

SERMON

Psalm 46:1-7

A Mighty Fortress is our God

Nunawading and Waverley, 31-10-21

Dear friends in Christ,

“A Mighty Fortress is our God” is one of the most famous hymns in the Christian Church, especially amongst Protestants and it is even being sung in some Catholic circles. It has been dubbed the battle hymn of the reformation and both the music and the words were written by Dr Martin Luther somewhere between 1527-1529. There are at least 70 English translations; the words being a paraphrase of Psalm 46. The first eight verses of Psalm 46 are:

**God is a refuge and strength for us,
a great and immediate help in distress.
Therefore, we will not fear when the earth changes
and the mountains crash into the heart of the sea,
the waters roar and boil and the mountains quake in their surging
pride.**

**There is a river; its streams make glad the city of God,
the holy dwelling place of the Most High.
God is in her midst; she will not be shaken.
God will help her at the turning of dawn.
The nations raged, kingdoms shook; he raised his voice and the
earth melted.**

**The Lord of hosts is with us;
the God of Jacob is our secure height.**

The Reformation, which began 504 years ago on this day, was not only about pure doctrine; it was the discovery of the gospel hidden for nearly a 1,000 years. It was the justification of rebels like you and me, by an act of grace and mercy displayed in Jesus Christ, who redeemed us through his cross and resurrection and set us right with God through trust in him. It was also the discovery of joy and song. People had to sing because their hearts were so full. Luther and others quickly set to work to write hymns for the ordinary folk to sing rather than choirs singing in Latin. Very quickly hymn books appeared and Luther contributed nearly 40 hymns, many with original music.

Why did this hymn, “A Mighty Fortress is our God” become so popular? I think it was because of its sense of defiance and confidence, picking up on the words of Psalm 46: **God is our refuge and strength...therefore we will not fear.** We feel strengthened and encouraged by them. Let’s quickly go through the verses translated by John Schubert.

1 A mighty fortress is our God,
 a trusty shield and weapon,
 our faithful helper in all need,
 no matter what may happen.
 The old evil foe
 now means deadly woe;
 deep guile and great might
 are his dread arms in fight;
 on earth he has no equal.

As you know, there was great opposition to Luther from the church hierarchy, though many bishops were sympathetic. In 1521, he was ordered to Worms under a Pope Leo X’s bull, where he was pressured to recant or else be killed. Luther recognised an old evil foe, the great enemy Satan, working behind the false teaching and attacks of the church. Force and violence were the only approach they used yet they were no match for the simple joy of knowing Christ that Luther experienced. Luther, and those with him, knew that God was their refuge, a fortress, **a secure height.** The only weapon they needed was the word of God that would counter anything their enemies threw at them.

We have heard recently of people being forced to ‘take a knee’. Would you do that if your employer asked you to do it? There are many sides to this, aren’t there, but in the end, Christians only bow to the Lord Jesus, **before whom every knee should bow and confess him as Lord.** Christians are used to kneeling for the body and blood of Christ, kneeling to confess sins or kneeling when entering a church. Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego would not bow to the idolatrous statue erected in honour of the Babylonian ruler Nebuchadnezzar II. Increasingly we are seeing popular idolatries sweeping through businesses and educational institutions today. More and more, we shall need to appreciate that our Lord is a faithful helper in all our need even if it means losing your job.

2 With our own might is nothing done;
 we’d soon be lost, rejected.

But for us fights the very one,
whom God himself elected.
And who may this be?
Christ Jesus is he.
He is our great Lord,
there is no other God;
and he has won the battle.

Jesus Christ fights for our existence to secure a place for us in His Father's kingdom. We know of no other God and therefore he is our great defender. If we attempt to use our anger or intellect or any other strength we might have, we will be quickly defeated by our foes. Our great temptation as a church is to always fall back on our own resources rather than believing that the Lord is amongst us. The church is **the city of God in which the Most High dwells**. The apostle Paul reminds us that by virtue of our baptism, we are **the temple of the Holy Spirit**. Since God is at hand with **his immediate help**, we can trust him and feel light and free and confident. I like the way Luther tells us that Christ has already 'won the battle'. Anyone opposing us is a defeated person.

3 Though hordes of devils gather here,
 all eager to devour us,
 we tremble not, we do not fear,
 they cannot overpower us.
 This world's prince may still
 scowl fierce as he will,
 he does us no harm,
 he's judged, he's overcome;
 one little word can fell him.

It is true that we are afraid of numbers; the more against us the more fearful we are. There is nothing worse than thinking that you are standing alone. You may be defending someone or trying to do what is right but those with the power want to silence you. The more you resist, the worse their rage becomes. All we need is the truth based on evidence added to the great spiritual truth that **Jesus is the way, the trust and the life**. 'One little word can fell' can fell the giant in our minds. Luther stood alone while most ducked for cover but his confidence was in the truth written and plainly stated in Scripture.

4. God's Word forever shall abide,
 No thanks to foes who fear it,

For God himself fights by our side
With weapons of the Spirit.
Were they to take our house,
Goods, honour, child or spouse,
Though life be wrenched away,
They cannot win the day;
The Kingdom's ours forever.

What a beautiful sense of victory we have here. Christian bravery only arises from a real meeting with the ascended Christ and a daily meeting with the Holy Spirit in his word. You will only stand for what you believe in and what you are prepared to stake your life on; and What we may suffer here is a small loss in comparison to what Christ confers on us, a kingdom that endures forever. It is a place of everlasting joy.