

Subject: "The Christian Declaration of Divine Confidence: Remembering Hurricane Florence Victims"

Sub-title: "Three Reasons Not To Fear The Hurricane"

Scripture: Psalm 46:1-3

The Declaration of Independence is one of the most cherished documents in all of American history, as it should be. After all, it was the foundational document that declared America's freedom from the tyranny of King Charles and Great Britain. And yet, while Americans celebrate the Fourth of July with jubilee, many forget that the circumstances in which the Declaration was born were anything but jubilant or joyful. At the time America declared its Independence, it was owned by Great Britain, a territorial slave of the country "across the water." America had no rights in the eyes of its "master." Therefore, to see Americans write and sign a document declaring their Independence was laughable.

It was also dangerous. To free themselves from the tyranny of Britain, the colonists would have to fight for their freedom. Yes, they'd have to go to war and risk their own lives. Signing the Declaration of Independence was tantamount to signing their own death warrant for, if they didn't win the war, everything would go up in smoke. Everything. Their fight for freedom would die with them. We wouldn't even read about it in history textbooks today if America hadn't emerged victorious.

At the time, though, the colonists had no way of knowing that they'd win, that they'd get their freedom. So how did they emerge successful? They staked their lives on their freedom cause, even if it meant losing their own lives in the process. They counted the quest for freedom greater than their own lives. They wanted freedom for their posterity if not for themselves. And Americans are free today bc of not only the God who, as the song says, "Shed His Grace on thee," but also bc of the persistent fight of the

colonists. Their decision to be free came at a scary time. This is why Patrick Henry is known for his famous line, “Give me liberty or give me death!” The Founding Fathers knew the cost of freedom. They were scared, sure. They were aware of the high stakes of freedom. No one had attempted a freedom experiment before. So they had no blueprint for their war strategy, no layout of how to implement the Democratic experiment, no freed citizens of other nations to converse with before making their plans. And yet, despite how fearful they were, they could still sign the document that could give them either liberty or death. These were scary times to be a rebel.

That was on July 4, 1776. Flash forward to Friday, September 14, 2018, when Hurricane Florence made landfall in Wilmington, NC at 7:15am. Florence has been one of the most unpredictable hurricanes meteorologists have ever seen. She was near a category 5 status when she headed toward North Carolina, but then died down to a category 2 before striking Wilmington. Meteorologists didn't know if she'd hit North Carolina or South Carolina. She hit North Carolina, has dipped some into South Carolina, and plans to return to the mountains of North Carolina before leaving the state.

While Florence may be headed out, she, like every other Hurricane before her, has left her mark and is still doing so. Many of the coastal areas are devastated physically and financially by Florence, as she has dumped several inches of rain on them and uprooted trees. I read yesterday that some places have seen 16-18 inches of rain, and others have seen totals as high as 30 and 32 inches of rain. Trees have been split, branches have been split, and some have fallen on even 100-year-old homes. Rivers are cresting, with the Cape Fear and Little Rivers causing mass evacuations to hurricane shelters. In New Bern, North Carolina, there have been over 450 rescues bc of rising flood waters. Duke Energy Progress, the electric company of the Carolinas, will have to restore power for some near 800,000 people in the state. Schools have closed indefinitely, with over 150

being used as hurricane shelters for victims who have to flee rising waters and low-lying areas. There have been 13 deaths with Hurricane Florence, 3 deaths in South Carolina and 10 in North Carolina due to the weather. Florence has stranded some citizens and killed others. And to make matters worse, this has come in the same week in which our nation mourned the 17th anniversary of 9/11, the terrorist event on September 11th, 2001 that changed the American consciousness forever when Al-Qaeda terrorists flew our airplanes into the towers of the World Trade Center. It's truly a scary, fearful, and traumatic time to be alive.

And in a time like this, perhaps the expectation is that I, God's servant, would have some new answers or insight to share with you. I don't. But what I've discovered in my own life is that, when the storms of life are raging, I can always, and I mean ALWAYS, find the answers I seek and the comfort I crave in the Word of God. And so, today, I share God's Word with you, those who are far away from Florence, those who are in Florence's path, and those who have lost friends or loved ones because of Hurricane Florence.

