

Reformation Weekend 2022: 10th Anniversary of Sandy: Psalm 46, Gratitude & Generosity

Psalm 46

October 29, 2022

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church, Manasquan, NJ

We start with Show & Tell today: this is the picture that hangs to the right of the Dutch door that leads into our Holy Trinity office space on the first floor. It's a framed kerchief our Synod gave us after Superstorm Sandy. Superimposed on it is the satellite image of Sandy swirling over the Garden State; entwined among the rings of the storm are the words of Psalm 46, the inspiration for Martin Luther's hymn, *A Mighty Fortress*, and always the assigned psalm for Reformation worship. Reformation **Day** is October 31st (the day in 1517 when Luther posted his 95 theses, 95 points of debate, on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg). Reformation **weekend** is always the last weekend in October. Reformation Sunday fell on October 28 in 2012, ten years ago, as we were bracing for Sandy to make landfall the next day. If you lived here at that time, you surely remember that Manasquan looked like the bull's eye on the weather forecasting map. Given the superstorm's proximity to Halloween, there were all kinds of references to the Frankenstorm barreling our way, shaping up to be the "perfect storm," combining hundred-mile-an-hour winds with warm ocean temps, a cold front up north to prevent the storm from going out to sea, a snowstorm coming in from the west, a full moon and a high tide....

Not quite knowing what to expect, we heard the choir sing:

*¹God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.*

*²Therefore we will not fear, though the earth be moved,
and though the mountains shake in the depths of the sea;*

*³though its waters rage and foam,
and though the mountains tremble with its tumult.*

The imagery was spot on. Our fear was named. Our faith was claimed. By God's grace we endured.

As it turned out, the storm was 900 miles wide. 90% of the Shore was left without power (3 million overall in NJ). We regained electricity here after 12 days. For others it took over 2 weeks. There were 40 deaths in NJ. The morning after the storm, Tues., Oct. 30, 60% of the structures east of Main St. here in Manasquan were damaged. First responder cars parked in Abe Voorhees Plaza by the Post Office

were destroyed. The water came further inland than anyone expected. The water levels in the Glimmer Glass and Stockton Lake were the same as in the ocean. It cost 7 million dollars simply for the removal of debris in Manasquan.

Pastor Mark went across the street from the parsonage to the church to retrieve the small generator. A large tree branch snapped off in the cemetery and almost flattened him. By God's grace, it didn't. We spent the night of the storm in the parsonage basement, but were grateful to suffer no damage this far from the beach. What do you remember??

The narrative below the kerchief in our Sandy picture includes the beginning of Psalm 46 and also these words of gratitude:

We give thanks for all who have worked to alleviate the suffering wrought by the storm, including individual volunteers, members of MOVE (Manasquan Organization of Volunteer Efforts), the Furniture Bank, the Linen & Kitchen Brigade. The storm washed us out of the sanctuary and into the community. Thanks be to God!

We remember with gratitude and fondness our friends from St. John's Lutheran Church, Phoenix, MD and from St. Peter Evangelical Lutheran Church, Southport, NC. Their spiritual support and material assistance have lightened our burden and gladdened our hearts.

May we always remember the "gifts given" to us during our community's time of need. In grateful remembrance, with deep gratitude to God and to those who have supported us along the Way, our Council has designated all of this year's Thanksgiving offering for Hurricane Ian relief.

Sandy's flood waters swept us out of this sanctuary and into the surrounding neighborhood. The Furniture Bank and Kitchen & Linen Brigades were born then and thrive still. Now it's not storm surge that keeps our worker bees busy: it's fire, illness, joblessness, homelessness, poverty. The beauty and the power of this outreach reminds us that the refuge and strength God offers is often routed through God's people. Fears are dispelled when someone, anyone cares. When the caring someone happens to be from a church, we can only hope that those on the receiving end realize God is answering their prayer through

other human beings. As our signboard proclaimed in the aftermath of Sandy, with snow on the ground: "GOD BRINGS SOLACE, NOT THE STORM." And often God comforts through God's people, through us.

Psalm 46 is all about the courage God's people experience when they remember that the loving God is present in power. The paraphrase from *The Message* puts it this way:

*We stand fearless at the cliff-edge of doom,
courageous in seastorm and earthquake,
before the rush and roar of oceans,
the tremors that shift mountains.*

"A Mighty Fortress" is all about the courage that Christians experience when we remember that our Savior, Jesus Christ, is present in power.

In the Gospel our Savior says:

"... if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed." (John 8:36)

"Therefore we will not fear...." The Superstorm of our sin is calmed by the One who died that we might live. No spiritual tumult, no pandemic, no politics, no civil unrest will unravel our faith in God who *"is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."* If we're finding it hard to hold onto the peace that passes understanding that is the Holy Spirit's gift, let's make our mantra another beautiful verse from Psalm 46:

Be still... and know that I am God.

Amen

Pastor Mary Virginia Farnham