

"The LORD of Hosts is with Us"
Psalm 46:7
September 12, 2001
Service of Prayer and Supplication
Following the Terrorist Attacks of September 11, 2001
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church
Boise, Idaho
Pastor Tim Pauls

¹God *is* our refuge and strength,

A very present help in trouble.

²Therefore 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.

⁴*There is* a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God,
The holy *place* of the tabernacle of the Most High.

⁵God *is* in the midst of her, she shall not be moved;
God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.

⁶The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved;
He uttered His voice, the earth melted.

⁷The LORD of hosts *is* with us;
The God of Jacob *is* our refuge.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. It was the ongoing chorus of the people of God throughout the Old Testament. Even if they used different words, the theme was a constant refrain: *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

The people of God made this declaration with good reason, for they knew full well that they existed by the hand of the Lord. They were a nation because of Him, because the Lord of hosts had brought them out of Egypt. He had delivered them from Pharaoh's hand and fed them in the desert. He had led them into the Promised Land, delivering city after city into their charge. It was the God of Jacob who raised up David and declared him King of Israel; and it was during the kingship of David that the Lord granted them a lasting victory over their enemies, breaking the bow and shattering the spear of longtime foes who wanted them destroyed. Oh, in remembering such times of deliverance and victory, it was good and right to declare, *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

It was still the refrain of the people of God after the glory days, when so many in Israel turned away to idols. Following faithless kings, many Israelites bowed to worship false gods and place their trust in them; but when the Babylonian armies attacked, these false gods had no deliverance to offer. The walls of Jerusalem fell, the city was destroyed; and the righteous people of God suffered death or captivity right alongside the worst idolaters of the nation. But for the people of God, the cruelty of their captors only confirmed to them the consequences of sin for this world; and the contrast all the more proclaimed the faithfulness of the Lord despite the rebellion of so

many. Thus Jeremiah could write in his lamentation, “Through the Lord’s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is Your faithfulness” (Lam. 22-23). You see, the faithful refrain continued among the people of God. Even as they sat on the rivers of Babylon and wept at the indecency of evil, they could also say with confidence and hope: *The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.*

The chorus remained true into the New Testament. Never more true, in fact: For during the census of Caesar Augustus, the Lord of Hosts lay in a manger in Bethlehem, wrapped in swaddling cloths. Conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was born of the Virgin Mary and took on human flesh for one stark purpose: To redeem the world. Rather than turn His back on a world so torn and self-destructive from sin, God sent His only Son into the world, that the world might be saved through Him.

The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge. It was true at the manger, and it was true at the cross. He hardly looked the Lord of hosts that day on Calvary, but the God of Jacob hanged on that cross to redeem His people. On that day, the Lord was not content just to break the bow and shatter the spear; He broke the reign of sin and shattered the sting of death. He destroyed those enemies there, so that He might deliver all who believe in Him to everlasting life.

Oh, the victory didn’t look like much of a victory, right there, right then; the Lord of hosts looked like an executed criminal, nailed to wooden beams. But appearances deceive: The Lord of hosts is with us even on the most dark and dreadful days.

Three days later the Lord of hosts rose from the dead, proclaiming His victory to the world. He ascended into heaven, but not before promising that He will return in glory to judge the quick and the dead.

In the centuries since, one can look at history and note many wars, disasters and devastations. Christians have suffered within these along with all others. But throughout these centuries, the refrain continues: *The Lord of Hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.* For while the Lord is not present in all of His glory, He is certainly present with His all-sufficient grace. To the Christian’s cry in trouble, “Come quickly, Lord!”, He declares, “Here I Am—in My Word, in My Sacrament of Baptism, and in My Supper.” This presence of the Lord has always been the consolation of Christians as they wait His return; for as St. Paul notes in our epistle for this evening, we will encounter tribulation and distress, famine and persecution; but none of these can separate us from the love of Christ.

Because even in the darkest of days, *the Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our refuge.*

We speak of this refrain each Sunday as we speak of sin and grace. But the necessity of this truth becomes all the more important evident and, in some ways, all the more apparent on days like September 11, 2001. The images are shocking and will haunt the mind for a while to come. The rescue efforts continue even as we gather here, and have already been at great cost to the rescue workers. Statesmen and experts have announced that we have entered a new era of danger and called for us to stand firm as a nation. In the coming days, the heart-breaking stories of individual casualties will reach our ears, along with images of funerals and memorial services. Along with all of this, inevitably, the questions arise: Why did this happen? And where is God?

