

**QUIET IN THE MIDST OF CHAOS**  
**Psalm 46**

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**Amarillo, Texas**  
**June 16, 2024**

The dog is barking. When will he stop that incessant barking? Yip, yip, yip.

The baby is crying – no, screaming bloody murder. When will she stop her crying?

Both the cell phone and the doorbell are ringing at the same time. The TV is two notches too loud. And the teenager is in his room blasting what he calls music and we call noise pollution. The walls are vibrating from his subwoofer.

An article in *Omni* magazine actually reports a startling claim. **The noise level in America is increasing at a rate of 1 percent per year or better – and we have the makings of a major health problem. The EPA estimates that 40 percent of the U.S. population is exposed to enough noise to cause permanent hearing loss. We live in a striving, noisy world. Exposure to noise raises blood pressure, brings about stress. Electric devices are actually being made by a German audio firm, Sennheisser, that meet sound and zap it before it gets to you. (*Omni*, February 1994)**

In the midst of the noise and the chaos, the barking and the crying, the ringing and the pounding, you want to hear the voice of God. You want to hear “Quiet, please.” You want to be still and know God.

We live in a noisy world. Can you hear the voice of God?

Psalm 46 – “Be still and know that I am God” – is a call for quiet in the midst of our chaos. It’s a call to relax and ease the stress that buzzes noisily about us.

**I. THE PSALMIST SPEAKS OF THE REASSERTION OF CHAOS (v. 1-3).**

We speak naively of terra firma. It isn’t. Geologists have discovered that the continents are actually afloat, continuing to be built and changed by moving plates. Volcanoes are the earth’s heat vents lying near the plate perimeters which are also earthquake-prone. What we have then is a dynamic, living, changing planet set in an exploding, expanding universe. Creation, as pictured by deists like a clock that has been wound up and left to tick along on its own, just doesn’t work. In fact, creation is a great drama that seethes with the unexpected but has a meaningful purpose that will reach culmination.

The Psalmist, in Psalm 46, these first 3 verses describes the world exactly this way. The earth cannot be our fixed position. The Psalmist is describing a time when chaos, when evil seeks to

reassert its primacy over both the natural world and in the world of human affairs. This is a noisy, hectic, chaotic disastrous scene. The earth is quaking. Mountains are slipping into the sea. The sea, so often in ancient texts, represents the watery chaos. Tidal waves roar in foam. It's the language of the Hebrew prophets. Chaos in nature and in human affairs – not yet fully subdued – still trying to reassert itself. God Himself had acted before – God's good order had already emerged from primeval chaos.

You remember, in Genesis 1:1-2. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And the earth was formless and void and darkness was over the surface of the deep and the spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters. Notice verse 2.

## **II. WE WILL NOT FEAR (v. 1-3, 4-7)**

Since God is our refuge and strength, the very present help in trouble, we won't fear even though chaos should seek to reassert itself in our lives. God has been in the business from the beginning of making order out of chaos and, so, we don't have to be fearful.

Though the foundation of creation itself should shake and warp, we don't have to fear. We can't know what circumstances in the life of the Psalmist prompted the Psalm to rush from his heart. Was there an enemy – an individual – a nation – that seemed to hold the upper hand? Was there a catastrophe in his own personal life? I don't know, we can't be sure, but whatever was happening to him he likened it unto a crashing of order, peace, and control in his life.

Some of you here this morning are at that very stage today. It seems as if your very world is coming unraveled. Nothing seems certain to you any longer, even the mountains of life seem to be slipping away. The tidal waves are roaring and crashing, the earth quakes! Maybe it's a relationship in your life. A relationship with a husband or a wife. A relationship with a child or parent. A struggle to be a single parent. A struggle to care for an aging mother or an aging father. At the very moment that you thought that at least you had your life in order then you can't even be certain of the ground underneath your feet – the terra firma. The Psalmist's depiction of the world is your depiction of the world.

But even as the Psalmist saw the uncertainty of his life, he saw the certainty of God. The certainty of God's availability to stay the course. It was as if he weighed the evidence in the balance. The power of chaos – of water, of darkness, of earthquakes or volcanoes – and the power of God. He measured them with care and declared with confidence – we will not fear. God is our refuge. That means God is our shelter. God is our strength. That is, his might is exerted against His foes. Thus God both protects us as our shelter and fights for us. He is both our shield and our sword for He is always with us – a very present help in trouble.

The word for "trouble" here means distress, cramped quarters, constricted feeling. God is here to help when the pressure mounts – when the world closes in upon us. So, the confession comes from the Psalmist and from our own lips, therefore, we will not fear. Our fear is gone because of the provision of the presence of God. Hurricane and tidal wave cannot touch us and neither can earthquake or avalanche. Through it all God, the Creator and Sustainer of this lively planet holds us fast.

