

Psalm 46

- ¹ God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
- ² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake in the heart of the sea;
³ though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
- ⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy habitation of the Most High.
- ⁵ God is in the midst of the city; it shall not be moved;
God will help it when the morning dawns.
- ⁶ The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter;
he utters his voice, the earth melts.
- ⁷ The LORD of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our refuge.
- ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD;
see what desolations he has brought on the earth.
- ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth;
he breaks the bow, and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
- ¹⁰ 'Be still, 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.

"Be Still and Know that I Am God"

If you are the sort who likes to memorize scripture, this Psalm is one that is well worth memorizing – it ranks up there with Psalm 23 which reminds us of God's presence and protection. This psalm reminds us of the same, though with a bit harsher imagery – mountains shaking and seas roaring, spears shattering and shields burning rather than green pastures and still waters. And this psalm ends with great counsel – counsel that I pray that we can all follow

not just over the next two months but for the rest of our lives: BE STILL, AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.

I want to practice that right now; I want us all to be still and know that God is God. Can we do that right now? Let's try...

Amen.

How did that feel? Was it a good prayer? I didn't time how long we were still and knowing that God is God, though I thought about doing this for one minute or thereabouts. I didn't time it because I think one of the first obstacles that we face when we pray is that we set a time limit on it, the same as we do when we come to church; we hope that the worship service will be within a certain time frame because we have schedules to keep. It's the way we live our lives, a way that must have been quite different from the way people in Jesus' day lived their lives. Our days are parsed out in terms of minutes and hours; theirs were very connected to the location of the sun – dawn, midday, dusk, night. But we are much more precise, scheduling our appointments and even reminders of appointments throughout our lives. So we commit three hours to church, or ten minutes to prayer, and various time allotments to dozens of other activities.

And our minds are so drawn to thinking, "What's next?" that we have a hard time "being still." How many of you were thinking "What's next?" as we were praying? How many of you are thinking now about what's next this afternoon? When do I have to be somewhere else besides church?

And thus it becomes hard for us to "be still" and just know that God is God. Douglass Steere, in his book entitled *Dimensions of Prayer* says in the Introduction:

"In our time we are not suffering as much from a decay of beliefs as from a loss of solitude."

And why is solitude important? Because for us to actually spend quality time with God we need to be free of all these distractions.

Our first distraction can be work. I grew up with a Protestant work ethic that makes it very hard for me to relax. As I'm working on one thing I'm keeping a list in my mind and on my computer of all the things that I need to do when the time allows it. And I'm constantly backed up. Anyone here have the same problem? I always have more to do than I have time to do it, and I'll be honest; I feel really good when I've had a very "productive" day. I feel really frustrated if I've spend a day where for various reasons I haven't accomplished much. We put a premium on productivity. In fact when we think of Jesus and what made him such a great person when he was on earth, we usually think of all the work he did. He was a healer. He was a teacher. He was a religious reformer. We look at ourselves the same way: How many books did we read? How many songs did we learn? How many phone calls did we make? How much money did we earn? How many of us would include "Prayer" on that list of our accomplishments? How many of us include "Prayer" on a list of Jesus' accomplishments? The gospel writer Mark recalls an incident where, after a long day of healing anyone and everyone Jesus woke up while it was still dark and went to a deserted place to pray, and he must have spent a bit of time out there because when the disciples finally found him they said, "Everyone is looking for you." And what they really meant is, "Everyone needs you to help them with something." Do you feel that way sometime? Everyone needs you to do something for them? It's nice to feel needed, but you can't allow your life just to be spent working. You need to include time for prayer. Another incident recorded in Mark's gospel tells of a man whose son is possessed by demons, and the disciples were unable to help the child. Jesus casts the demon out of the boy, healing him completely. Later when the disciples ask him, "Lord, why couldn't we cast out the demon?" Jesus answers "This kind can come out only through prayer." The disciples *wanted* to help this boy, but they couldn't because they either did not pray or did not know how to pray in order to drive out the demon. We need to pray, and we need to include time each day for serious meditative prayer.

But do we? We speak about our need for "recreation," which, when you look at the word you discover that it consists of the prefix "re" meaning "again" and "creation" Re-creation should be a time of

bringing us back to some original state of being, a state of creation. And if we believe in God as we say we do then that original state of being is a state of harmony with God. We don't get that from going to a sports event or from taking a trip or going to an opera. There's nothing wrong with doing these things, but don't think of them as "re-creation." Think of them as "entertainment," which means "amusement" or "diversion." That which entertains does not "recreate." Entertainment takes you away from work or whatever is occupying your life at the time, but it doesn't bring you back to a state of harmony with God. Our lives get so caught up in this cycle of work and entertainment that we afford little time for true re-creation. Let's face it: "Being still" is not something we strive for. It's like a "time-out"; we consider it more a negative result of some misbehavior. We all desperately need some "time-out" with God.

And so the first requirement for us to pray is A RECOGNITION THAT WE NEED GOD. WE NEED GOD BECAUSE HE IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN TRULY RE-CREATE US. If you don't recognize a need God, then going through the motions of setting aside a time and place to "be still" and know that God is God won't have any impact on you. You need to be able to look at yourself, let go of your ego defense mechanisms, drop any pride that you may have about your accomplishments or your abilities, your title or status, your list of all the good that you've done, and you need to know that your greatest need is God.

And related to recognizing our need for God is a recognition that WE NEED TO CHANGE. And we will certainly change as we commit ourselves to prayer and contemplation. Furthermore, THE WORLD will change, because as we change we take on greater love and greater compassion, and we also gain a greater sense of purpose – God's purpose and how we are uniquely called to fulfill that purpose in this world. We won't be able to help ourselves from speaking and acting in ways that spread God's love to others and into our community.

Your homework this week is not going to be something as specific as committing a certain amount of time in a certain place praying. Because if you haven't been praying or if you haven't felt very

inspired during the times that you pray, telling you to go through these motions is not going to bring about a spiritual awaking in you. You have to start with the right attitude. And so for this week, I would like you to make two lists: One list will be "Why I need God" and the other list will be "Why I need to change." If you just start making these lists it should provide you with an incentive to pray. And if you do pray, that's okay; you might have a wonderful time doing so. But begin by recognizing your needs – why you need God, and why you need to change. I'll be making those lists too, and I expect that they'll both be pretty long.

And I will set aside time every week for prayers here at the church. You can join me if you want. The schedule will be different each week, but the times will be listed in the Events Calendar in the Announcements, so join me if you'd like as we together experience the dimensions of prayer.