

## ***The Lord God is my strength – Sunday 15<sup>th</sup> June 2014***

***“ Though the fig tree should not blossom  
And there be no fruit on the vines,  
Though the yield of the olive should fail  
And the fields produce no food,  
Though the flock should be cut off from the fold  
And there be no cattle in the stalls,  
Yet I will exult in the Lord,  
I will rejoice in the God of my salvation.  
The Lord God is my strength,  
And He has made my feet like hinds’ feet,  
And makes me walk on my high places..”  
Habakkuk 3:17-19***

Beloved in The Lord,

Where do you turn to when something bad happens? Where do you gain strength in times of trouble? Who do you turn to when everything falls apart? No matter how great your need maybe, no matter how enormous the problem, no matter how deep your despair, there is a place to turn to, and that is our Heavenly Father, Almighty God.

Our text today bears this out. This is a truth that we find repeated throughout Scripture, namely that The Lord God is our strength. We heard in our first Bible reading today the testimony of the Psalmist: ***“God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble”(Psalm 46:1).*** Martin Luther based his famous hymn “A Mighty Fortress is our God” on this Psalm. A person who can proclaim “The Lord God is my strength” will withstand every trial that comes his or her way. Such a person will make it through even the most testing times because their focus is in the right place – their focus is on God. They have learnt to lift their eyes above their circumstances and to focus upon God Himself.

If our focus is only upon ourselves, upon our circumstances, then the song of our heart will be more or less something like “woe is me.” On the other hand, however, if our focus is on God, then our song will be very different and will be something like “ A mighty fortress is my God!”.

Last Sunday we reflected upon the truth that the mouth speaks out that which fills the heart. We also saw that in order for the testimony of our life to be good and pleasing and honouring to God, our heart needs to be continually filled with The Holy Spirit. Today in our service we commemorate the events of June 14. The day when countless thousands were brutally removed from their homes and shipped off to Siberia at the hands of a godless regime. Many never did return to their homeland. As a nation, we have experienced many difficult times, and have endured much suffering and been sorely tested. What is of vital importance is how we deal with the past. We must not allow a seed of bitterness or unforgiveness to reside in our heart because that seed leads to death.

We must lift our eyes to God and focus upon Him. We must ask God to give us a heart that resembles His heart. A heart that forgives and that carries no resentment nor bitterness.

Jesus is our living example of God's heart. Hanging on that cross, He looked down at those who had put Him there and prayed that the Father would forgive them for they did not know what they were doing.

Forgiveness sets us free. Why live with bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart? These are like a malignant cancer that slowly eats away and destroys our very soul. Forgiveness is a balm that heals and brings peace and joy.

We return to our foundation text. The prophet Habakkuk lists a whole litany of problems and then says despite all of that: ***"Yet I will exult in the Lord, I will rejoice in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places.."***

You see, he had the right kind of attitude. He knew that in order to walk on the high places, one must have their focus upon God. In order to live victoriously, one must confess: "The Lord God is my strength." When we do our feet become light and we can skip for joy.

Bitterness, anger, hatred, unforgiveness, whining and wailing and moaning make our feet heavy. It drains all of our energy and robs us of peace and joy in life. It takes you hostage and keeps you in a very negative and dark prison. On the other hand, glorifying God, praising Him, sets you free and helps you live in the light and your feet are light even in the darkest of night.

This is why in his letter to the Philippians Paul wrote: ***"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice!" (Phil.4:4)***. Paul didn't write rejoice sometimes, no he wrote rejoice always. Not only when you feel like it, but always. Not only when the sun is shining brightly and the birds are singing, but also when the sun refuses to shine and you are in a dark place – rejoice! Not only in health, but also in sickness – rejoice! Rejoice always!

Please note that Paul writes: rejoice **in The Lord**. Herein is the key. Paul doesn't write rejoice in your circumstances, but rejoice in The Lord. You see it is a question of focus. There is a great old song that says that God is not only God on the mountain but He is also God in the valley.

God knows you, He knows your circumstances. Nothing, absolutely nothing, happens outside of His knowledge and so you can rejoice in Him always. If you do, you will find that you have victory even in the most difficult circumstances. I am always deeply moved by Job's words which he uttered upon the news that he had lost everything he had, his possessions, his family, his servants, his cattle, even his health. He said: ***"Naked I came from my mother's womb, And naked I shall return there. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord." (Job 1:21)***

You see, Job understood that absolutely everything is in God's Hands. Even in great loss, he was able to worship God and bless His name. The next verse tells us something very important:

***"Through all this Job did not sin nor did he blame God." (Job 1:22)***

The end result was that God gave him more than he had before the test. Beloved, it is of utmost importance that we settle the issue once and for all in our hearts and that is that God is absolutely sovereign, and He does as He pleases. It is not for us to question His will

or His ways, but it is for us to believe in Him, trust in Him, worship Him, love Him always. He knows what He is doing.

If we must experience pain and suffering, then that is in His hands. He will help us if we trust in Him. There are so many wonderful promises that God gives us. One of the most beautiful is this one: ***“Do not fear, for I am with you; Do not anxiously look about you, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, surely I will help you, Surely I will uphold you with My righteous right hand.” (Isaiah 41:10)***

and another that is similar: ***“But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the flame burn you. “For I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior;” (Isaiah 43:1-3a)***

What more do we need, than to etch these promises into our hearts and to remind ourselves of them? We need to be as David who said: ***“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; You have anointed my head with oil; My cup overflows. Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.” (Psalm 23:4-6)***

God is with us always, and through Jesus we know that we have a home in Heaven that awaits us. No matter how rough this life can get, if we are in Christ, then we know that paradise awaits us. This is why we must rejoice in The Lord ALWAYS! We need to constantly confess that The Lord is my strength. When and if we do we will live in peace and in victory. We will be in a position to help others.

If our heart is bitter and full of hatred, then we will spread this like a bad germ that infects others. On the other hand if our heart is full of peace and joy, then we will spread good medicine.

Paul gives us good advice:

***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” (Philippians 4:4-8).***

Amen.

Pastor Colvin S. MacPherson Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church in Sydney.  
All Bible quotations taken from New American Standard Bible.