

Shape. Deter. Respond. The new catch-phrase resetting our defence priorities in the light of the pandemic that has reached across our globe. \$270 billion dollars is to be committed to shoring up Australia's defences in the Asia-Pacific.

The figure is almost eye-watering. The Prime Minister warn us that our region has become increasingly unstable since the impact of Covid-19. World powers are flexing their muscle and displaying their might.

I wonder whether the announcement made you feel more secure? Do you feel better today now that your government has a strategy to protect the nation?

What makes you feel safer and more secure in an increasingly fragile and unstable world? Where is your refuge? Where do you seek help? Who is your fortress?

It's the question Psalm 46 raises as we consider the fourth week in our series on Understanding the times. This week. Understanding our Planet.

Unmistakeably this is a Psalm about the refuge God provides. V 1:

Read v 1

Again in v 7. And v 11.

The Lord Almighty is with us

When you consider the state of our planet, what is that shakes your confidence?

Is it when creation itself becomes a threat?

A virus we can't even see tracks its unpredictable path throughout the globe. Bringing chaos and confusion.

A drought that sucks the life out of the land. A bushfire that consumes all in its path.

What is that shakes your confidence?

Is it when history fails us? Kingdoms rise and fall? Nations vying for power and position. Leaders who rule via Twitter feeds.

Or maybe it's more personal? Your confidence has been shaken by someone or some institution that has let you down. The church has to own up to that one.

Psalm 46 promises a place where you can go. When creation falls apart. Or when history, or perhaps we should say humanity, fails us.

When can track a path through the riches of this Psalm in three steps:

1. God's refuge when creation falls apart (vv 1-3)
2. God's refuge when history fails us (vv 4-7)
3. God's refuge when both creation falls apart and history fails us (vv 8-11)

Firstly, God's refuge when creation falls apart.

If you word-search the bible for virus. Or pandemic. Or contagion. You'll get no hits. Illness and disease bring better results.

What does the bible have to say when creation itself becomes a threat to its inhabitants?

The author of this Psalm speaks also of natural disasters. V 2:

Read vv 2-3

The forces of nature are never quite subdued. They threaten the order we strive for. Never more have we understood that than these present times.

I had to do a double-take when the Premier said this week, when trying to encourage continued caution in our behaviour, to act as if every other person has Covid-19.

Nothing like a message of hope in troubled times!

Note how this author counsels us when it comes to the fallen creation. The first five words of v 2:

Therefore we will not fear

The very first words of the bible explain that God's creation brought order out of chaos. God declared what he had made was very good. Fit for purpose.

Yet we desired to enjoy the blessings of creation without God. Or as Romans 1 puts it more bluntly: to worship the creation rather than the creator.

As a result of our desire for self-rule, creation has been frustrated by God himself. We can read about the curses placed upon it in Genesis 3.

But the now fallen state of creation is no more outside God's plans than his original intention. God frustrated the creation for two reasons.

Firstly, that we might understand that it is his creation. We should not seek to understand our planet outside his sovereign and sustaining power.

Secondly, that we might look forward to its restoration. Romans 8:21 reminds us that the creation itself will at a future point be liberated from its decay.

There will not always be viruses. Earthquakes. Floods. Famine. Drought. Cancer. Dementia. MS. Chronic Fatigue.

Throughout history God exhibits his rule over creation to remind us of his purposes. Israel is rescued out of slavery through the parting of the sea.

And at the climax of God's plans and purposes in the death and resurrection of his Son, darkness covers the earth during the day. While an earthquake opens the tombs as the dead are raised to life.

In the midst of a fallen creation God is our refuge and strength. An ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.

For secondly, God is a refuge when history fails us.

V 4 begins to reveal what the refuge God promises looks like:

Read vv 4-5

What makes this location secure? The river whose streams make glad the city of God. A reminder of the Garden of Eden before we chose to own it for ourselves.

What makes this city secure? The Most High dwells there.

V 6. Kingdoms will fall. Like the mountains of v 2. But the Lord Almighty, the Lord of Hosts is with us.

And note how he rules. V 5. By his presence. And by his help.

The city of God is the symbol of refuge. Both now. And for the future.

Now. Nations are in uproar and Kingdoms fall. They fail to heed the voice of God. It causes the earth to melt.

Without the word of God the might of humanity just becomes a history.

Nothing more. Nothing less.

But that same voice comforts those who trust in the Lord. He is their fortress.

Powerful nations spends most of their time exhibiting their might. Because they know how fragile it is. They know that no Kingdom in history has not succumbed to history.

The Covid season has unearthed this reality in troublesome ways. Leaders and governments have failed to come to grips with the creation they thought they could control. The virus has proved how little control they have.

In desperation they have instead used season to exercise increasing dominance over others, rather than work for the common good.

Psalm 146. V 3:

Do not put your trust in princes, in human beings, who cannot save.

For thirdly, and finally, in the last four verses the author reinforces God's refuge when creation falls apart and history repeats its failures. Vv 8-11.

Read vv 8-9

Come and see. See how God intends to deal with the combined chaos of natural and national forces.

He makes peace by breaking the instruments of war. Against the haughty rulers throughout history the Lord speaks.

The Lord of Hosts who commands all armies stills his opponents. God humbles and harnesses through his might word. V 10:

Read v 10

And in the same breath he offers fortress protection to those who seek refuge in the turmoil of temporary human rule.

The bible records the history of the human condition.

As part of creation we were blessed with the opportunity of enjoying, even overseeing the created order, and using it to bless others.

But to do this without God was a responsibility we were never going to manage. Who did we think we are?

How many times have the rulers of the earth gathered together to address the fallen-ness of creation and our human failings? Only to record another failing?

How often have we tried to conquer creation rather than till the earth so that it might be a blessing to others?

How often have we worshipped creation rather than seek out the creator?

Yet we press on in resistance. We think we can tame the creation and triumph over history. We seek greatness. And in the end find smallness.

Powers become an entry in a history book. A study in academia. A monument likely torn down by a future and frustrated generation.

If you're frustrated at the frailty of creation and the fallen-ness of humanity then that's exactly what you're meant to be.

It is a frustration at the hand of God. Put in place so that we might look for something better. More secure. More lasting. Fortress-like.

The bible says there was one human who could handle the responsibility of life in this broken world with the confidence Psalm 46 calls for.

He entered creation and could still it with a word. He ruled creation to bless others. Healing the sick. Curing disease. Bringing life from death.

To reveal he was the promised one through whom all people could receive the lasting and comforting presence of God.

He stood against the authorities of his time. For his Kingdom was not of this world.

Jesus is the one who is present in the city of God. Ruling from heaven. Present in the lives of all who have turned to seek refuge from a fallen and failing world.

There is no greater triumph over creation and history than the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. It restores creation to its intended goal. Directs history to its intended end.

A new heavens and new earth where the City of God will no longer be a fortress. But a river of life. Revelation 22:1:

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb² down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

You don't need \$270 billion dollars to find your security. Come seek the refuge of God in the presence of his Son Jesus Christ.

The Lord Almighty assures us that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from his love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord.