



**September 15-16, 2024      Psalm 46:11**  
**Trinity Ev. Lutheran Church**

**Pentecost Sunday #17**  
**Rev. Glenn L. Schwanke**

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

*“Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not, we fear no ill; they shall not overpower us. This world’s prince may still scowl fierce as he will, he can harm us none. He’s judged; the deed is done; One little word can fell him.”* (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God, CW, 863:3) I don’t suppose I need to tell you that Dr. Martin Luther wrote this hymn, that it is based on the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm, and it became the great battle hymn of the Reformation in the 1500’s. Luther himself, when discouraged, would often invite his friends to sing it for courage and strength. (*“Kommt, lasst uns den 46 Psalm singen.”*)

I can understand that. The 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm tells us, *“God is our refuge and strength, a helper who can always be found in times of trouble.”* (Psalm 46:1) Christians of every age have found this Psalm comforting in times of personal tragedy and trouble. These are words you want to hear when you’re flat on your back on a hospital bed, or when your world has just been tipped upside down by a telephone call and bad news.

Christians of every age have also found this Psalm especially comforting in times of national crisis. In times of war. For example, everybody was using the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks of 2001. Why? Because of refrains like these: *“God is in her. She will not fall. God will help her at daybreak Nations are in turmoil. Kingdoms fall. God raises his voice. The earth melts.”* (Psalm 46:5-6) Our world may go insane with evil and may mass as one against the Lord to topple him from his throne and destroy his Church—but our world will never be able to do it. (See also Psalm 2) The mere sound of the Lord’s voice can still the insanity, and it will melt our earth on the Judgment Day.

And then there’s this portion of the Psalm as well. *“Come, look at the works of the LORD. What a wasteland he has made of the earth! He makes wars cease to the end of the earth. He shatters the bow. He cuts up the spear. He burns the carts with fire. “Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the nations. I will be exalted on the earth.”* (Psalm 46:8-10) The book of Revelation builds on this picture, as it describes for us a cataclysmic Armageddon. All the world’s forces massed under the leadership of Satan. Massed against the Lord in one final great battle! And it is those war pictures, those end of the world pictures, that Dr. Luther picked up on when he wrote his great hymn, A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.

In verse 3, Dr. Luther does almost too good a job of describing that hellish army that fights against us. The good Doctor reminds us that you and I have bigger things to worry about than North Korea and its nukes. Bigger things to worry about than hard-line Muslims in Iran joining Hezbollah and Hamas and striking out at the West. Bigger worries than the Russian Ukraine war. Luther’s poetry makes the same point the Apostle Paul once made. *“For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world rulers of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.”* (Ephesians 6:12) The real war you and I are engaged in every day is not physical. Not political. But spiritual. And it is waged against an unseen army under the leadership of Satan. An army of devils.

How many devils are there? The Bible doesn’t give us a precise head count. In the apocalyptic symbolic language of Revelation, we are shown how the devil took with him a third of the stars of heaven, a third of the angels down with him. But how many is that?

This brings us back to Luther’s hymn. *“Though devils all the world should fill, All eager to devour us.”* His poetry made me wonder. How many devils would it take to fill this world? Currently, there are over 8 billion people inhabiting our planet. By the year 2150, projections claim our world will have almost 10 billion people on it. Could there be that many devils? Well, yes I suppose so, and more. Luther’s hymn talks about filling this earth with devils. I suppose devils could pack all the desert regions of this earth—they wouldn’t worry about the lack of water. And Satan could assign the devils on the bottom of hell’s seniority totem pole to outpost duty at the Arctic or Antarctic. And some devils could sit on the peaks of every mountain. Others could inhabit the swamps and bogs. And frankly, devils could also inhabit the depths of the oceans, lakes and rivers.

But for now, let's hypothesize that devils occupied only all the dry land surface of our earth—excluding Antarctica. And let's pretend they did so at the density of one devil per square meter. That gives us a tally of **135 TRILLION** devils.

**135 TRILLION devils?** Could there be that many? Yes. Are they our friends? No. Luther paraphrases the words of St. Peter when he tells us they are *all eager to devour us*. (1 Peter 5:8) And yet, *"We tremble not. We fear no ill?"* How could Luther write those words? Had he been dipping excessively into the beer kegs his dear wife, Katie, made sure were kept in storage at the Luther home? No. Rather Luther had been drinking deeply from the comforting words of the 46<sup>th</sup> Psalm. In particular, he focused his attention on the name of the Lord you and I cling to when it seems the whole world stands against us. **The LORD of Armies is with us! The God of Jacob is a fortress for us!** (Psalm 46:11)

Back in verse 2 of the hymn, **A Mighty Fortress**, Luther wrote, *"With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected; but for us fights the valiant one whom God himself elected. You ask, 'Who is this?' Jesus Christ it is, The almighty Lord. And there's no other God; he holds the field forever."* That's the translation used in our current hymnal, Christian Worship. But that's not the translation I memorized back in the day—the one contained in The Lutheran Hymnal. The old translation was actually closer to the original German. Our Champion in battle is Jesus Christ. **"Of Sabaoth Lord."**

I can understand why the translators changed the words slightly. In Confirmation Class we always confused the word "*Sabaoth*" with "*Sabbath*," the Hebrew Word for "*rest*." And even after the Pastor corrected us time and again, the word still didn't stick. "*Sabaoth Lord*." Do you know what it means? It's the name for our Lord that we pull out of Psalm 46. The NIV translates it "*Lord Almighty*," and that's why our hymnal changed the translation slightly to "*Jesus Christ. . .The Almighty Lord*." But the more literal translation of Sabaoth is "**Lord of Hosts**." (KJV) or "**Lord of Armies**."

