

Monday, October 2, 2017 – Las Vegas Mass Shooting Tragedy Prayer Service
“God is our Refuge and Strength”

Psalm 46

Rev. Derek S. Klemm, Mountain View Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV
Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

Today compares to very few days in my past. 9/11 and Oklahoma City come to mind. After 9/11 you didn't have to remind anyone about how fragile life was or how quickly everything can change, because what people are experiencing is far more vivid than anything I could say. And so it is for us today.

Is there evil in the world? Is there sin in the world? Is there hatred? Is there suffering and sorrow caused by these? Is there death and mayhem as a result of this evil and hatred? Who, here, would deny this?

Who here – also – can control this? That has been one of the sobering things about this tragedy at a family friendly concert of over 20,000 people right in our own backyard. We are forced to recognize that we have far less control than we sometimes lead ourselves to believe. Even at a societal level, we generally believe that someone knows what's going on, and will do what needs to be done to thwart whatever evil is being contemplated. And then the events of last night occur and I found myself saying it out loud, “How could no one have had some indication of what was about to happen, so that it could have been stopped?” I watched helpless like you did either late last night or during the day today as people checked in as “safe” on social media and worried about the Metro officers and doctors and basically everyone who might have been there without my knowledge from our community, unable to make it ok. And even as you wrestle with those questions, you wonder how to talk about this with your kids who have questions of their own.

And so today, we feel less secure. Stories are still trickling in of heroic bystanders, men shielding women from fire with their bodies, police officers, rescue personnel and doctors handling triage at UMC and Sunrise, they stir us. But even they could not stop this tragedy. We are conditioned to believe that when the police are there everything is in hand and they've got it under control, but even they couldn't stop this. It is a troubling realization that even they were powerless in the face of these events. Where do we find hope? Where to we find a sense of security and control?

In the first Scripture reading, the psalmist writes, “God is our Refuge and Strength, an ever-present help in trouble.” He then goes on to describe some pretty out-of-control scenarios: the earth giving way, the mountains falling into the heart of the sea, waters roaring and foaming, and mountains quaking. In terms of some of the turbulent experiences of life, these would be right up there. And yet, we are told we do not have to fear.

Do not fear?! Are you kidding? When everything around us seems to be falling apart before our eyes?! When chaos seems to be the order of the day?! When our city is reeling from the worst violence ever inflicted upon it?! Do not fear?!

Either God is crazy, or... He is still in control, and though we don't see it, He is asking us to trust Him, in spite of the fact that everything around us is declaring that we shouldn't. “God is our Refuge and Strength, and ever-present help in trouble.”

Our source of stability, our source of hope, our source of comfort, our source of security comes not from the world around us. We know all too well how easily that can be taken from us. No, these things come from the God who has squarely faced evil of the likes we saw yesterday. More than facing it, He grabbed hold of it, and He embraced its horrendous coldness on the cross. And there He wrestled it down – down into the grave. But dear friends, who came out three days later? Who triumphed by coming out of that grave? Christ did! Not sin and evil, but Christ. And, we win.

What we see in the world around us now is sin and evil in its death throes. It is kicking and screaming, and we know, all too well since last night the damage it can still inflict. But, it will not overpower us – oh no – the cross of Jesus, and the empty tomb has seen to that.

And this knowledge gives us perspective. Life is more than the accumulation of years. It is a relationship with God that goes on for eternity. It is a relationship shared with one another, that requires commitment and sometimes sacrifice. Nevertheless, fear can be removed. Hope can rule the day. And we can have a sense of security in even the most troubling times.

In fact it was Christ, who taught us to expect that our faith will be sorely tried at times. But it was also Christ, who said, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me.” With that He steers us right back to the cross and empty tomb in the midst of trouble. And in so doing He reminds us of a victory that is already ours. And He prepares us to fearlessly

face the day. He steels our nerve. He comforts our hearts, and we find in Him that there is strength.

As a city and a nation we are preparing ourselves for what is ahead. We don't know what tomorrow will bring but we do know who is with us.

At this hour, all across our beloved city we are going to our source of strength – our God. To Him we are bringing our deep concerns for those who were wounded in this attack, and our deep concern for the families and friends of those who have lost their lives in these attacks.

We are finding comfort in God and one another. We are encouraged by the scenes of rescue workers joined by thousands of volunteers lined up to give blood, or deliver water, people desiring to do what they can – what we can – to ease the suffering of the victims.

We are also finding courage and heart for the battles yet to come.

There is no doubt that we, the people of Las Vegas have been jolted. But one of the blessings that God is bringing out of the rubble of this experience, is the opportunity to refocus ourselves upon the things that really matter: our Lord, and Savior Jesus Christ, that we are a people of faith. And in this hour of trial we are made stronger, bolder, and more courageous.

We are focusing upon our families, and the treasures of each other that God has given us. And as a city we are seeing again, that we have been mightily blessed by God, and we are proud of that. And, by the grace of God we will stand together. In Jesus' name, Amen.