

“Security in an Insecure World”—Psalm 125

Those who trust in the LORD are like Mount Zion,
which cannot be moved, but abides forever.
As the mountains surround Jerusalem,
so the LORD surrounds his people,
from this time on and forevermore.
For the scepter of wickedness shall not rest
on the land allotted to the righteous,
so that the righteous might not stretch out
their hands to do wrong.
Do good, O LORD, to those who are good,
and to those who are upright in their hearts.
But those who turn aside to their own crooked ways
the LORD will lead away with evildoers.
Peace be upon Israel!

It goes without saying, but I’ll say it anyway.
We live in an insecure world.
In fact, I’ll go one better.
We live in a culture of fear.

Now, we’ve been through fearful times before, but this time seems different. And perhaps that’s because its beginning can be traced to a specific date: September 11, 2001, the date of the terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania. Since that day we’ve been concerned, and rightly so, about other attacks. But, beginning that day, we became automatically and, dare I say, prejudicially suspicious of people of a certain ethnic and religious background. And that made it easier for us to be automatically and prejudicially suspicious of people of other particular ethnic backgrounds.

Add to that the number of mass shootings over the past several years, a few of which have occurred in churches. So we’ve cast around for how to prevent these tragedies from happening—but, for some churches, the solution has been to turn the church into an armed fortress where people shoot first and ask questions later. Now, I’m all in favor of prudence—I’m all in favor of due caution; but I also believe that there has to be a balance between protecting ourselves and staying true to the mission of the church, the mission of making disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the community and the world.

Now, our politicians have had a field day playing on our fears. One side says that we have to be afraid of those who aren’t like us, because they’re out to take our jobs and kill us—and, by the way, we also need to be afraid of the guys and

gals on the other side who are molly-coddling those who want to take our jobs and kill us. The guys and gals on that other side of the aisle tell us, however, that those we really need to be afraid of are the ones who are saying we need to be afraid of the people who want to take our jobs and kill us. Both sides, however, are pandering to our fears.

Back in the 1960s, a group named Buffalo Springfield recorded a song called “For What It’s Worth,” written, I believe, by Stephen Stills. There’s one stanza, along with the refrain, that may say something about where we are today:

Paranoia strikes deep.
Into your life it will creep.
It starts when you’re always afraid—
Step out of line, the man comes and takes you away.
I think it’s time we stop, children, what’s that sound?
Everybody look at what’s going down.
I think it’s time we stop, hey, what’s that sound?
Everybody look at what’s going down.

Now, you are free to disagree with my little analysis, and I doubt that I’ve changed or will change anybody’s mind about anything, but I’ve come to believe that we really do live in a culture of fear—and that we crave, now more than ever, security in an insecure world.

So can we find it? Can we be secure in an insecure world?

I believe we can—but I believe that that security doesn’t lie in Smith and Wesson or Glock, and it doesn’t lie in elephants or donkeys, and it doesn’t in walls and barriers. In the midst of the insecurity and uncertainty in which we live, this much is sure and certain—and if anything of what I’m about to say sounds familiar, feel free to *not* act like a Methodist; feel free to jump in and say it with me:

“For God so loved the world the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through him might be saved.”

Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but by me.”

Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, yet shall they live, and whoever lives and believes in me shall never die.”

Jesus said, “I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. I died, and behold, I am alive for evermore, and I hold the keys of hell and death.”

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.
He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.
Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.”

“The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and was manifested in the flesh, vindicated in the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed in throughout the world, taken up in glory.”

“Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

“I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

I could go on like this for hours—but do you get it? If you haven't yet, here it is: that in the midst of all that causes us uncertainty and insecurity in our lives, in the world, and in the church, there are three things (which are really one thing) that are certain and sure, three things (which are really one thing) that have always

been, always are, and always will be, three things (which are really one thing) in which we must dwell secure and certain for now and forever. They are:

The love of God our Father;
The saving grace of Jesus; and
the transforming and enlivening power of the Holy Spirit.

You see, ours is the God who can be trusted; ours is the God who has never ever broken a promise; ours is the God who loves us and never gives up on us even when we don't love him or turn our backs on him; ours is the God who has triumphed in Jesus over sin and death; ours is the God who has made for himself a people to share his love with one another and with the lost and broken and hurting and dying people in this lost and broken and hurting and dying world; ours is the God whose kingdom is forever. Ours is the God who is our security in this insecure world.

You see, the real challenge for us is not whether we're going to lose what we have or even our lives—the real challenge is whether or not we're going to lose the one thing about ourselves that is eternal, and that is our souls. And that will surely happen if we allow this culture of fear, this paranoia, to consume us so that our trust is in *things* and *people* rather than in the God who has made his love for us as our Father real in his Son and his Spirit.

So it really matters very little to me whether or not you carry a weapon—what matters to me is that your trust is in the Lord, and that he has the ultimate allegiance in your life. It really matters very little to me what your political leanings are—what matters to me is that your allegiance ultimately is not to the elephant or to the donkey, but to the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world. And I really don't care whether or not you favor walls and barriers and restrictive laws—what matters to me is that you choose to live by the laws God has given us: that we love him with all that we are and all that we have; that we love our neighbors as ourselves; and that we love one another in the church with self-sacrificing, self-giving love, the way Jesus loves us.

I keep going back to Martin Luther's great hymn, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," because the first and the last lines speak to me, at least, about security in this insecure world. The hymn begins:

A mighty fortress is our God,
A bulwark never failing;
Our helper he amid the flood
Of mortal ills prevailing.

And it ends on these lines:

Let goods and kindred go,
This mortal life also;
The body they may kill;
God's truth abideth still.
His kingdom is forever!

What the future holds, I don't know. But I don't have to know what the future is—what I have to know is that the God who holds all of our yesterdays, todays, and tomorrows in his hands is with us always. What I have to know is that, even if everyone else in this world fails us, there is still One who will comfort us, who will carry us, and who will see us through. What I have to know is that it's *God's* future we're really seeking, and if we're willing to follow him, with imagination and courage and, most importantly, hope, we'll arrive where he wants us to go. What you and I have to know as we face today and tomorrow is that, come what may, the Lord our God, who has made himself known to us as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, is our security in an insecure world. Thanks be to God!