The writer of Psalm 46, understood to be multiple writers, the sons of Korah, understood something about the nature of fear and scary times. This is why they begin this chapter of the songs or the Psalms with the words, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." They understood that as humans, we need refuge, a place to go for protection, that we need strength because we will get weary and tired on this Christian journey, that we need a present help in time of trouble because trouble will come, as sure as the sun rises in the East and sets in the West. And they also realized that in those troubling, fearful times, that the Christian confidence can be placed confidently in the Lord because He will be there for His own.

Here in Psalm 46:1-3, we see what I call the Christian Declaration of Divine Confidence. The Founding Fathers crafted their Declaration of

Independence with three truths which, to them, were self-evident. The second sentence of the Declaration of Independence says the following: “we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”

In the same way, Psalm 46 declares the Christian Declaration of Divine Confidence, three self-evident truths that Christians need to be reminded of and can be confident about in times of trouble where fear and distress. First, we can be confident that “God is our refuge.” The word “refuge” here is the Greek word καταφυγή (kataphuge). God, the sons of Korah say, is the one who helps us flee. God is the One who helps us escape. When danger comes, He is the One we can run to. Psalm 61:3-4 calls the Lord a “shelter” and a “Strong tower.” It says:

3 For You have been a **shelter for me,
A **strong tower from the enemy**.
4 I will abide in Your tabernacle forever;
I will trust in the shelter of Your wings. *Selah***

The Lord is shelter. He gives shelter from the storm. The victims of Hurricane Florence have been looking for active buildings that are housing refugees of the hurricane. The Lord, though, provides the best protection. The Lord is “a strong tower from the enemy.” He is the One who shields us from Satan’s snares, traps, darts, and bullets. When a person looks for a refuge, a hiding place, they are running from something. God is our refuge, the sons of Korah say in Psalm 46:1 because we are running from trouble, we are running from evil, we are running from sorrow and sadness. Even when we’re facing sorrow in our lives, He is the One we can run to and therein find safety, love, joy, peace, happiness -- all the things we can’t have on our own. There’s a song that says, “Jesus is a Rock in a weary

land; He's the shelter in the time of storm." And this song is true: Jesus is shelter. He is a strong tower.

Proverbs 18:10 goes on to say that "The name of the Lord *is* a strong tower; The righteous run to it and are safe." When believers are having it hard, when life weighs us down, when everything is falling apart and we don't know what to do, we can remember to call upon the name of our God because His name is a strong tower that we can cry out to when we feel alone, scared, and depressed. And calling upon His Name reminds us that God is always there.

This is the first self-evident truth that need no evidence: that God is our refuge. We know that God is there. We can look back in times in our lives and see God's hand, even when everything was chaotic.

The next self-evident truth in the Christian Declaration of Divine Confidence in Psalm 46 is that God is our strength. The word for strength here, δύναμις (*dunamis*), tells us that God is power, God is might. He's called "The Almighty God" for a reason. God is our refuge, our hiding place, but what good would a God be who wasn't powerful enough to protect us and deliver us? So God is not only our hiding place but also our power, our protection, our Deliverer. He has the power to do anything He wants to. He can deliver us from any trial, tribulation, or obstacle. And even when we don't see Him moving or our eyes tell us that God isn't doing anything, we can always know that God is moving behind the scenes. He has the power. That's what we Christian believers must remember: that just because God doesn't move in our time, it doesn't mean God CAN'T move! He moves in His time -- that His sovereignty -- but we must trust and know that He's got the power to move, even if He doesn't. He isn't lacking in power because He doesn't move the way we want Him to.

