

## **PSALM 46:1-11**

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 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.

## **JOHN 8:31-38**

Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free.” They answered him, “We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone. What do you mean by saying, ‘You will be made free?’”

Jesus replied, “Very truly, I tell you, everyone who commits sins is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed. I know that you are descendants of Abraham; yet you look for an opportunity to kill me because there is no place in you for my word. I declare what I have seen in the Father’s presence; as for you, you should do what you have heard from the Father.”

## **THE FLIP SIDE**

**Psalm 46:1-11**

**John 8:31-38**

In the grand scheme of things, 246 years is about a nanosecond in human history. Nevertheless, much has happened in that nanosecond since Independence from English rule was declared in 1776. The thirteen Colonies banded together and informed King George III they were no longer under his tutelage. That became the first symbolic shot fired in the War of Independence, the subsequent victory resulting in the official founding of the United States of America. It ended foreign domination gaining the Colonies freedom from subjugation and allowing a fledgling democracy to take root.

Today, we take our freedom for granted, of course. But freedom is like a coin with its one side, which we shall arbitrarily call “tails” signifying our external reality and the rights for freedom guaranteed by our laws and Constitution. The Flip Side, which we shall call “heads”, is a metaphor of our internal worlds that is a product of what occurs between our ears; that is, our thinking and our emotions. We know what freedom the law grants us in our activities and behavior. But the Flip Side of this coin is a whole other reality. And there is often a tension between the “heads” and the “tails” which create faith issues worthy of exploration on this long

Independence Day weekend.

Let's get clarity by starting with our Psalm for this morning. The world outside of ourselves, the "tails" side of the coin, mirrors our world. Listen again to the first two verses: *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.*

How much trouble do we have out there? How many Palestinians were killed yesterday by Israeli missiles? How many Hamas hostages are already dead; how many still in captivity? How many drones and missiles were traded by Russian and Ukrainian forces? How many violent storms and heat waves fueled by our warming climate have amplified human suffering and property damage in just the last week? And what about the increasing pressure closing in on all of us like a vice as November's election draws closer? And let's not forget about AI which is already altering our worlds behind the scenes. It is largely unregulated and has the potential to literally end human existence.

Which of us can claim immunity to feeling angry, disillusioned, disgusted or fearful over what is occurring in the outer world? Do we have freedom from its influence? If we think we do, we are fooling ourselves.

That's the "tails" of the coin—the world as it is.

So now let's Flip the coin to the "heads" side and think for a moment about our internal sense of freedom. As I reflect upon my inner personal world, I find a mixed bag. On the one hand, I feel very grateful. In the prior two years I dealt with some health issues undergoing bilateral hernia surgery in '22 and hospitalized with Afib last August. But this year—outside of muscle aches and pains created by my overactive lifestyle—I feel much better. My wife is also healthy, our marriage is strong, our children and grandchildren are all doing well, my garden is the best it has ever been and we are financially stable. Things can change quickly, of course—and they do—but I have much to be thankful for.

But on the other hand, there is a darker side between my ears. For I am very concerned about where our country and our world are headed. What is it going to look like when my grandchildren reach my age? We just never seem to learn, repeating history over and over. I worry about it. And I imagine you do too. *The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter.*

It is how we process all of this that is critical and how do we this in faith? Fortunately, the Psalmist leads us to the answer: *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.* The author expresses what is obvious—that history making outside of us is unpredictable and frequently violent. But he invites to go within and seek refuge from the resulting tumult.

Inside—between our ears—is where true freedom is to be found—that space where the Spirit resides within us. We cannot be tethered to events outside of our control. As Jesus said to the Jews who believed in him, *If you continue in my word...you will know the truth and truth shall make you free.* Of course, his audience is puzzled wanting to know what he means since no one has ever enslaved them. But they are only looking at “tails” side of the equation where we often get stuck.

Jesus Flips the Coin and shows them the other “heads” side. *Everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the Son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.* And once more we are speaking of our internal worlds. How much space do we leave in our mental households for the Spirit? How much power do we give to our faith? If we allow fearful, angry, hateful thoughts to encamp in our inner living rooms, we will become their unwitting slaves. Who do we want to allow to party in there—between our ears? That is the spiritual question

for us on Independence Day. Embrace true freedom: *Be still  
always...and know that I am God.*

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