

¹ God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.
² Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way
and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
³ though its waters roar and foam
and the mountains quake with their surging.
⁴ There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,
the holy place where the Most High dwells.
⁵ God is within her, she will not fall;
God will help her at break of day.
⁶ Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall;
he lifts his voice, the earth melts.
⁷ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.
⁸ Come and see what the LORD has done,
the desolations he has brought on the earth.
⁹ He makes wars cease
to the ends of the earth.
He breaks the bow and shatters the spear;
he burns the shields with fire.
¹⁰ He says, “Be still, and know that I am God;
I will be exalted among the nations,
I will be exalted in the earth.”
¹¹ The LORD Almighty is with us;
the God of Jacob is our fortress.

The season of Lent, for me, has always been like waking up after having been sick for a while. The stomach ache is gone, my head isn't throbbing, and I can feel life coming back into my fingers and toes. And though I don't feel completely well, I know I will be well soon. As I think of the weeks leading up to Easter, I feel the promise of redemption in the same way—the promise that it's coming, even though it isn't fully here yet.

All the Psalms are beautiful, but I've chosen Psalm 46 to think about this Lent because it embodies God's promise of coming redemption, while at the same time reflecting the very real ways that He is already in our *presence* and our *present*.

The psalm begins, “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” I don’t know about anyone else, but I’m not witnessing mountains fall or surging seas—though, many times in this life it really does feel like it. It can feel like the whole world is being torn apart. But in the midst of those disasters, whatever their nature may be, God is present, promising to support and strengthen. And the promise of redemption is also there—God Himself says “*I will be exalted in the earth.*”

But I have to admit, I got a little stuck on verse 6: “Nations are in uproar, kingdoms fall; he lifts his voice, the earth melts.” I often use the word “melt” in a positive way (like, “that dog video is making me melt”) but I don’t think that’s really the right use of the word here. I mean, it’s hard to feel mushy and loving about national distress. And then the same thing happens again in verse 8: the Lord has brought desolation on the earth. These two images aren’t the redemption I imagined.

But perhaps, that’s exactly the point. I’ve been thinking a lot lately about how the redemption of the world and the restoration of God’s perfect order don’t always happen the way I expect them to. Maybe it happens through melting worlds and desolation. To return to the image of being sick: I don’t like having a fever, but sometimes it’s necessary. The aches and shivers and sweating aren’t fun, but fevers are the immune system’s attempt to redeem our health by destroying the germs that make us sick. And I cringe at the idea of using violence to bring peace, but even God “*breaks the bow and shatters the spear; he burns the shields with fire.*” Just like a fever.

At first it seems bad, maybe, but I think this is hopeful. The world and the people in it are hurting—and sometimes we don’t feel God like a fortress. Instead, we feel the earth giving way. But it’s still hopeful to me because even in those moments of destruction, God is still in the process of redeeming. He can, and does, and always has made beauty out of chaos. Far be it from me to try to determine what redemption is happening through any means at any given moment. So whether it’s climate change, hate-motivated violence, empty bellies, or broken hearts, God is present and in the process of redeeming all things.

I’d like to end with a favorite quote of mine, by Julian of Norwich: “All shall be well, all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”