The Hebrew boys, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego, learned this lesson about God. They refused to bow down to the golden statue of the king and were thrown in the fiery furnace as we read in Daniel 3. I

preached on this some time ago in a sermon called “America’s Golden Calf.” What we know from Daniel 3 is that the king made good on his promise to throw them into the fiery furnace because they refused to bow down to the king’s golden calf. And yet, they say something that I think is often overlooked when we study the story. It is found in Daniel 3:16-18:

16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego answered and said to the king, “O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter. **17** If that is the case, **our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace**, and **He will deliver us from your hand**, O king. **18** **But if not, let it be known to you, O King, that we do not serve your gods, nor will we worship the gold image which you have set up.**”

These three men realized that God was able to deliver them: “our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace,” they said. Do you believe that God is able to deliver you from the trials and tribulations and hardship you’re under? The Hebrews didn’t deny this. They knew their God had the power, that God was their “strength,” to use the words of Psalm 46:1. God was their strength, and He is our strength, too. He is power and strength and deliverance for all who believe Him, who claim Him as their God, for all who are His children and belong to Him.

Last but not least, God is “a very present help in trouble,” or, as Margaret Allison and The Angelic Gospel Singers say, “an ever-present help in the time of need.” He is “present,” meaning that He is there. I remember growing up that, in grade school, the teacher would call your name and you had to say “present.” I still remember doing that to this day. When someone said “present,” the word itself gave notice to the teacher and students that the student was in the building. So when the text says that God is “a very present help in trouble,” it means that God is there, that God is “in the situation” or the circumstance, that God is in the moment with you, that God is there even if you can’t physically see Him. The Greek Old Testament, the

Septuagint, translates the phrase to say that God is “a very found helper in trouble.” This means that God can be seen, discovered, found when you’re in trouble. You can see Him when trouble comes, that He is a helper who helps His children when they’re in trouble.

The Bible is full of testimony to God as an ever-present help in the time of need. Though the Lord waited 430 years, He delivered His people, the Jews, from Egyptian bondage. He sent Moses, their human deliverer, and He protected them from the loss of their firstborn in a land where He slayed the firstborn of the Egyptians. And then, when He led them out and Pharaoh’s army chased them to the Red Sea, God parted the Red Sea and let them walk through on dry land. And then, He got final vengeance on their enemies by letting the water return to the sea and drown the Egyptians. In their time of need, God was present and He demonstrated it by rescuing His people. Yes, God is a very present help in trouble.

Daniel in the lions’ den is another favorite account of many a believer. Yes, Daniel was one who prayed three times a day. He prayed to his God, believed in his God, and lived for his God. Yet, there came a decree in the land from the king that said that any man that prayed to any god except the king would be thrown into the lions’ den. He signed it because of the royal officials who made the decree; but what he didn’t get at the time is that he was officially throwing Daniel in the lions’ den because Daniel prayed to the God of Israel and wouldn’t forsake his God for any one else, man or deity. The royal officials wanted to eliminate Daniel, so they came to the king and reminded him of his royal decree -- and then, they mentioned Daniel in his rebellious state, praying to his God. King Darius had no other choice but to throw Daniel in the lions’ den. But the interesting thing is that, though Daniel was in trouble, God was an ever-present help in the time of need. While Daniel was down in the lions’ den, a place where the lions would’ve eaten his flesh, not one lion touched Daniel because the Lord God shut the mouths of the lions. As Daniel told King Darius when Darius discovered him unharmed in the lions’ den, “**22** My God sent His angel and shut the lions’

mouths, so that they have not hurt me, because I was found innocent before Him" (Daniel 6:22). The angel "shut the lions' mouths" because Daniel was innocent in the matter; he'd done no wrong to pray to his God only. Yes, in Daniel's lions' den, he found God to be an ever-present help in the time of need.

In verses 2 and 3, the writer(s) takes these three self-evident truths about God -- that is, that God is our refuge, God is our strength and power, and God is an ever-present help in trouble -- and he then says that we are to act on them. If we know that God is our hiding place, if we know that God's got the power to deliver us in every situation and to protect us in situations we must go through, then we shouldn't fear. As the writer says, "Therefore we will not fear, even though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea; though its waters roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with its swelling." The idea of the earth being removed, the mountains being carried off into the sea, the waters roaring and swelling or flooding, and the mountains shaking demonstrates geographical, natural disaster. In effect, the writer is saying that we will not be afraid of the natural disasters we see around us. We will not be burdened down within though all around us is falling apart.

