**FAVORITE HYMNS**

***A Mighty Fortress***

The young Catholic monk had had enough! He was sick and tired of the pope and the clergy of the Roman Church abusing the scriptures and taking advantage of the ignorance of the poor common man. This man-made religious hierarchy had drifted so far away from the Bible that this lone voice in the wilderness could stand it no more. What the Vatican and all its 1,000 years of history was doing was the grossest abuse of power imaginable. They controlled the vast population by fear and intimidation. They played upon their ignorance like a violin, manipulating the masses to believe that if they would but put their money in the coffers of Johann Tetzel’s “Indulgence” buckets then they could buy a loved one’s soul from purgatory and send them straight to heaven. The pope and archbishops had endorsed this method of “forgiveness” in order to raise funds to repair St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome. This young priest and monk named Martin Luther changed history.

Martin Luther was extremely intelligent and entered the University of Erfurt at the age of 13. He became so good at debating that he earned the nickname ‘The Philosopher.’ He had a great career ahead of him in the academic world. But then one day when he was 21 he was frightened into the religious life when a terrifying thunderstorm sent a bolt of lightening right next to him as he was walking on a road. He cried out, “Help me, St. Anne, and I will become a monk!” He fulfilled his vow, gave away all his possessions, and entered a monastery.

Twelve years later, in 1517, at just 33 years of age, on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg Germany, he nailed his famous 95 Theses to challenge Pope Leo X to debate. Thus began the Protestant Reformation. The pope, in 1521, excommunicated Luther from the Catholic church, and the Emperor Charles V issued an Edict of Worms, declaring Luther a heretic and outlaw, giving permission for anyone to murder him without penalty. But the common people had come to love him and so he was protected by Prince Frederick III in his castle. Under protection Luther spent time translating the Bible from Latin to German so the common man could read it for himself.

Until his death in 1546 at the age of 62 Martin Luther became not only a prolific writer of sermons and commentaries to promote Biblical learning, he also was a hymn writer that composed at least 36 songs for the common people to sing in worship. He strongly believed the common man, mostly illiterate, could easily learn through rhyme and rhythm the great doctrines of the Bible. From childhood he had loved to sing, so he knew music well. He made it one of his missions to use hymns for God’s glory and man’s salvation.

Facing threats from the Roman Church was not his only concern. In 1527, a terrible pandemic known as the Bubonic Plague broke out all over Germany and Europe, killing many of its victims quickly and painfully. Luther, along with his pregnant wife Katharina, could have chosen to escape to safety. Instead they chose to stay and help, using their very house as a ward for the sick.

Now facing both physical death, and spiritual threats of persecution and martyrdom, he fell into serious health issues, especially severe depression. His friend Philip Melanchthon came to see him. Luther suggested they sing their favorite Psalm 46. As they sang a thought for a hymn took hold of him. He immediately penned what became known as *The Battle Hymn Of The Reformation*. He titled it **Ein feste Burg ist unser Gott.** Frederick Hedge, who translated it from German to English in 1853 titled it *A Mighty Fortress Is Our God*.

Read Psalm 46 and then immediately read the words to Luther’s war song of God’s protection. As we face both persecution and pandemic let us use this great hymn to know God rules in the kingdoms of men. We can, we must, we will ultimately triumph.

**Psalm 46** **God the Refuge of His People and Conqueror of the Nations  
 To the Chief Musician. A Psalm of the sons of Korah. A Song for Alamoth.**

1 God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.  
2 Therefore we will not fear, Even though the earth be removed,   
 And though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea;  
3 Though its waters roar and be troubled, Though the mountains shake with its swelling.  
4 There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God,   
 The holy place of the tabernacle of the Most High.  
5 God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved; God shall help her, just at the break of dawn.  
6 The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.  
7 The LORD of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our refuge.

**A Mighty Fortress** **words and music by Martin Luther**

A mighty fortress is our God, A bulwark never failing.   
Our helper He amid the flood, Of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe, Doth seek to work us woe;   
His craft and pow’r are great, And armed with cruel hate, On earth is not his equal.

Did we in our own strength confide, Our striving would be losing.   
Were not the right One on our side, The Man of God’s own choosing.  
Dost ask who that may be? Christ Jesus, it is He;  
Lord Sabaoth His name, From age to age the same, And He must win the battle.

And tho’ this world with evil filled, Should threaten to undo us;  
We will not fear for God hath willed, His truth to triumph thru us.  
The prince of darkness grim, We tremble not for him;  
His rage we can endure, For lo! His doom is sure; One little word shall fell him.

That word above all earthly pow’rs, No thanks to them abideth;  
The Spirit and the gifts are ours, Thro’ Him who with us aideth.  
Let goods and kindred go, This mortal life also;  
The body they may kill, God’s truth abideth still, His kingdom is forever.

While today we would challenge Luther’s doctrinal position on the plan of salvation, we still admire this man of great courage who stood against both the powers of Church and State. As he told Emperor Charles, who demanded he recant his convictions, "Unless I can be instructed and convinced with evidence from the Holy Scriptures or with open, clear, and distinct grounds of reasoning, then I cannot and will not recant, because it is neither safe nor wise to act against conscience. Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me! Amen."

To Luther that hymn was more than a another song to sing in church, it was a motto to die for. The next time you sing this 500 year-old hymn that helped change the world, maybe you will make it your statement of faith, your hill to die on, too.

Until tomorrow… make God your refuge and strength, your present help in time of trouble.

God loves you, and so do I. - Rick