

It never stops. What we mean by “it” can be just about anything! The rain never stops. The news never stops. The traffic never stops or rather the construction, crazy drivers, and accidents never stop. The constant movement and motion by everyone and everything is relentless. Just after Imelda hit, I wanted everything to stop for a couple of weeks just so we could catch our breath and catch up on all the things that got pushed to the back burner when water invaded our lives. And you would think that I got my wish when stay home orders were issued last spring. Except it seems that there was even more to do. Checking in, making new plans, scheduling trips to the grocery store – everything seemed to take longer not less time. It wasn’t that things stopped, rather it was simply different.

We’ve talked about the weariness that we all have. With the weather last week and the beginning of hurricane season on Tuesday we’re weary, and it hasn’t even started. Psalm 46 is best known for one line – “be still and know that I am God,” and while it is a great verse there is so much more to it than God simply telling us to be still. The Psalm begins telling us that God is our strength and refuge even when the earth is change; mountains crumbling to the sea and the water roaring and foaming.” It is chaos – something that we know about. But God isn’t telling us to be still and know yet. In fact, we get a word that we don’t understand.

Selah. It appears 74 times in scripture, 71 in the Psalms. It could mean several things. Most likely it is annotation for musicians that we do not for sure know something like – pay attention. Another theory is that it like refrain – meaning something is repeated here, most likely instrumental music. It could be similar to amen (which means so be it) as it shares understanding a root in Arabic or it could mean forever. Each of these are

possible. I am equally drawn to all of them in part because when I see it my mind and body intuitively pause, as if to take stock of what was said. And after the pause my mind goes back to a summary of what we learned about God – that God is our refuge even in the chaos – forever.

When I get stressed or anxious, I putter. I keep moving, trying to do what God has done, specifically putting order into chaos. And yet, while I do accomplish eliminating some nervous energy the end result is that I am more tired than when I started. I am inherently not good at taking refuge anywhere, I am always moving, always thinking, always figuring out what comes next. Do I have any fellow putterers here?

As we return to learn more about God, we see that God is in the city. God is in the hustle and bustle and yet God does not rush in to address whatever crisis is present. God will act but in the morning. God isn't reacting but taking time and choosing instead to respond. That is not to cause us concern. In fact, quite the opposite, God is with us and remains our refuge. In our previous sermon series of God in the Storm, we were reminded that when the storm was raging and the disciples were panicked, Jesus was asleep. We learned about ways to calm our hearts & minds through holding our breath or square breathing. Jesus asked the disciples why they had such little faith? They responded not with answers about their faith instead explaining the situation as if Jesus couldn't see it. Sometimes in our effort to manage the chaos we find ourselves in we spend energy that we do not have to. The psalms are making this same point that God is the refuge and, in the morning, will respond. We struggle either with moving immediately or not at all. We, as humans, don't seem to have a middle road in this regard. And yet God's word to us – refuge forever.

Finally, we get to the last stanza – where we get those beautiful words to be still and know that I am God. But before we get there, we hear what God will do, after assessing, resting and reflecting, bring peace. This isn't a passive peace either, God will make the war cease. God doesn't stop there but also “breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.” God is making the instruments of war useless. It is only after the instruments are destroyed that God tells us to be still and know.

All too often when we hear this passage, we have divorced it from the rest of the text. God is not simply commanding us to be passive, intellectual thinkers no matter the circumstances. In fact, God, acts and we know that we are expected to do so as well. The rest that we are being invited to comes only after we are fully rooted and grounded in who God is and who we are in God. God, not just in this psalm but throughout the whole of scripture is the creator and orchestrator of the universe. This does not mean that God is done creating nor does it mean that God is a puppet master. We seem to get lost in these thoughts. We hear all the time of God's plan for us, but it is not a static detailed plan of who is doing what with who. Rather, God's plan for all of creation is perfect unity with God expressed through God's grace and peace. This is the plan. The plan had been for us all to be in the Garden of Eden with God, but we knew better and have been separated from God in the broken creation we call home. Does this mean God has simply abandoned us? Not at all, in fact we see God's love and plan evolve when Jesus comes to earth, followed by the descent of the Holy Spirit. We even sing that God is immortal, invisible and alone is wise. God knows our thoughts before we think them, but God alone knows the outcome.

God's call in our lives to know and love God. That love then leads us to love each other. Through faithfully living these two commandments the world around us can change. But we cannot know God without reading & studying God's word, gathering together to worship, praying, sharing sacraments and being accountable to each other. We practice loving God and each other when we care for all those around us and beyond. When everyone eats, drinks, is clothed, safe, loved and in relationship with others – then we get a taste of what once was in the Garden and what will be again when Christ comes in final victory and we feast at the heavenly banquet.

In the following weeks we will look at what we know about God and how we know it. Then we will turn to look at the practice of being still so that when we put them together, we get a greater sense of the work that is before us as we work towards the promise of paradise. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.