Christians need not have their hearts fail within when they see earthquakes, pestilences, and yes, even the Hurricane Florences of our lives. I've seen some of the devastation of Hurricane Florence and it's enough to make anyone's heart fear. And yet, because Christians have their God, the Father, and His Son, Jesus Christ, we have no need to fear. In fact, the writer says "we will not fear." It's a vote of confidence that, with the knowledge of God that we have, the knowledge that He protects, cares for, delivers, and loves His own, fear is unwarranted. Now many of us have always pointed to other verses when we become fearful or frightened of the future. We point to Paul's words to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:7, that "God has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind," but the writer of Psalm 46 gives us a statement that we should use more with fellow believers: that is, because we know these three

self-evident truths about God, we will not fear. We don't have to live our lives in fear of every moment, fear of what will happen next, because the Lord watches over and protects His own. Our attitude should be one of confidence because our God is The Almighty. There's nothing greater or stronger than Him, there's nothing He can't do.

I know, I know. Hurricane Florence has been fierce to North Carolina and South Carolina. I know: victims of the storm have had every reason to fear. A woman in Snead's Ferry in Onslow County, NC was on the Today show this week talking about how she was too stubborn to heed the warnings and get out of her house -- and now she finds her yard to be a river and her home to be part of the river as well. Yes, in situations like these, it's easy to fear what will happen to us, our homes, our property, our loved ones, the things we've worked for and invested in. And yet, in these times, even in stressful times where fear, doubt, uncertainty, and a lack of confidence seem warranted to the human mind, we can be confident in this one thing: God is on the throne, and He's not abdicated yet.

The sons of Korah, the writers of Psalm 46, knew something about God being their divine help in the time of need. They couldn't have written it if they hadn't experienced it. They understood fear. They understood uncertainty and doubt, the stress of life, the tragic, unexpected events, the moments when you feel as though the earth beneath your feet was being engulfed by water (metaphorically and literally speaking). They understood the human tendency to fear the unknown. Fear is a normal human reaction, but Christians should fear least of all because we have our Christian Declaration of Divine Confidence, we have faith and confidence toward our Almighty God, we know three self-evident truths about our God -- and the writer gives them to us in Psalm 46. First, God is our refuge, He is our hiding place. Next, God is our strength, our power, our energy when we feel tired, when we feel like giving up. God's got the power that man could only crave. Last but not least, God is a very present help in trouble, an ever-present help in the time of need. God is our refuge, our strength, and

our ever-present help because He is the Almighty and He is there. He has promised never to leave us nor forsake us, to be with us always, and if He has promised it, His hand is not so shortened that He cannot perform it.

If the writer or writers of Psalm 46 were here today, here's what they'd say to us: "Church, we hold these truths to be self-evident: that God is our refuge, God is our strength, God is a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though all around us is sinking sand. When all else fails, when there's no one to turn to, when it seems as though everything is falling apart, we can go to the Rock. That Rock is Christ Jesus." Let us never forget that God is with us, even in the hurricane.

I'll leave you with the words of a song that echoes the words of the writer or writers of Psalm 46:

Where do I go when there's nobody else to turn to?

Who do I talk to when nobody wants to listen?

Who do I lean on when there's no foundation stable?

I go to the rock

I know he's able

I go to the rock

Where do I go, where do I go

When the storms of life are threatening?

Who do I turn to when those winds of sorrow blow?

And is there a refuge in the time of tribulation?

I go to the rock

I know He's able

I go to the rock

I go to the rock for my salvation

I go to the stone that the builders rejected

I run to the mountain and the mountain stands by me

When the Earth all around me is sinking sand

On Christ, the solid rock I stand

When I need a shelter, when I need a friend

I go to the rock

This, then, is the Christian Declaration of Divine Confidence. We don't have hope in ourselves, but rather, in our God.