

Proper 15 (Series B)

“O God, My Faithful God” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #696)

Johann Heermann (1585-1647) published “O God, My Faithful God” in 1630 in a book titled *Devoti Musica Cordis, Haus und Hertz-Musica*, along with forty-eight other hymns. As the title suggests, Heermann intended this book of “house and heart music” for devotional use at home, not for public worship. Our hymn flows out of daily life, things that happen in homes, workplaces, and in congregations.

This hymn opens in classic prayer form, with an address to God. Heermann then names attributes of God, attributes that give confidence that the petitions that follow will be answered. God is faithful, God is an ever flowing fountain of perfect gifts, God is creator of everything (“without [God] nothing is”).

We should not pass this opening by too quickly! Heermann wrote these words during the 30 Years War, and he had already experienced the death of his wife, a devastating fire that almost destroyed the town where he was pastor, and the beginning of throat trouble that would lead to his giving up preaching in 1634. In spite of all this, Heermann with confidence addresses God as a fountain of perfect gifts! Twenty-first century Americans, I fear, would be more apt to whine and complain.

The remainder of stanza 1 and stanzas 2-4 contain a series of very practical petitions. When we sing this text, we ask for good health, a clear conscience, strength to do what God desires, a tongue that never speaks out of turn or offends others, patience with enemies, the blessing of friends, and “to live at peace with all.”

Stanza 3, in particular, rings true for me. How many times have I said something that I regretted and needed to apologize for? And, just as problematic, how many times have I kept silent when I should have spoken up? With our many ways of “speaking” immediately and widely on social media, this petition is especially appropriate today. Perhaps we should all put it on our computers or mobile devices, and pray it before our fingers hit the keys.

Finally, the key words to this hymn are found at the end of stanza 2:

. . . trusting you to bless
the outcome for my good,
for you must give success.

Heermann gives us words to ask God for strength to do God’s will, and not to worry about the outcome of following God. Rather, we trust in God, that the result of our actions would be for “[our] good.”

And then there are those five little words, “for you must give success.” These words do not say “if I do what God wants God will have to give success, to bless me.” In other words, this is not “do good, get good” theology! Rather, Heermann reminds us that we humans cannot “by our own reason or strength” give success to our actions. Any good that comes from what we do is only by the grace of God. Any good that comes from what we do is a perfect gift from the ever flowing fountain of God’s love. God does not love us because of what we do, or even because of who we are. No, God loves us because of who God is, was, and always will be: a faithful God, a fountain ever flowing with gifts of forgiveness, healing, and love.

To this God be all glory.

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In God, my faithful God, true fountain ever flowing,
without whom nothing is, all perfect gifts bestowing:
give me a healthy frame, and may I have within
a conscience free from blame, a soul unstained by sin.

Grant me the strength to do with ready heart and willing
whatever you command, my calling here fulfilling;
that I do what I should while trusting you to bless
the outcome for my good, for you must give success.

Keep me from saying words that later need recalling;
guard me lest idle speech may from my lips be falling;
but when within my place I must and ought to speak,
then to my words give grace lest I offend the weak.

Lord, let me win my foes with kindly words and actions,
and let me find good friends for counsel and correction.
Help me, as you have taught, to love both great and small
and by your Spirit's might to live in peace with all.

Let me depart this life confiding in my Savior;
by grace receive my soul that it may live forever;
and let my body have a quiet resting place
within a Christian grave; and let it sleep in peace.

And on that final day when all the dead are waking,
stretch out your mighty hand, my deathly slumber breaking.
Then let me hear your voice, redeem this earthly frame,
and bid me to rejoice with those who love your name.

Text: Johann Heermann (1585-1647); English translation prepared by Catherine Winkworth (1827-78)
Tune: O GOTT, DU FROMMER GOTT

Both text and tune are in the public domain.

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and duplicated for local use.]