



Ascension Lutheran Church

Reformation Sunday, October 26, 2025
Psalm 46 / John 8:31-36

Rev. Paul D. Erickson, Bishop
Greater Milwaukee Synod

Psalm 46: God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved, and though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea; though its waters rage and foam, and 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 shaken; God shall help it at the break of day. The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake; God speaks, and the earth melts away. The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold. Come now, regard the works of the Lord, what desolations God has brought upon the earth; behold the one who makes war to cease in all the world; who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire. "Be still, then, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth." The Lord of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our stronghold.

Grace to you and peace, from God, our rock, our redeemer, and our guide; amen.

I'm so glad to be able to be with you on this Reformation Sunday as you join together in worship, in prayer, and in witness. Especially as you celebrate the affirmation of baptism for several young people in your faith community, I pray that we can all work together as we walk together, seeking to fulfill our synod's mission statement: We follow Jesus, building communities of justice, love, and mercy. I'm grateful for all the ways that you are engaged in this mission in this community, and, through our global partnerships, around the world, and I look forward to walking with you as together we discover the future that God is inviting us into.

It's becoming increasingly clear that the future that God is inviting us into will be quite different from our past, and even our present. Change is all around us, in our nation, our world, our congregations, and our communities. We don't know what life will be like in the weeks, months, and years to come, and so we don't even know how to prepare for it all, especially in these days of constant chaos and turbulence. In such times, when everything around us seems fluid and unstable, it makes sense that we might seek something firm to hold on to. We may look to our traditions, our heritage, our familiar patterns and practices as refuges against the swirling change all around us, but if we look at Psalm 46, we will be reminded that God is the only source of strength and stability. Nothing else can be counted on; nothing. "The nations are in an uproar, the kingdoms totter; he utters his voice, the earth melts."

And yet, the image that God lifts up in the middle of the crumbling city, that which the psalmist says makes glad God's heart, is not some kind of rock, or anchor, or some other firm and immovable object, it's a river. The psalmist writes, "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy habitation of the Most High." But of course, a river is the exact opposite of something firm and stable, for the river is always changing. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said that "you can't step into the same river twice."

What would it look like if, instead of understanding our Lutheran identity as a mighty fortress, we began to see it as a healing river? A river that flows to us from elsewhere and passes through us to something greater than we ourselves can imagine? Especially here, in this synod, named for Milwaukee, which means in the Potawatomi language, the gathering place by the waters, we celebrate the various rivers that shape our lives and connect us



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all. I'm sure there have been times when these waters have been polluted or ignored, and the life and future of these rivers may at times be in question. But the rivers flow on, and while no river is the same two days in a row, their life continues, and the gather the waters that fall from the sky, they wind through and connect many different communities, and they bring life, and hope, and healing wherever they flow.

My prayer for the church, this Reformation Sunday and always, is that we might look for ways to be less like the mighty fortress and more like the healing river, gathering the resources that God showers down upon us, connecting people from all ages and classes and cultures and races and identities, and bringing life, and healing and hope to the world. Communities, congregations, and nations will continue to rise and fall, but the grace and love and mercy of God will flow on forever, and in this and only this can we place our trust. Thanks be to God; amen.