



Psalm 46 – When the Earth Gives Way

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change, though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea; though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High. God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved; God will help it when the morning dawns. The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts. The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. Come, behold the works of the LORD; see what desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire. 'Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth.' The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Earlier this week in Boston, the earth shook and smoke filled the air, chaos and confusion reigned, and the suffering cried in anguish. It was, I imagine, for those who were there as if the earth itself shook and everything that was solid and secure gave way. Whatever may have been the experience of the psalmist—a cataclysmic earthquake or an unexpected assault by some enemy—he too knew the feeling like that of those in Boston at the marathon finish line. In our world and increasingly in our own country there are more and more occasions when figuratively “the earth is moved and the mountains shake in the heart of the sea.” What the psalmist describes is the earth reverting to its primordial chaos, with nothing solid and secure to cling to.

The experience is replicated not only in the violence that we see around us, but in a variety of human experiences—the death of a spouse, the unexpected loss of a job, a medical diagnosis that radically alters the future, the deployment of a loved one to war, the loss of your life’s savings, etc. Anger, disbelief, and fear rise to reign in its wake. Yet, this psalmist expresses a calmness and confidence that grows out of the assurance that no matter what may assail us, what painful reality we must endure, or what loss we may suffer, the God of creation, the God who sustains all creation, will sustain us. *God is our refuge and our strength, a very present help in time of trouble. . . . 'Be still [then] and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth.'* ¹¹ *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*