

# The Poetry and Promises of God

By: Meagan McLaughlin

October 30, 2022. Today is the perfect day to remember that Martin Luther composed “A Mighty Fortress” while he was in exile. We remember all the promises of God that show up throughout our scriptures. God is our refuge and strength, no matter what happens in our lives.

Readings: [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#), [Psalm 46](#), [Romans 3:19-28](#), [John 8:31-36](#)

\*\*\* Transcript \*\*\*

The passages we have today, and every year on Reformation Sunday, are some of my favorite scriptures. Part of it is the poetry of the words in these readings. But far beyond the beautiful images that these texts present, are the promises that they carry for us. It is so appropriate that we remember these promises today as we celebrate Confirmation for John, James, Harrison, and Marc, affirming the promises of our baptisms.

In Jeremiah we hear, “I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and will shall be my people.” In a few minutes, our Confirmands will share a passage of scripture that has meaning to them, and tell us why they chose it. Although they will not be reciting it from memory today — that seemed like too much pressure in front of the whole congregation — they did share their passage from memory with me, and with each other, and with their adults as they prepared for today, and there is something profound about having a piece of scripture memorized, to bring it within us, so that we carry it with us wherever we go.

Often when we hear about law, we think about something black and white, something that limits us or constrains us, that looks for where we’ve failed so that we can be judged. Our founder Martin Luther, whose seal rests on our altar today as we remember the Reformation he began, he wrestled with this throughout his life. He struggled to get it right, so that he would be worthy. And then, finally, Luther recognized the promise of God’s grace. As it says in Romans, we have all sinned. And we are all justified — made whole — by the God who created us.

God’s word, on our hearts. God’s promise, to always be our God. That is the promise, the covenant, that our God made with Israel and Judah. And God is faithful to that covenant with us today, even when we fail. That is what you, and we along with you, are confirming today, Confirmands. We are sinner and saint, none of us perfect. And we are, each of us and all of us, God’s people, beloved forever. And nothing will ever change that.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus tells us, “If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Continue — abide, remain, to be held. “In my word.” Jon Heerboth reminded Tuesday text study that in the Gospel of John, “word” means Jesus. Free, as Luther discovered, from the struggle, the stress, and the guilt of trying to earn your place and God’s love. Free to be the people God created you to be: honest, humble, and authentic. Free to embody the truth of God’s mercy, justice, and love, even if it is not popular, as Luther did when he challenged the corruption and injustice of the church, even the pope himself, in order to call the church he loved back to the truth. If you are held by the love and mercy of God in Jesus Christ — and you are, Confirmands, and beloved people of Christ Lutheran — the truth of God’s promise will set you free.

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.” In a few minutes, we will be singing a

song that echoes these words from Psalm 46 — “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” Many may know that this hymn was composed by Martin Luther. But today is the perfect day to remember that Luther wrote this hymn while he was in exile, hiding away from those who wanted to kill him, in the literal fortress of Wartburg Castle.

Trouble comes in so many forms in this world, and we have felt it in a particular way this week as we have grieved, and raged, and resisted, the tragedy at Central Visual and Performing Arts High School on Monday. Luther’s hymn echoes the song of the psalmist, who claimed that God will not forsake us. In the midst of pain, injustice, and suffering in our lives, the psalmist reminds us to take a moment to be still, and know that God is right there in the midst of it.

Today, John, Marc, Harrison, and James, we stand with you as you affirm the promises of your baptism, and we remember our baptisms with you. We come together as a community to celebrate with you this step on your life-long journey of faith. We remember all the promises of God that show up throughout our scriptures. God is our refuge and strength, no matter what happens in our lives. The truth that we are beloved children of God frees us to be who God created us to be, and embody God’s love in the world. We hear God speaking the promise to us today: I will be your God, and you shall be my people. And nothing will ever change that.

Thanks be to God.

\*\*\* Keywords \*\*\*

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