Dear friends, we have opportunity with all compassion make clear that the terrorist attacks upon our nation yesterday do not raise doubt of God's existence or love; rather, they confirm the Word of the Lord to be true, and they drive us to the Savior who, in love, has conquered death.

“Through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned,” declares the Word of God (Romans 5:12). The events leading up to yesterday's violence are complex, but at the root is this simple truth. Death is present in the world because of sin. Because of sinful rebellion against God, man follows his own selfish desires. He wants more than he is given and is jealous of his neighbor; he may even strike out against his neighbor to get what he has, or simply to deprive his neighbor of having more. This show of the sinful nature goes on in the preschool classroom; hideously magnified, it is played out by grown men in downtown Manhattan and Arlington, Virginia.

Sin and death seek to ravage this creation, and this elementary truth lies at the core of yesterday. God grant indeed that those events serve as a wake-up call: Not just about national security and the price of the freedoms we enjoy, but about the ever-present reality that death could be near to any of us at any time. God grant that many might therefore see their need for a Savior, for we do not know the day nor the hour that our soul will be required of us. Such is life in a sinful, dying world; and it is a testament to God's patience and mercy that this life and world remain, despite the sin—for only because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions are new every morning.

Apart from the Lord's mercy, this world is nothing but destruction. So declares the Law of the Lord. So confirm the events of yesterday.

While the events of yesterday confirm God's Word about sin and death, and our sinful hearts use these things to drive us to fear and despair, they certainly cannot deny God's Word of Gospel.

The destruction of these attacks upon our nation cannot change the fact that Christ has died for the sins of the world. The malice and terror of the perpetrators cannot alter the truth that He is risen from the dead. No matter the devil's dance, he cannot put the Lord back in the grave. The aftermath of yesterday and its own horrors cannot change the truth that the Lord of hosts is still with us, and the God of Jacob remains our refuge.

Do not for a moment believe that these acts of terror are somehow proof that God has forsaken this world; in fact, all the world would be engulfed in such things if the Lord did not hold them back for the sake of His people. And do not for a moment believe that God has forsaken His people who lie in the rubble of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. When they suffered at the hands of evil men, all this sinful world could give them was a tomb of cement and steel. But the Lord is risen from the dead, and He opens their tomb; He delivers His people to eternal life. They are wrenched away from their families now, it is true; but in their mourning, the comfort for their families is nothing less than the Lord's promise: *I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand* (John 10:28-28). You see, even when evil men and death tried to destroy God's people in the destruction of those buildings, the Lord of hosts was with them and the God of Jacob was their refuge. Not even this peril could separate them from the love of Christ. Though deprived of life here, those who trust in Christ live forever: Because Christ has died, Christ has conquered death, and Christ is with them.

This is the Gospel that sustains us, too: The Lord of hosts is with us, and the God of Jacob is our refuge. Death is always near, and it would destroy us today, if it could; but it cannot lay a finger upon us for the sake of Jesus, who has conquered this mortal enemy. And it will not lay a finger upon us until the Lord uses that conquered enemy to deliver us from this dying world to His kingdom of everlasting life. Until then, by His gracious provision, He sustains us and cares for us with His mercy and grace.

Sustained, we pray.

We pray, remembering the victims of these evil acts, and we give thanks to the Lord of Hosts that He has faithfully delivered all who trusted in Him for forgiveness and life.

We pray for their families and all who mourn, that the Lord would mercifully grant them peace in the midst of their grieving, and the hope of the resurrection.

We pray for our rulers and leaders, that they would care for the suffering and bear the sword in godly wisdom and virtue. We give thanks that, for the sake of Jesus, we remain a nation under God.

We pray for our rescue workers and military personnel, that the Lord would grant them safety in their service to our country.

We pray for our enemies, that they might be brought to justice—and that they might be brought to repentance.

We pray for all, that against this backdrop of darkness and smoke, they might see the radiant light of the Lord who has conquered death for them.

We pray this night—not with a feeling of impotence, as if we pray because we can't do anything more. No, we pray because the Lord promises to hear the prayers of His people; we pray, confident that our petitions arise before the throne of God. We pray, certain that our Father in heaven will hear our prayers and work all things for our good, because He has sacrificed His Son to hear us pray.

You see, in this dying world, nations rage and kingdoms are moved.
Not so the Lord: He utters His voice and the earth melts.
He utters His voice and His people are delivered.
He is as near as His Word.
The Lord of Hosts is with us.
The God of Jacob is our refuge.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen