

Jan 26 *Unafraid – Living with Courage and Hope*
“The Sky is Falling”

Psalm 46

One of my favorite Psalms is Psalm 46. Listen carefully again to a few of its words: “God is our refuge and strength, a help always near in times of great trouble. That’s why we won’t be afraid when the world falls apart, when the mountains crumble into the center of the sea... The LORD of heavenly forces is with us! The God of Jacob is our place of safety... Be still, and know that I am God!”

Think about what this means. If God is our refuge and strength then my peace and security, when the world seems to be coming apart at the seams and the sky seems to be falling, never comes from the our country’s policies, a certain political party or our armed forces, as important as these might be. My peace, in the midst of the storms of life, including political or financial firestorms, is found in God. The Psalm is a reminder to breathe deep. Don’t panic. The sky is not falling.

Do you remember the story of Henny Penny? An acorn falls on her head and she thinks the sky is falling. She tells her friends that the sky is falling and they must go and tell the king. In their fear, they are no longer thinking straight. Henny and the goose, duck, turkey and rooster meet up with a fox, who offers to show them a shortcut to the king’s house. Only the shortcut leads straight to the fox’s den. The fox and his family have a marvelous dinner except for Henny Penny who hears the last sounds of the rooster, believes it is morning and so turns to go home to her nest to lay her egg. She never does tell the king the sky is falling. To my way of thinking this is not a story for children. But the moral of the story is one we should pay attention to. When we’re led by fear we often make dreadful mistakes.

What experiences have you already had that made it feel as though the sky was falling? Do you remember a time where it seems your world was falling apart? Remember the fear you were experiencing and how, at that moment, you were moving forward more by instinct than anything else? You were not making your best choices. I am guessing that sometimes you were just like Henny Penny and ran around to all your friends and family and cried out about how your sky was falling. They commiserated with you and cried with you. In these moments, did you look to your faith in God to

provide you with a stable place to stand as everything else seemed to be crumbling? Today we are going to look at how to develop that trust.

Sometimes we say, with a wry smile, that in today's world "the only constant is change." But many times this idea brings us, not a smile, but deep-seated fear. In the Psalms, we find mention of the world falling apart, mountains crumbling and the sea (an ancient symbol of chaos and disorder) roaring and raging. But we also find the confidence that God is over all the changes that cause us fear. God is always our refuge and strength.

The psalms were positive that God was present with us at any time of fear. We need to appreciate the words of Psalm 46:10, "Be still." This does not refer to going to a quiet mountain retreat. It was a call to say "enough" to our noisy inner fears, and with them silenced, to recognize God as our place of safety. Think about the story of Henny Penny. If any of them had say "enough" to their noisy inner fears they would have understood that the sky was not falling. They would have quit running around afraid, and they would not have ended up as dinner for the foxes!

When it feels as if the sky is falling we have to quiet the voices. We have to take a deep breath, remember God is with us and step back for a moment from the situation. This does not mean the problem will go away but we will be able to deal with it better.

I see this often when people are in the midst of a health emergency. They are afraid, doctors and nurses keep stressing the need to make decisions and to do it quickly. Often they make instinctual choices and after many such decisions find they, or their loved ones, are in a place they never imagined. I think of a person who was clear that they never wanted to be kept alive by machines. They had a stroke and unintentionally their loved ones kept making incremental decisions that led to just that eventuality. They trusted that the physicians would give them only the information that was best and would not steer them wrong. They placed all their trust in the doctor and found that that trust, in part, was ill founded.

I think of another family in a similar situation who stopped the noise. They told the physician they were not ready to decide anything at that moment. The doctor again stressed that time was of the essence. The wife said, "God is with us and if it is my husband's time to be with God I am okay with that. I am not okay with being pushed to

make a decision before I am ready.” The family asked more questions, challenged the doctor to clarify what was happening, and what might happen, until they became clear what their choices could or would lead to and, because of this, refused further treatment.

Trusting that God is with you allows you to pause and say “enough” to the voices screaming, “The Sky is Falling.” It allows you to live unafraid. Trusting in God reminds you that outside sources, as important as they might be, are not always the best ones to listen to.

At the end of the Bible, in visions packed with symbols, Revelation proclaimed Jesus’ final triumph over evil. In the first century, for Christians, the persecuting Roman Empire was evil incarnate. The vision gave Jesus a double title— “Lord of Lords and King of Kings.” It echoed a title Caesar often claimed. Jesus was king, not just over “little people,” but over all other kings, even over Caesar. He was, and is, “our place of safety.” This is a reminder that God is ultimately in charge. This is why it is so valuable to build your trust in God today. The more we learn to trust God in little things now, the easier it will be to trust when everything seems to be falling apart. To live unafraid means pausing, taking a deep breath and listening for God, and to ask, “What is our ultimate source of security?” We also need to step back and realize that running around screaming the sky is falling will never solve anything.

The other thing this reminds me of is that sometimes we, or those around us, will fail at keeping grounded and centered. This is the time when we have to speak up for those who cannot speak up for themselves. It is a time for us to say “enough.” Sometimes it means stepping back a bit and letting them work on things for themselves instead of trying to fix things. It is a time to say, “The sky is not falling and once you figure that out I am willing to help you.” It is hard to do this for ourselves and even harder to say that to ones we love. Our faith allows us to have courage, and that courage calls us to speak up in love.

I recall a family where a loved one was dealing with addiction issues. They had tried everything to help. They had paid the bail to get them out of jail. They had sent them to treatment centers and more. They were filled with the fear of what ifs. You know what I mean. What might happen if they didn’t do something. Their child did not want

help and so their efforts ultimately were fruitless. They were running around screaming the sky is falling. Finally, they made the decision to step back. It was hard to watch their beloved child's life cycle down. But they trusted God was with them and with their child no matter what. I wish I could say it ended well. But their experience is what sometimes happens in life. The child overdosed one more time and could not be revived. As shattering as it was they realized God was with them in the situation. They had done what they could and their child was now with God. Trust in the goodness and power of God gave them the tools to go forward. They realized sometime later that what happened was likely to have happened whether they continued to expend financial and emotional capital on their child or not. The child did not want to help and that was hard to hear. The support of church and family gave them the emotional space to heal.

Yes, life will sometimes feel like the sky is falling. But God is stronger than anything you are facing. Take a deep breath and step back and listen for God. Place your trust in God. Step back from running around with others in their need and listen again. And know that no matter what is occurring God is with us and in that assurance we find that no matter what, God is faithful. And that is enough.