

Proper 21 (Series B)

“Triune God, Be Thou Our Stay” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #505)

In memory of **Donald Busarow** whose grade-schoolers gave lively renditions of “If I Had a Hammer” on the school bus in late ‘60s Detroit

Do you remember the last time you or those with you sang on a hike or long trip? Do you remember what you sang? I’m told that fewer and fewer people do that these days, what with all the listening devices? We might wonder what the people of today’s First Lesson (Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29) sang as they moved from camp to camp on to the Land of Promise. It doesn’t sound like they were remembering The Song of Moses and Miriam (Exodus 15).

We’re told that in young Martin Luther’s day he, with classmates and villagers, sang a version of today’s hymn which by then was a hundred or so years old. It invoked the care and keeping of various notable saints such as Peter, Mary, Nicolas and so on. The tune also can be traced that far back in much the same form.

The commentary in *Luther’s Works* (vol. 53) tells us that Martin Luther “retained the first five lines of the text with minor changes, replacing the appeal to the saints with an invocation of the three Persons of the Trinity, and he formed the concluding part differently.” What a marvelous defense against the **evil one** he then lined out for us, beginning with **faith** and **trust!**

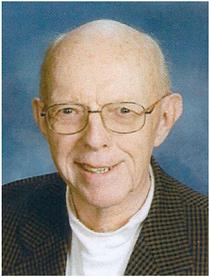
The translator, Richard Massie’s use of “God’s armor” points me to Ephesians 6 (13ff) with truth as a belt tight around the waist, with righteousness as a breastplate, shod with the readiness to announce the Good News of peace; shielded with faith, helmeted with salvation, wielding the word of God as the sword which the Spirit gives. What protection for life’s journey! Whether it was rhyming or remembering that takes us to “running” in the translation, who can miss the rich NT references comparing the faith journey to participating in a race (1 Cor.9:24,26; Gal.2:2; 5:7; Phil.2:16; Heb.12:1)?

What a “journey song” —from here to the holy! With a couple steps between stanzas, we go about 180 paces. Sing that again and again as was the custom for the procession and you have gone quite a distance. While few of us have Rogation processions any more, what a way to begin a service with a Trinitarian invocation. And what a wedding processional this might make as was a custom some time ago! Whether because of shortened aisles or attention spans, “Triune God, be thou our stay” can be just as appropriate.

However you do it, may “Triune God, be Thou our stay” find a place in your faith journey.

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Triune God, be Thou our stay
O let us perish never!
Cleanse us from our sins we pray,
And grant us life forever.
Keep us from the evil one;
Uphold our faith most holy,
And let us trust Thee solely
With humble hearts and lowly.
Let us put God's armor on,
With all true Christians running
Our heav'nly race and shunning
The devil's wiles and cunning.
Amen, amen! This be done;

So sing we, "Alleluia!" (Lent) O Lord, have mercy on us So sing we Hallelujah..

Tr. Richard Massie, alt.

God the Father, be our stay,
When Hell's dread powers assail us;
Cleanse us from our sins, we pray,
Nor in our last hour fail us.
Keep us from the Evil One;
Firm in the faith abiding,
In Christ our Saviour hiding,
And heartily confiding.
Let us put God's armour on;
With all true Christians running
Our heavenly race, and shunning
The Devil's wiles and cunning.
Amen, Amen, so be done,

Richard Massie (Primary Source Edition)

Gott der Vater wohn' uns bei
Und lass' uns nicht verderben.
Mach' uns aller Suenden frei
Und helf' uns selig sterben!
Vor dem Teufel uns bewahr'.

Halt uns bei festem Glauben
Und auf dich lass uns bauen,
Aus Herzensgrund vertrauen,
Dir uns lassen ganz und gar,
Mit allen rechten Christen
Entfliehen Teufels Lesten,
Mit Waffen Gott's uns fristen!
Amen, Amen, das sei wahr,
So singen wir: Halleluja!

(The Handbook to the Lutheran Hymnal #247)

God the Father with us be,
Let us not fall to badness
Make us from all sinning free,
And help us die in gladness
"Gainst the devil well us ware,
And keep our faith from failing,
Our hope in thee from quailing,
Our hearts upon thee staying.
Let us wholly trust thy care,
With all good Christians sharing,
Escape the devil's snaring,
Him with God's weapons daring.
Amen, now! So may we fare!
Let us then sing: Alleluia!

(Luther's Works vol. 53, p. 270)