There may be 135 Trillion devils, but there are more angels. The picture language of Revelation tells us 2/3rds of the angels remained faithful to the Lord and stand ready to fight for him. When Peter drew his sword to protect Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, what did our Savior say? *"Put your sword back into its place, because all who take the sword will die by the sword. Do you not realize that I could call on my Father, and at once he would provide me with more than twelve legions of angels?"* (Matthew 26:52-53) 12 legions? That's a detail of 72,000 angels immediately available for Jesus' summons!

When the King of Aram came to capture Elisha and his servant, Elisha wasn't a tad bit worried, because he knew *"those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* (2 Kings 6:16) But Elisha's servant was in a panic, so the prophet prayed, *"O LORD, open his eyes so that he can see."* *Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he saw that the hills were full of horses and chariots of fire, all around Elisha.* (2 Kings 6:17)

And yet there are more angels than that. In the book of Daniel (7:10) and the book of Hebrews (12:22), the holy writers tell us there are too many angels to even begin to number! And Jesus doesn't bother numbering his angelic army. When our Savior returns on the Last Day, he simply assures us *"all the angels (will be) with him."* (Matthew 25:31)

And yet, in a way, all this number talk is missing the point. You and I don't need the entire angelic army to keep us safe. One guardian angel will do just fine, won't it? (Psalm 91:11-12) It only took one angel to keep Daniel safe all night in the lion's den. (Daniel 6:19-22) Only one angel was needed to roll back the stone from Jesus' tomb. (Matthew 28:2) Only one angel could unlock the prison doors and break the apostles out of jail. (Acts 5:7-10)

And yet, in a way, even all this talk of guardian angels is missing the point. When Dr. Luther penned his great Reformation hymn, who was the Champion he looked to for comfort? Not just an angel, but **The Angel of the Lord!** The Lord of Armies! Jesus Christ! It is **the Angel of the Lord, the Lord of Armies, Jesus Christ** who took to the field of battle one night outside the walls of Jerusalem. The city was under siege by the mighty, invincible army of Assyria. But inside the city was a good, pious king named Hezekiah. He prayed to the Lord: *"O LORD, God of Israel, you are seated above the cherubim. You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth. You made the heavens and the earth. 2 Kings 19:15 ... But now, O LORD our God, please save us from his hand, so that all the kingdoms of the earth will know that you, O LORD, are God, you alone."* (2 Kings 19:15:19) The Lord sent Isaiah the prophet to assure Hezekiah, *"I have heard what you have prayed to me about Sennacherib."* And *"That night, the angel of the LORD went out and*

*struck down one hundred eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp. When it was time to wake up in the morning, there they were—all the dead bodies! Then Sennacherib king of Assyria broke camp and returned and lived in Nineveh.” (2 Kings 19:20, 35-36)*

Jesus is our Champion! **The Lord of Armies! Sabaoth Lord.** No wonder the Apostle Paul exclaimed, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31) No wonder Luther could shout, *“We tremble not. We fear no ill.”* A world-full of devils cannot overpower us with Jesus on our side.

For we know that our Lord of Armies has already won the victory for us. But not through might. Not through Michael the Archangel or 72 legions of angels or all the hosts of heaven above. Rather the victory over Satan and all his demons was won by Jesus through a humble manger. Through a life of selfless service to man and perfect obedience to his Father.

And ultimately, that victory was won for us through the cross. This is how the Son of God *destroyed the devil’s work.* (1 John 3:8) This is how Jesus foiled Satan’s evil plans to ruin you and me forever in hell. Jesus dismissed the heavenly hosts and walked alone to Golgotha. He set aside his glory and might and instead shouldered our sin and our guilt. Our shame and our defeat. All those temptations to which we all-too-easily succumb—Jesus took the blame for them. And on the cross he suffered. He died. And he triumphed! This is why now just one little word is enough to put the devil and all his demons on the run.

**The word is Jesus.**

You and I don’t need to toss and turn at night, wondering and worrying if there really are 135 trillion devils filling our world, all out to get us. For Jesus our Champion, our Lord of Armies, is as close to us as His Word. This is why the Apostle Paul urges you and me, *“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can stand against the schemes of the Devil. Ephesians 6:10-11 ... For this reason, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to take a stand on the evil day and, after you have done everything, to stand. Stand, then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness fastened in place, and with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace tied to your feet like sandals. At all times hold up the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the Evil One. Also take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. At every opportunity, pray in the Spirit with every kind of prayer and petition.”* (Ephesians 6:10-11, 13-18)

Brothers and Sisters in Christ, when you pray, call on the one who is called Sabaoth Lord, the Lord of Armies. He will never fail you! He always stands with us, for *“The Victory’s won: The Kingdom’s ours forever!”* Amen.



Rev. Glenn Schwanke