

Proper 12 (July 27, 2014)

"From God Can Nothing Move Me" (*Lutheran Service Book*, #713)

*"Then the people answered, 'Far be it from us that we should forsake the Lord to serve other gods...'"* [Joshua 24:16]

*"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."* [Romans 8:38-39]

*"Nevertheless I am continually with you; you hold my right hand."* [Psalm 73:23]

On the Festival of the Holy Trinity, I had the incredible privilege of baptizing my grandson, Joshua. It is in Holy Baptism that we relinquish our identity and take on a new one as children of God. At the font we hear the promises of God to be with us always, to forgive us forever, to love us into eternity, to make us members of a new family, the church. Baptism roots us and grounds us in God's grace. It becomes for us an oasis of comfort and support to which we may return each day, particularly when the circumstances of our lives become complicated or even unbearable. After all, it was at Baptism that the Holy Spirit began to comfort and assure us of God's presence.

The baptismal promise is that, with the Spirit's help and comfort, we can make it through the difficult and challenging times of life. So my grandson Joshua received the promise of God's grace against the formidable backdrop of sin and evil, and yes, even death. He shares a name, of course, with the great leader of Israel who led God's people into the Promised Land, but not without challenge. It was a critical moment for God's people to throw off their gods, turn from sin, and follow a God of promise. Joshua led the way by personally taking a strong stance for his household: "We will always serve the Lord." Though the future that lay ahead for Israel was fraught with obstacles, they made the Lord the foundation of their life together.

That resolve and determination is clear in the first phrase of our hymn text, "From God shall nothing move me..." You almost get the sense that we are holding on for dear life, never letting go of our rock, our power, and our helper. Another insight comes from Catherine Winkworth's translation: "From God shall naught divide me." Our baptism makes us one with God and one with each other. It is the great equalizer as God receives everyone into this new family no matter who we are, or where we are from, or what we have done. We hold dearly to this baptismal relationship with God and one another. We are adamant that nothing will divide us, or as St. Paul wrote, nothing will separate us from God's love.

We take comfort in knowing that as much as we may try to hold things together when times are bleak, God is working harder to stay close to us and to keep us together in faith. No matter that evil or tragedy or society tries to divide and conquer, we are the baptized, the children of God, and our God is stronger than anyone or anything. From the second verse of our hymn:

...God's grace shall still endure.  
He rescues me from sin

And breaks the chains that bind me.  
I leave death's fear behind me;  
His peace I have within.

This reliance or trust in God's strong grace does not come easily or without a price. We turn daily to the power of our baptism and are strengthened in times of need by others who love the Lord. We are so thankful that we have a network of love and support in the body of Christ. To reclaim the promises of our baptism also means that we need to turn away from the harmful practices or hurtful situations that keep us from experiencing God's life. It was no easy task for the Israelites to turn from other gods. Joshua's loyalty to the Lord stood in stark contrast to their behavior, and was a strong model for their future.

We are so much more fortunate because in our struggles we have a New Testament Joshua to lead us, Jesus of Nazareth. More than a leader and example, he gives us the strength and power to overcome sin and adversity. His cross demonstrates that he is truly "the one who saves," and our "greatest treasure." We hold fast to him and put our faith in him. Nothing can divide us or move us from him. Nothing!

When in my darkest hour,  
I can on him rely;  
I have from him the power  
All evil to defy.  
For God alone has might,  
And I shall never fear it;  
My body, soul, and spirit  
Belong to him by right. (vs. 3, tr. Gerald Thorson)

*Prayer:* Lord Jesus, as we face the turbulence of life, ground us in your baptismal promises and hold us firmly in your grace forever. Amen

Paul Weber  
Hickory, NC



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From God can nothing move me; He will not step aside  
But gently will reprove me and be my constant guide.  
He stretches out His hand in evening and in morning,  
My life with grace adorning wherever I may stand.

When those whom I regarded as trustworthy and sure  
Have long from me departed, God's grace shall still endure.  
He rescues me from sin and breaks the chains that bind me.  
I leave death's fear behind me; His peace I have within.

The Lord my life arranges; who can His work destroy?  
In His good time He changes all sorrow into joy.  
So let me then be still: my body, soul, and spirit  
His tender care inherit according to His will.

Each day at His good pleasure God's gracious will is done.  
He sent His greatest treasure in Jesus Christ, His Son.  
He every gift imparts. The bread of earth and heaven  
Are by His kindness given. Praise Him with thankful hearts!

Praise God with acclamation and in His gifts rejoice.  
Each day finds its vocation responding to His voice.  
Soon years on earth are past; but time we spend expressing  
The love of God brings blessing that will forever last!

Yet even though I suffer the world's unpleasantness,  
And though the days grow rougher and bring me great distress,  
That day of bliss divine, which knows no end or measure,  
And Christ, who is my pleasure, forever shall be mine.

For thus the Father willed it, who fashioned us from clay;  
And His own Son fulfilled it and brought eternal day.  
The Spirit now has come, to us true faith has given;  
He leads us home to heaven O praise the Three in One!

Text: Ludwig Helmbold (1532-98)

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