Next, verses 4-7. A reassurance of God's presence and power. With God the waters are no longer life-menacing seas but a life-giving river. The picture of God's help as the quiet water supply of the besieged. (Isaiah 8:6). Over against the watery chaos is God's river, the perennial stream watering Zion is the river of God's mercy and His spirit and it makes His people glad. In the midst of God's city, there is the Tabernacle of The Most High. God is in the midst of her as she shall not be moved. He is her stability. Moreover, when the sun rises and the nations march into battle, God was Jerusalem's security. He need only utter his voice and the whole earth will melt. God is our stability and our security. While all else is moving, the city of God will not be moved though the kingdoms tottered, the city of God is steadfast. Just as His voice was decisive in the formation of the world, His voice will be decisive in dissolving the world.

### **III. BE STILL AND KNOW THAT I AM GOD.**

Look at verses 8-11. "Be still and know that I am God." This is a vision of things finally to come, although the victories of the present are a foretaste of them. The word for behold is generally used for seeing with the inward eye, as a "seer" or prophet sees. Although the outcome is peace, the process is judgment. The reassuring words, "He makes wars cease..." are set in a context not of gentle persuasion but of a world devastated and forcibly disarmed. This sequence, with tranquility on the far side of judgment, agrees with Old Testament prophecy and apocalypse, and with the New Testament. (e.g., Isaiah 6:10-13; 9:5, Daniel 12:1, 2 Peter 3:12 and forward).

So, too, the injunction, "Be still..." is not, in the first place, comfort for the harassed but a rebuke to a restless and turbulent world. "Quiet!" – in fact, "leave off!" might be a better translation. It resembles the command of Jesus to another raging sea: "Peace! Be still!"

Cease striving.

Who among us can't identify with the Psalmist here? If we could identify with this crumbling world, how much more his striving restlessness?

Do you remember sister Corita Kent, the famous little nun who made posters and became known as a kind of leader of worship around the country? Years ago John Killinger, pastor/professor, was at Vanderbilt University to chair "a worship season," he wrote a letter to sister Corita to ask if she would come and lead the worship services during this special emphasis.

In a few days, a postcard came addressed to Killinger. On the other side of the post card it simply read, "Dear, I am trying to be quiet. S. Corita." Killinger assumed she meant that she wouldn't come. He didn't call her or write her to ask.

Nobody wants to let his or her life slip away in wasted moments though much of the time what we call wasted may be the richest and most productive of all. On the rare occasions when we allow ourselves a long soak in the tub, we often emerge dripping with ideas. A pointless afternoon poking around town can reap surprising rewards – from etchings to inspirations, and always a replenished store of images, understandings, and ideas. The pleasure that lingers afterward is alone well worth the investment. The experience and its memory are well worth the price.

What's your hurry?

We have lost the art of being still – of being quiet. We can't dare to wait and I'm the worst of all. Did you know that there's even a high-tech frosting that can be used on a cake so you don't have to wait for the cake to cool? We don't even have time for cakes to cool anymore.

We are in a hurry to get home at night, so we can go to bed early, so we can get up for work, so we can go home again. We spend the weekend trying to get a jump on the week ahead. We are so oriented to the future, that we don't live for a moment in the present.

Be still and know that I am God!

Erma Bombeck wrote these words:

**“Someone asked me the other day if I had my life to live over would I change anything? My answer was no, but then I thought about it and changed my mind. If I had my life to live over again, I would have waxed less and listened more.**

**“Instead of wishing away nine months of pregnancy and complaining about the shadow over my feet, I'd have cherished every minute of it and realized that the wonderment growing inside me was to be my only chance in life to assist God in a miracle.**

**“I would never have insisted the car windows be rolled up on a summer day because my hair had just been teased and sprayed.**

**“I would have invited a friend over to dinner even if the carpet was stained and the sofa faded.**

**“I would have eaten popcorn in the ‘good’ living room and worried much less about the dirt when you lit the fireplace.**

**“I would have taken the time to listen to my Grandfather ramble about his long-ago youth.**

**“I would have burnt the pink candle sculptured like a rose before it melted while being stored.**

**“I would have sat cross-legged on the lawn with my children and never worried about grass stains.**

**“I would have cried and laughed less while watching television . . . and more while watching real life.**

**“I would have shared more of the responsibility carried by my husband which I took for granted.**

**“I would have gone to bed when I was sick instead of pretending the Earth would go into a holding pattern if I weren’t there for the day.**

**“I would never have bought anything just because it was practical/wouldn’t show soil/was guaranteed to last a lifetime.**

**“When my child kissed me impetuously, I would never have said, ‘Later. Now go get washed up for dinner.’**

**“There would have been more I love yous ... more I’m sorry’s ... more I’m listenings ... but mostly, given another shot at life, I would seize every minute of it ... look at it and really see it ... try it on... live it ... exhaust it ... and never give that minute back until there was nothing left of it...”**

When we can never stop to smell the roses, we become mechanical. So rushed. Why, when we pull into the driveway, must we hustle our children out of the car? so what if they want to piddle – we’re home – but the sense of rush, a sense of striving has become so much the norm that we don’t even question it.

