

A Joyful Expectation of Death

Psalm 46

Gary Richmond tells the story of the hunt for the black widow spiders. One summer when he was a kid his mother strictly warned him not to go anywhere near any black widows. This of course gave Gary what he considered the best idea of the whole summer.

"We'll try to catch ten." He told his best friend.

So Gary his friend and his older brother set off to the backyard to catch ten black widow spiders. Gary carried one mason jar and his brother had the stick. They caught eight without any difficulty. When they found the ninth Gary took the lid off the jar, but he was so focused on watching the ninth spider that he failed to see the one that crawled out, until he noticed an eerie sensation on the back of his hand. When he saw the spider, he screamed and dropped the jar. Spiders went everywhere. His older brother came to the rescue and flicked the spider off his hand.

That was the day Gary said he learned the most important lesson of his life. Someday I am going to die.

This is a truth that we all know but that we rarely appreciate. It is too easy to push it to the back of the mind, to consider it a thing far off, a worry for another day.

Martin Luther was another one who learned early that he was going to die. A lot of his early life was spent in fear of that day. Until he learned from scriptures like Psalm 46 that this day was not a day to fear because in that day Christ stands as our refuge, a place of safety.

In our Gospel lesson Jesus tells us the truth will set us free.

John 8:32 "And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

From what are we set free? The truth we learn in God's word sets us free from the fear of death.

Hebrews 2:15 and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

This is the heart of Psalm 46, not that we escape death but that in death Christ is our refuge.

Psalm 46:1-3 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble. ² Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed, And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; ³ Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling.

The mountains fall. The oceans swell up. The earth shakes beneath him. These are images of death and certain destruction. This is an image of the day of death when everything is taken from us, all crumbles away. yet the Psalmist is unafraid. Why? Because he will not die? No, but because even in death Christ is still his refuge, his mighty fortress, his strength.

When nothing else is left, when all the earth is falling apart, there remains one and only one sure and certain refuge, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. The refuge which He gives to us in that hour of utter destruction is not the preservation of this life but rather the deliverance through death into life.

The prophet Job understood this and having lost everything else clung to that one thing.
"I know that my redeemer lives."

The Psalmist does not fear this day of absolute destruction but looks forward to it since it is the day of deliverance.

Numbers 23:10 "Let me die the death of the righteous, And let my end be like his!"

Psalm 46:4-7 ⁴ *There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God, The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.* ⁵ *God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.* ⁶ *The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.* ⁷ **The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.**

Again, in verse five we have this same picture of the deliverance which comes in the hour of our death. The night which verse five alludes to is our life on this earth. This night grows ever deeper and darker until the moment of its end which is the moment of our death. Then at that moment we open our eyes on the dawn, the rising of the Son. He comes at the dawn because He is the dawn. His coming is the dawn.

Malachi 4:2 ² **But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings;**

In the moment of our death our eyes will be open to see the One who was always with us but whom we could not see because of the darkness of the night.

God assures us that even in the darkness of night He does not leave us. Verse four assures us that there is the river which gives joy and comfort to the people of God. This is none other than His word and His sacraments. There also is the tabernacle in which God dwells among his people, which as we talked about last week is Jesus himself.

As we wait for the dawn, as we wait for the day of deliverance, it is God's word which gives to us comfort and strength and peace. In this sacrament which you are about to receive, you have the assurance that Christ is with you, the promise of the forgiveness of sins, the peace which comes from knowing that even during the destruction of all things the Lord is your refuge.

Isa 58:11 The LORD will guide you continually, And satisfy your soul in drought, And strengthen your bones; You shall be like a watered garden, And like a spring of water, whose waters do not fail.

Is there anything more peaceful and calming than to sit on a warm sunny day beside a lake or gently flowing river? Assuming of course that the misquotes aren't out in force.

This is what God's word and sacraments provide for the believer, the rest and comfort that we need in the day of our death and in all the dark night that leads to it.

Just this last week a member here faced a scary surgery. They called me up and asked for a devotion and the Lord's Supper. It is through these things that Lord gives us comfort in the face of death and tribulation, His word, and His sacrament.

Psalm 46:8-11 ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. ¹⁰ Be still, and know that I *am* God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! ¹¹ The LORD of hosts *is* with us; The God of Jacob *is* our refuge.

Come and see the works of the Lord.

The deliverance of the Lord is a thing that is repeated many times in our lives. But each time these are only pale imitations of the true deliverance which comes at the day of our death. Rather than fearing or avoiding the day of destruction, the day of death, the day when the mountains fall and the earth shakes, the psalmist encourages us to eagerly come with him so that we might see for ourselves on that day the wonderful works of God

If you had a time machine what would use it for? To see the red sea parted? To watch the creation of the world? To walk with the women on the first Resurrection morning? We do not need a time machine to see the "works of the Lord." We only need to wait until the hour of our death, when our eyes will open upon the dawn and the rising of the Lord.

Because of this, because we know that the Lord is our refuge at all times and especially on that great day of deliverance therefore, we ought to "be still and know that I am God."

What does it mean to "be still and know that I am God."

It means:

To stop complaining and shouting,

Stop running around demanding this and that.

Stop expecting perfect happiness in money, in entertainment, in work, in relationships.

Stop expecting politicians and governments to be fair and just and good.

Stop being angry because life is unfair and unjust.

Stop holding grudges because this person did that, and that person did this.

In other words, stop demanding that God do things your way and accept His will. He is God. He knows what is best and He has the power to do it. Stop and wait and watch for the dawn of God's deliverance.

Some day you will die, and what a wonderful thing to know that on that day you will see Jesus.

Young Gary eagerly sought the black widows. Although he was too young to understand that what he really sought was death.

We as mature Christians, with full understanding of the forgiveness that is ours through Christ death, with eyes open to the brilliance of the glory of the resurrection of our Lord and Savior, wait with eager anticipation for the day of destruction. We know that on that day we shall see what our hearts most desire, the salvation and the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Daniel 12:9,10,13 ⁹ And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end. ¹⁰ "Many shall be purified, made white, and refined, but the wicked shall do wickedly; and none of the wicked shall understand, but the wise shall understand. ¹³ "But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days."

Our God is a mighty refuge; therefore we will not fear even in the day of death. Amen