

First Sunday in Lent

“A Mighty Fortress Is Our God” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #656, 657)

~ *Worst Case Scenario* ~

**If the Mountains Should Crumble
A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD**

~ **Psalm 46** ~

What was it that precipitated the writing of Psalm 46 we wonder. Surely the inspiration came from the Spirit of God! But God uses real life events to bring out the testimony and resolve of faith in His people.

Witness the Children of Israel backed up against the Red Sea with the armies of Egypt bearing down upon them. Sheer terror struck the hearts of God’s people. Moses stood up and proclaimed, “Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today. The Egyptians you see today you will never see again. The Lord will fight for you. You need only to be still.” (Exodus 14:13-14)

How can God’s people “be still” when their very lives are about to be crushed! The psalmist must have known such terror also. The threats to his own life were right before his eyes. God’s people were in danger of being destroyed. Even God’s good purposes were in jeopardy it seemed. How can the psalmist hope to comfort the people with God’s simple words, “Be still and know that I am God.”? He must have known something about God. He must have been just as confident as Moses ever was! Even when things looked utterly hopeless, God was their refuge and strength, their very present help in every trouble. He would act and He would save!

The psalmist pictures for the people a “worst case scenario”. How bad can things get? Well, what if the mighty mountains of old that stand so solid and sure as if they would hold their ground forever, should suddenly give way, crumble, and fall into the heart of the sea? That would certainly make God’s people fear that their whole world was crumbling around them. Yet even then, God stands sure and firm for us. God is with us. God will help us. God will save us. God’s good purposes will not fail—even if the mountains should crumble!

Do you think that when Dr. Luther took the words of Psalm 46 and wrote the words and music to “A Mighty Fortress”, he was perhaps sitting back in his chair, without a single care or concern on his mind except the contemplation of a pleasant retirement? Not hardly! The battle for the reformation of the church was fully engaged! Luther was Moses at the Red Sea with the armies of the mighty Roman Church bearing down on him and on all who held to the truth of Scriptures and God’s Word of salvation through Christ alone.

Rome was ready to crush God's faithful utterly, and they looked to Luther for guidance from the Lord. Luther looked out at the Red Sea of the future and surely could not see how God would ever bring them through it alive. He could be crushed. God's people could be annihilated. The very truth of the gospel could be submerged once again in the polluted sea of work righteousness and superstitions. What hope was there? Where was their strength to stand firm? Where was their refuge for a time such as this when it looked like the mountains would crumble around them and they would be plunged into the heart of the sea?

Luther could not have known how God was going to open up the Red Sea and bring His people safely through. But this he knew. A mighty fortress is our God! When the mountains crumble, God will stand. And the Lord is with us! He who gave us the victory of salvation through the battle fought and won by Christ Jesus our Savior, would not fail.

As Luther contemplated those powerful words of Psalm 46, he was well aware that there was an even greater and more devastating "worst case scenario" than any mountains crumbling. Indeed, physical threats to this life must have seemed small compared to the spiritual threats to eternal life thrown up by Satan and all his evil forces. And yet, even at this, with Christ our Savior and Lord fighting for us, there is nothing, nothing in all the world to fear! "Though devils all the world should fill, all eager to devour us, we tremble not! We fear no ill! They cannot 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."

Yes, they may take our life, goods, fame, child and wife! And they have! And they will! But they have won nothing. God has given us the kingdom in our Lord Jesus Christ, and nothing can separate us from His redeeming love. (Romans 8)

Every day I look up and see the mountains ready to crumble around me. How can we meet the church budget? The demands of my family and personal life are sometimes more than I think I can deal with. I pray with an anxious heart for people who are hurting, people who are leaving, people who just don't seem to care. Others are busy pushing and pulling in different directions. Is this the work of the Lord we are doing? War and hunger and violence stalk every corner of the world including my own neighborhood. Society today seems to be in a vicious competition with Sodom and Gomorrah to see which can sink to the lowest depths of flagrant immorality and idolatry. Do we need to club people over the head with the Law until it gets through to them? The Gospel doesn't seem to be doing its job. Don't we have to look at things realistically as we see them, and then do what we have to do to make things right? Or is there some kind of deep guile that is deceiving us and tempting us to abandon the only true hope we have?

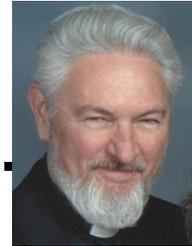
Open your Bible to Psalm 46. Read it again and apply it to yourself and the people you serve. Lift up your voice with Dr. Luther and sing aloud what you know to be true and solid and lasting to all eternity. Be faithful to the Lord and His eternal Gospel. Even if the mountains should crumble, even if devils all the world should fill, be still and know

that the Lord is God! He is with us every day, every hour with His blood-bought forgiveness and resurrection life to lift us up and sustain us through every battle of life! He is our refuge and strength, our very present help in every trouble. A mighty fortress is our God. Amen.

A FEW ADDITIONAL NOTES FOR MEDITATION

It is uncertain when exactly Dr. Martin Luther wrote the words and melody for “A Mighty Fortress.” The year 1529 is quite probable. It quickly rose in popularity to become “The Battle Hymn of the Reformation.” It was translated into Swedish in 1536 and into English in 1539 by Bible translator Myles Coverdale. Over seventy English renditions have been published. The hymn has been translated into some one hundred languages and has been sung by Christians around the world. “A Mighty Fortress” is found in both Lutheran and Catholic hymnals as well as in nearly every protestant hymnal published. The melody has been used by many composers including Pachelbel, Handel, Mendelssohn, Wagner, and, of course, J. S. Bach. The melody motifs of “A Mighty Fortress” have also been both used and abused in numerous movies and television shows. There are many stories of how God’s people in times of fearful terrors have been comforted and reassured of God’s presence and power by singing “A Mighty Fortress.”

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A mighty fortress is our God, a trusty shield and weapon;
He helps us free from ev'ry need that hath us now o'ertaken.
The old evil foe now means deadly woe;
Deep guile and great might are his dread arms in fight;
On earth is not his equal.

With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected.
But for us fights the valiant One, whom God himself elected.
Ask ye, Who is this? Jesus Christ it is.
Of Sabaoth Lord, and there's none other God;
He holds the field forever.

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.

The Word they still shall let remain nor any thanks have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain with his good gifts and Spirit.
And take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife,

Though these all be gone, our vict'ry has been won;
The Kingdom ours remaineth.

Text: Martin Luther; translation composite
Tune: Martin Luther

(Both text and tune are in the public domain)

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