Be still! “Leave off,” says the Psalmist. Take time to know that I am God. God brings that direct prophetic word and as He brings peace to the earth, so He brings peace to the heart. We can experience now that reality – Be still and know that I am God.

To know that God is God is to experience Him in the quiet of our hearts. This is relational, not merely theological, knowledge. It is letting God’s peace settle down upon us. It is knowing Him as our security and stability in the storm. Be still and know that I am God.

**America – the country of shortcuts and fast lanes. We’re the only nation on earth with a mountain called “Rushmore.” Time – according to pollster Louis Harris – may have become “the most precious commodity in the land.” Do we really have less time or is it just our imagination?**

**In 1965, in testimony before a Senate subcommittee, it was claimed that the future looked bright for free time in America. “By 1985,” predicted the report, “Americans would be working 22 hours a week and would be able to retire at age 38. The reason for this reduced work week is the advancement of computers in our country. They will do everything for us.”**

[Now AI is supposed to be the new savior. It will disappoint, too!]

**The truth is, the average leisure time has shrunk 37 percent since 1973. The average work week has increased from 41 to 47 hours. Why didn’t the forecast come true? What did the Committee overlook? They misjudged the appetite of us as consumers. As the individualism of the ‘60’s led to the materialism of the ‘80’s, the free time gained for us by technology didn’t make us relax, it made us run. Gadgets provided more time – more time meant more potential money – more potential money meant more time needed – and around, and around**

**it went. Lives grew louder as demands became greater. And as demands became greater, lives grew emptier.**

Leave off! Be still and know that I am God.

Listen to the words of God. “Be still ... cease striving ... leave off ... be quiet ... and know that I am God.” Notice as he continues. “Cease striving and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted in the earth.” The word for exalted means to be lifted up, to be raised high. We think of a victorious coach being carried away from the field by his team receiving the praise of the fans. God will be raised high and both creation and history will bow to His sovereign will and give him glory. We know that this will take place when Christ returns to manifest the fullness of God’s kingdom. As Philippians says in chapter 2, “every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God.”

The Psalm ends with a repetition of verse 7 – almost like a refrain. Is God big enough to deal with our personal problems? Is He big enough to deal with the crises that we face in our world? The God of Psalm 46 commands angelic hosts – volatile nature, expanding creation, historical chaos, wars, and rumors of wars. He is the Lord of many. The Lord of hosts. He’s going to be exalted in the earth.

Some of us come today needing to be reassured of the power of the Almighty. We are stressed out. We haven’t taken the time to know the power of God. You know, life does take its toll. **In the early 1900’s the top 10 killers of humankind in the United States were all infectious diseases. [Now], it is estimated that the top 10 killers of humankind are all stress-related diseases. “Most illnesses do not, as generally thought, come like a bolt out of the blue. The ground is prepared for years through faulty diet, intemperance, over work, moral conflicts, slowly eroding the subject’s vitality. Man does not die, he kills himself. Every act of physical, psychological, or moral disobedience of God’s purpose is an act of wrong living and has its inevitable consequences.”**

Lord, ease the pounding of my heart with the quieting of my mind. Steady my hurried pace with the vision of the eternal reach of time. Give me, amid the confusion of the day, the calmness of the everlasting hills. Make the tension of my nerves and muscles fade with the soothing of the singing streams that live in my memory. Help me to know the magical restoring power of sleep. Teach me the art of taking minute vacations, of slowing down to look at a flower, to chat with a friend, to pat a dog, to read a good book. Remind me each day of the fable of the hare and the tortoise that I may know that the race is not always to the swift but there’s more to life than its increasing speed. Let me look upward to the branches of the towering oak and know that it grew great and strong because it grew slowly and well. Slow me down Lord. Inspire me to send my roots deep into the soil of life’s enduring values that I may grow toward Your will for me.

**In *The Phantom Tollbooth* by Norton Juster there existed a city named Reality. For many years it had been a lovely town, full of bright and wonderful spaces, and all its citizens took time to enjoy their home and to revel in its beauty. One terrible day someone discovered that if they kept their head down and walked as fast as possible they could arrive at their destination much sooner. Before long, other people started imitating this one person’s style**

**of commuting, and soon the entire population of Reality rushed around without pausing to rest or take in the view. They didn't even notice when Reality disappeared. The city, saddened by the lack of attention it was receiving, just faded away, and its inhabitants never even paused to note its passing, they kept on rushing about taking care of business.**

We need to be careful. Not that the city's going to fade away but that our relationship to God will fade if we don't take the time to stop to know Him and to know His world.

Rushing, haste, dashing, accelerating, expediting, scrambling, living life at a breathless speed – to us the Psalmist says, “Quiet, please. Be still and know that I am God.”