says, if one suffers we all suffer; if one rejoices we all rejoice. Interconnection happens because creation is born of love.

That's why scripture says love one another. Love is how the universe works. Trying to devour one another doesn't make sense Jesus shows in dismissing the old practice of *an eye for an eye*. As Gandhi said, *an eye for an eye makes the whole world blind*.

We're called to another way. And it may even be that though we can hardly imagine how, everything positive we do, every act of goodness, every bit of healthy love, may be quantum – huge – because God multiplies love – like Psalm 23 multiplies into Psalm 46. And we sing, *God makes war to cease to the ends of the earth, breaking the bow, shattering the spear, burning chariots with fire.*

This is the holy work of God. God will make war to cease because God's holy love ultimately transcends everything that masquerades as power. God's love is the **real** power because it's what's holy and whole.

Thanks be to God! And so we sing, *You are holy, you are whole. You are always ever more than we ever understand. You are always at hand. Blessed are you coming near. Blessed are you coming here to your church in wine and bread, raised from soil, raised from dead.*

God is the Love who does these impossibilities – raises the dead, makes war to cease. May we stake our lives on these promises: God is holy and whole and will make war to cease. Love will have its way.

Amen

+Pastor Peg, LCM, LA – staking our lives on God's holy love!