

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. ⁸ Come, behold the works of the LORD, Who has made desolations in the earth. ⁹ He makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire. ¹⁰ Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! ¹¹ The LORD of hosts is with us; the God of Jacob is our refuge.

Text: Psalm 46 A 10-29-17 Reformation Eph. 6:10-18a Mt. 8:23-27 Ps. 27 Resp. Ps.: fr. 34
Hymns: 798, 266, 262, 800

GOD IS OUR REFUGE AND STRENGTH

A mighty Fortress is our God, A trusty Shield and Weapon;
He helps us free from every 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. (TLH #262:1-2)

Dear fellow believers in Christ,

The church of Martin Luther's day taught that we're saved by faith in Jesus and our good works. Luther tried as hard as he could to be good, even to the point of becoming a monk and going way above and beyond the good deeds that were required of the monks. But no matter how hard he tried, Luther could never be sure that he had done enough good things to make up for all of his sins and deserve to go to heaven. He was scared to death that God was going to punish him forever in hell. As he kept studying God's Word he came upon Romans 1:17: "*The righteousness of God is revealed in it*" (the Gospel), "*as it is written, the righteous shall live by faith.*" God led Luther to see that we're not saved by anything we do, but by faith alone in Jesus and what He did to save us.

The church sold “indulgences,” which were pieces of paper granting a person forgiveness for sins. The church was teaching the people that God’s forgiveness can be bought with money. Luther wrote against the sale of indulgences, pointing out that Scripture teaches that God forgives our sins freely for Jesus’ sake. This was the chief subject Luther wrote about in 95 theses, or statements. He posted them on the door of the local church, which was the way they made public announcements back then. Luther wrote them in Latin, the language of the scholars, intending only that he and his fellow scholars would read them and discuss and debate them. But when word got out about what they said, they were translated into German and other languages, and spread all over that part of the world. That’s how the Reformation got started. Luther hadn’t intended things to happen as they did, but God had. The Bible’s teachings of faith alone, Scripture alone, and grace alone had almost become lost. The Lord was bringing those precious truths back, so that people could once again hear them, believe them, and be saved!

Because of his 95 theses and other things he wrote, Luther came to be in very serious trouble with the church (which held great earthly power at that time) and with his emperor. They demanded that he take back everything he had written. Because Luther’s writings were simply expressing what the Bible says, he could not and would not take them back. As the events of the Reformation kept moving forward, Luther was excommunicated by the church. The emperor labelled him an outlaw who could be killed by anyone. Luther’s whole world had been shaken to its core.

Our text speaks of “*the earth [being] removed, and ... the mountains [being] carried into the midst of the sea; its waters [roaring] and [being] troubled, and “the mountains [shaking].”* Those words, figuratively speaking, are a fitting description of what was happening in Luther’s life, and what can happen in our lives. Like Luther, sometimes our whole world gets turned upside down, and our feelings of peace and security vanish.

“*The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved.*” Some who followed Luther’s teachings (the Bible’s teachings) and tried to spread the Reformation in their own countries were put to death. The emperor tried to force the Lutheran princes to deny their beliefs and return to the established church. Even though they very well could have lost their lives for it, they refused, and remained faithful to Scripture.

The psalmist says, “*Why do the nations rage and the people plot a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against His Anointed*” (Ps. 2:1-2). As in Luther’s day, still today certain individuals and people in positions of power are raging against God and His Word and His people. Satan can’t stand it when the truths of God’s Word are being freely spread for everyone to hear and believe and be saved by. He stirs up people against God and His Word and us to try to stop us from believing and spreading the Gospel.

But our text has good news! *“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear.”* We’re reminded twice in our text that *“God is our refuge.”* Luther and the other reformers kept turning to the Lord and His Word as their *“refuge”* – their *“Mighty Fortress,”* and so do we. *“God is our ... strength.”* We say with the Apostle Paul, *“I can do all things through Christ, who strengthens me”* (Phil. 4:13). *“God is ... a very present help in trouble.”* Jesus assures us, *“I am with you always”* (Mt. 28:20). With God as *“our refuge, ... strength,”* and *“very present help in trouble,”* *“therefore we will not fear.”*

“[The Lord] makes wars cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariot in the fire.” There was a time when the bow (and arrow), spear, and chariot were weapons of mass destruction. The armies that wielded those weapons are long gone. But the Lord God Almighty, the *“King of kings”* and *“Lord of lords”* is still on His throne. *“The nations raged, the kingdoms were moved; He uttered His voice, the earth melted.”* Some people and some in government may think they’re in control. But God is in control, and His will for the good of His Church is always and ultimately done. He tells us, *“Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!”*

The real battle Luther and the other reformers faced, and that we face, isn’t an earthly battle. It’s a spiritual battle. *“We do not wrestle against flesh and blood,”* Paul reminds us, *“but against ... spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly”* (the spiritual) *“places”* (Eph. 6:12). Jesus died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Jesus has given us the victory over our greatest enemies: Satan, sin, death, and hell! *“‘Comfort, yes, comfort My people!’ says your God. ‘Speak comfortingly to Jerusalem, and cry out to her, that her warfare is ended, that her iniquity is pardoned’* (Is. 40:1-2a).

“There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God.” The Lord is speaking figuratively of the life-giving Gospel ‘waters’ that make God’s people *“glad.”* Water keeps us alive. Jesus gives us eternal life! Jesus says, *“Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never thirst; but the water that I will give him will be in him a well of water springing up into everlasting life”* (Jn. 4:14).

“The LORD of hosts is with us.” God and His *“heavenly host”* (Lk. 2:13) – His heavenly angels – are watching over us, defending and protecting us against Satan and his evil angels. *“The God of Jacob is our refuge.”* God, who protected and blessed the Old Testament believer, Jacob, is protecting and blessing us.

“God is in the midst of her.” God is always with us, His Church. He has promised us, *“Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you”* (He. 13:5, NIV). Therefore *“she shall not be moved”* (from the original: *“be shaken”*). *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Ro. 8:31). God graciously spared the lives of the Lutheran princes. The reformers who were martyred God took

to heaven, and their powerful testimony lives on. The Lord allowed Luther to live for many years and spread the Gospel through his preaching and teaching and prolific writing. The Lord is watching over us and protecting us and blessing us, too! He has caused the legacy of the Reformation – faith alone, Scripture alone, grace alone – to remain for us to believe and continue to proclaim.

“God is our refuge and strength.” The story of the Reformation and Martin Luther, the Lutheran princes, and the other reformers and all that they faced and all that they were able to accomplish is an amazing one. But the Reformation really isn’t about them. The Reformation is about God and what He did for them and through them. Against all the might of Satan and the greatest powers on earth, the Lord restored the saving truths of His Word for the world. These truths remain as our source of salvation, comfort, and strength in life, and our assurance of eternal life one day in heaven!

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,
 Let these all be gone, They yet have nothing won;
 The Kingdom ours remaineth. Amen. (TLH #262:3-4)