

October 26, 2025
Reformation Sunday
Psalm 46
Emmanuel Lutheran Church, Norwood, MA
Pastor Amanda L. Warner

Do not be Afraid

Never, ever read the comments. Those are words to live by. For your mental health, for your ability to have faith in humanity, for your ability to have hope for humanity, you should never, ever read the comments.

Those are words that I try to live by. If I'm reading something on Facebook, a news article or commentary or article about the UConn Women's Basketball team, or if I'm watching a video on YouTube, or if I'm reading something from some news source on the internet, if I'm looking at anything on the internet that has a comment section, I know that I should never, ever read the comments. Ever.

And yet, sometimes I get sucked in. And when I get sucked in I have the sad opportunity to remember, to realize yet again, that a lot of people have a lot of time on their hands and an astonishing amount of bitterness in their hearts. I'm reminded that for some people the internet is not a tool, but a hobby. They are keyboard warriors who seem to be poised and ready to jump on anything and everything and make it negative, turning it into a fight, not a discussion, not a debate, but a fight. And, of course, you never know if the people in the comments are people at all, if they are actual human trolls or if they're bots or if they're paid foreign agitators, placed to sow dissension and division into our public discourse and dialogue, so much of which seems to take place on the internet, in the comments, which, as I said, you should never, ever read.

Okay, so one day not too long ago I read the comments. I knew I shouldn't do it, but for some reason I clicked where I shouldn't have and, predictably, I was upset by what I read. And I can't even remember the point of the article I was reading. I don't even remember what it was about, even though I've been racking

my brain to try to figure it out. I also don't remember why I broke my own personal rule about the comments. What I do remember is that the comments quickly turned to religion and how religion was the source of most of the problems on earth. The critique of religion was extensive, though completely unnuanced, painting people of all religions with the same broad brush: intolerant, violent, judgmental, hypocritical, power hungry, and foolish.

Now, to be fair, I know that there are some legitimate critiques of religion that can be made, critiques from history and critiques from today, but the religion that I found in the comment section of this forgotten article, which were mostly a critique of Christianity, was so far from the religion that I have grown up in and experienced and preached and practiced, that I was flabbergasted. Is that all that people think that religion, that my religion, that our religion is?

Yesterday, at the rummage sale, I ran into a couple that I kind of know from soccer. At the end of his eighth-grade year, Cyrus's time with Norwood Youth Soccer and the team of boys his age that he had been playing with and Britton had been coaching for four years came to an end. I was sad to see it end. Sad because I had gotten to know the boys on his teams and many of their parents. We had spent 20 Saturdays a year for four years cheering the team on through ups and downs, wins and losses, happily, many more wins than losses. We had gotten close. In fact, I was so attached to the team that I often attended the games even if Cyrus was injured and not playing.

Many of Cyrus's Norwood Youth Soccer teammates tried out for the soccer team at Norwood High School, but it quickly became clear that it wouldn't be the same. Only he and three of his fellow freshmen made the high school varsity team. Most of the rest were playing JV. Some kids didn't make the team at all. And when I went to the first game of his freshman year, I hardly recognized any of the other parents. They were strangers, the parents of the seniors, juniors, and sophomores. I

only recognized the few parents of the other freshmen who had made the high school team.

And it's not easy to put together the names and faces of the parents and put them together with the players when you only see them a few times a month for a couple of months a year.

So, when I saw the couple come into the rummage sale, I wasn't positive it was them. I could tell they were wondering if they recognized me too. So, I took a chance. If they were who I thought they were, their son had been out for a couple of games with an injury, so I greeted them and I asked them about their son. And thank goodness, they were who I thought they were and stopped to talk with me about their son, his injury, and the soccer season in general.

Now there I was, in a church, at a church rummage sale, wearing an Emmanuel Lutheran Church tee shirt, but still I had a moment of wondering, should I tell them that I'm praying for their son? Because I was praying for him and am going to keep praying for him, but I wasn't sure if they would appreciate hearing that. Because I read the comments and it's clear that a lot of people think that religion is dangerous nonsense. I didn't want to put them or myself in an awkward position and have an uncomfortable interaction after we had just had such a nice chat.

But then I remembered that I don't think that religion is dangerous nonsense, and I remembered that I am a Christian and I remembered that I am a pastor, so I pointed to my Emmanuel Lutheran shirt and I said, "Obviously, I'm a praying person and I'll be praying for your son." (Just as a note, when I spoke to them I used his name, but I haven't been identifying the couple or their child in this sermon, even though just before the final game of the season, I finally know the parents' names.)

After I told them I would pray for their son, they told me they would be grateful for the prayers and thanked me.

Today, the anthem that the choir sang was based on Psalm 46, which is always the Psalm for Reformation Sunday. It's a Psalm that was important to Martin Luther. It's the Psalm that he paraphrased for his famous hymn, *A Mighty Fortress is Our God*.

Martin Luther was born into a tumultuous time, close to the turn of the fifteenth century, when the political and religious world in which he lived was in turmoil. The position of faith in the world was shifting, the old world order was passing away, nation states were rising, and princes were demanding more power for themselves, and bishops and the pope were acting more like princes than like pastors.

The nations rage, and the kingdoms shake;
God speaks, and the earth melts away. (Psalm 46:6)

As an adult Martin Luther himself was responsible for more rending and tearing of the world order as his words, his writings, caused deep rifts in the church, causing him to be hunted by the church for execution, causing his life to be in danger.

Come now, regard the works of the Lord,
what desolations God has brought upon the earth;
behold the one who makes war to cease in all the world;
who breaks the bow, and shatters the spear, and burns the shields with fire.
(Psalm 46:8-9)

Martin Luther struggled with depression throughout his life and the only thing, the only thing that kept him going was his faith, and perhaps also the faithful

love and care of his friends and his wife, Katherine von Bora Luther. Luther considered these friends and his beloved Katie to be gifts from God.

“Be still, then, and know that I am God;

I will be exalted among the nations; I will be exalted in the earth.”

The Lord of hosts is with us;

the God of Jacob is our stronghold. (Psalm 46:10-11)

Certainly, we are living in our own tumultuous times. And it feels like the nations are raging and the kingdoms are shaking. It feels like the earth is moving, as though waters are raging and foaming, and mountains are shaking in the depths of the sea. Our very foundations are being rocked. And in a time when we need faith more than ever, to comfort us, to strengthen us, to turn us in service to one another and the world, more and more people are turning away from faith, away from God, and raging against religion, blaming without exception or nuance, people's faith for the ills of the world. It is a scary time, especially if you read the comments.

But Psalm 46 tells us that God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. And it tells us not to fear.

Do not be afraid to share that you have faith, even if your faith is shaky or shaken. Do not be afraid to speak hope into a world of despair. Do not be afraid to speak about the river of life, whose streams make glad the city of God. Do not be afraid to speak of the hope of peace, the God who makes wars to cease in all the world. Do not be afraid to be a peacemaker. Do not be afraid to speak of the hope of God's help for the broken city. Do not be afraid to exalt God in the nations. Do not be afraid to show up in the shattered places of the earth, for God is there before us. Therefore, we will not fear.

Rest in the stillness and the peace of God. The Lord of hosts is with us. The God of Jacob is our stronghold. Amen.