

061624 English Sermon "Be Still and Know that I Am God" Psalm 46:1-11

This past weekend, we had a New York Annual Conference session. The New York Annual Conference is made up of 408 UMC local churches on Long Island, New York City, and north to the Catskills region of New York and western Connecticut. Once a year, each of the UMC's conferences meets to set budgets, elect new officers, discuss and vote on important decisions, approve new associate and full member clergy, recognize retiring clergy, and remember those who have passed away in the past year.

This year was the 225th New York Annual Conference of The United Methodist Church. In other words, for 225 years, church leaders have been coming together like this for what we call a holy conference every year. The theme was "and Know that I am God," based on our reading today from Psalm 46. I have served as co-chair of the Conference Sessions Committee that is responsible for this important annual event for the past three years, including this year, and by the grace of God, it has gone well and I am glad to step down from this responsibility. In fact, I have one last evaluation meeting left this coming Tuesday evening.

The theme holds profound significance this year. It reminds us that our work is meaningful and essential as we engage in holy conferencing. We seek God's guidance in every step we take. "(verse 1) God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. (verse 10) Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth." (Amen) These verses remind us of God's unwavering presence, even in the face of challenges and uncertainties. Just as the mountains stand firm, so does our faith. We find refuge in God—a haven where our fears dissolve and our strength is renewed. We are seeking God's guidance in every step we take.

"Be still, and know that I am God." Raphah(רַפָּה) is the Hebrew word for "Be Still" in Psalm 46:10. And this isn't "I'm just gonna sit here and do nothing". It is "active waiting". The term is better described as stop striving or cease striving. It also means "sink down, let drop, or relax." Relax first to know that God is in control. The psalmist tells us in this passage that God is sovereign over everything. Whether the problem is personal or communal, still God is in control! This was the Israelites' strong belief in the character of YHWH God. God would not let go of us. Instead, God holds tightly onto us.

These verses remind us that we find strength in our faith and community even in tumultuous times. As I preached a few weeks ago, people today can easily get angry about everything. The world seems more enraged than ever, from Twitter tirades and road rage to mall meltdowns and family feuds. "Be still, and know that I am God."

Recently, I read an interesting article in Harvard Business Review: "Just 6 Seconds of Mindfulness Can Make You More Effective". When you get a stressful stimulus, emotions happen in 0.2 seconds, and you can do nothing about it. Emotions are natural, just reflexes, but then they become actions. Emotion becomes motion.

It takes about 6 seconds for an action to happen, and the more effective people are those who can feel the emotion and do something about it so that the desired behavior comes out. Instead of reacting with a temper and ruining things and relationships. But what do you do in those 6 seconds? It's disappointing. Take a deep breath!

Karen May, vice president at Google, developed the ability to mentally recharge by taking one "mindful breath" before walking into every meeting. It takes her roughly six seconds, and in that time, she brings her full attention to one breath, resetting her body and mind.

The psychological reason is that when you put your attention intensely on the breath, you are fully in the present for the duration of the breath. To feel regretful, you need to be in the past; to worry, you need to be in the future. Hence, when you are fully in the present, you are temporarily free from regret and worry. That's like releasing a heavy burden for the duration of one breath, allowing the body and mind a precious opportunity for rest and recovery.

There are 78 internal organs in the human body that work together and 5 of them are vital for survival. But you can NOT tell your heart, "Slow down". You can NOT say, "Hey, you stomach, slow down your digestion". You can NOT control, "Hey, brain, think sharper". The only internal organ you can control is your lungs. You can breathe quickly, or slowly even once or twice a minute.

I think there's a faith implication to this as well. In Genesis, we read that God formed man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath

of life. So really, breathing is something that God gives us some control over until the day God calls us home.

For deep breathing to be effective, you need to be aware of it when you start to feel emotional so that your body automatically goes into deep breathing. There's only one way to get your body to remember: practicing deep breathing regularly when you're not stressed. So, take a deep breath every now and then. Relax and remind yourself that God is taking care of you. You are not alone; your Heavenly Father is with you and He is good. [Pablo Casals was considered one of the greatest cellists ever to live. When he was 95 years old, he was asked why he continued to practice 6 hours a day. He answered, "Because I think I'm making progress."](#) We can still make progress in our relationship with God and in our relationships with people.

[Last Sunday, a child told our Sunday School teacher, "You know why trees have roots? It's so they don't fall over!"](#) That's true, isn't it? Sometimes, we learn profound things through our children. The roots of our faith help us stand still in a rough time without falling over. The Bible tells us to relax and trust in God, and it also tells us that God will not rest when it comes to God's people. God holds onto us and does not let go, and we are to cling to God. Relax and take a deep breath; God's got us covered!

[Luther's one of the most famous hymns is "Ein' feste Burg ist unser Gott," – "A Mighty Fortress is our God."](#) Based on Psalm 46, it reflects Luther's awareness of his intense struggle against darkness and evil spirits. In difficulty and danger, Luther would often resort to this song, saying to his associate, "Come, Phillipp, let us sing the 46th Psalm." On the base of Luther's tomb is inscribed, [A Mighty Fortress Is Our God. Psalm 46:1 says, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."](#)

Dear beloved sisters and brothers in Christ, may this Christian journey deepen your spiritual maturity and strengthen your connection within the body of Christ. As we navigate this journey together, let us remember Psalm 46 as our guiding light. In stillness, we find clarity. In mindfulness, we discover resilience. And in the community, we thrive. Fairfield Grace, may God's grace, peace, goodness, and mercy be with you, your family, your business, your studies, and with the lives of your children. To Christ be thanks and praise. Amen.