

On the Sunday before last, I was speaking in Sudbury. Sudbury, of course, is over the border in Suffolk and is one of my longest drives as a visiting speaker, so I had plenty of time to listen to the radio en route. Even though it was a *sports* programme, there was no sport to talk about, so you can guess what they *did* talk about....the Coronavirus!

I'd already decided to talk about Jonah when I got there – chapter 3, because it's Lent and Jonah told the Ninevites they had *Forty more days* (v. 4). So I was going to talk about having another chance and the need for repentance and God's gracious mercy – which are all important subjects, I'm sure you'll agree.

But, as I listened to the radio and the growing panic about the virus, I decided I needed to talk about something else to help them. I wasn't sure that we'd have forty days before something happened. So I was driving and thinking and praying...."What can I talk about?" And then I thought of this:

Ps. 46

Sometimes the heading of a psalm tells us when it was written, but not this psalm. I'm glad of that – it means it's appropriate for any time, especially, I would suggest, *for such a time as this* (Est. 4:14). Because the psalmist is thinking of some very bad times indeed. He's imagining *the earth giv[ing] way and the mountains fall[ing] into the heart of the sea* – that's called an earthquake. I've never experienced an earthquake, but it's when everything we thought was stable suddenly shifts. Isn't that what's happening now?

And what happens *if the mountains fall into the heart of the sea*? Isn't that what causes a tsunami? And so he describes the consequence: *[the sea's] waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging*. And then he writes *selah*, which means "pause" – think about it. Well, think about it – I've never been in a tsunami, but doesn't it feel like one now? Haven't we been *overwhelmed* by this virus?

He goes on – verse 6 says that *nations are in uproar and kingdoms fall*. Is there a nation in the world untouched by this crisis? The mightiest nations are falling alongside the weakest.

Come and see the works of the LORD, he says in v.8, *the desolations he has brought on the earth*. Look out your window – the streets are desolate. Perhaps I should have stuck with Jonah – *Forty more days and [you] will be overturned* (3:4).

Well thanks, Steve! We tuned in to get some comfort and inspiration and all you've done is tell us what we already knew and depress us!

I've been selective – I've told you the bad news to prepare you for the good. Listen: *God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble* (v. 1). Did you get that? *God is....an ever-present help in trouble*. Are we in trouble now? Then thank God for the people who can help you – family and friends and neighbours and doctors and nurses, who will do all they can, but, when they've gone and you're all alone, who remains? Or perhaps you're all alone anyway and completely isolated. But, who remains? *God!* He is *ever-present* – we're *never* alone. And, if you fall sick and grow weak, who is our strength? *God!* In fact, the weaker we are, the stronger He is, because we need Him more! And He is our *refuge*: we need to stay indoors and self-isolate - pull up the drawbridge of our castle. But *He* is an even greater refuge – He is our castle, walls, drawbridge, the lot! We are secure. Listen:

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 (vv. 4-5).

Now, here's a funny thing! The psalmist is singing about *the city of God*. Which city is *the city of God*? Jerusalem, of course. But he also says that *There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God*. Which river does Jerusalem stand on? It's not the Jordan – that's 21 miles away. Jerusalem is one of the few great cities in the world that *doesn't* stand on a river! (Basildon's another one.) No, *we* are *the city of God*, His Temple where He dwells (1 Cor. 6:19)! So what is the river? His Holy Spirit – as Jesus said, *rivers of living water will flow from within[us] and John explains, By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive (Jn. 7:38-9)*. His Holy Spirit will even make us *glad*! How can we be *glad* in these circumstances? Because, when we're well we sometimes forget Him, but, when we are in trouble, we call on Him and He draws nearer.

Oh, and *when* will He help us? *At break of day*: He's there when we wake up. And, because He's *an ever-present help*, He's with us all day. And, because *we* are *the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells*, even when we're asleep, He's with us – no! *Within* us!

And *who* is it who's with us, what's He called in v. 7? *The LORD Almighty is with us* – how can we be afraid? He's *Almighty* – He's stronger than any virus! And He will give us faith stronger than any virus, because what else is He called in that verse? *The God of Jacob* – the God of His people: He knows your name and your circumstances. How can we be afraid?

But we are, aren't we? Why? Because there's a war going on - not out there, but inside us. And our biggest enemy consists of two words – *what if*. Verse 9 tells us that God has declared war on war and we know we're His soldiers (2 Tim. 2:3). So, what are our weapons? *Shh....*

Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth (v. 10).

God is there with you, speaking, whispering.....Shh....will you, will *we* choose to exalt Him, even if others won't? *Be still*, He says, "don't panic. You've sung so many songs to Me, telling Me you trust Me: now I'm asking you to *prove* it." And then the psalmist repeats verse 7 – if he says it *twice*, it must be important, mustn't it? *The LORD Almighty is with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress. Selah (vv. 7, 11)*. Think about it.

It's said of Luther, [that] when [he was] in greatest distress, [he] was wont to call for this psalm, saying, "Let us sing the forty-sixth psalm in concert; and then let the devil do his worst."

FRIENDS, DON'T PANIC: GOD'S GOT THIS!