



Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word

Text: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

Tune: Martin Luther (1483-1546)

“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word” is one of Martin Luther’s last and simplest hymns, but it is likely his best-known hymn, second only to “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” In it, we pray for those who would undermine the Word of God, praying especially for peace and unity. Like all good hymns, it directs us to our eternal life in heaven, where we will truly know the peace and unity afforded by the Word of God.

Martin Luther was born November 10, 1483 in Eisleben, the son of Hans and Margarete. After receiving his education at Magdeburg, Eisenach, and Erfurt, eventually earning a Master’s Degree in 1505, he entered the Augustinian Convent at Erfurt and was ordained in 1507. In 1508 he began to lecture at the University of Wittenberg, and received his Doctor of Theology in 1512. His most infamous event, the nailing of the Ninety-Five Theses to the door of Wittenberg’s Castle Church, occurred October 31, 1517, counted as the official beginning of the Reformation. Though he attracted many enemies, his writing of *De Babylonian Captivity of the Church* (1520), a document analyzing the Sacraments under the Roman Catholic Church, earned his excommunication. Luther’s hymnwriting began in 1523 when he wrote a song commemorating the first Lutheran martyrs, a style of writing which became the foundation for the Lutheran hymn. Luther continued teaching, much writing of theological works, and preaching until his death, February 18, 1546.

“Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word” has been and perhaps still is the most widely used of all of Luther’s hymns. Countless orders of service from the Reformation and post-Reformation era assign it to be sung either immediately after the sermon or at the end

of the service. The earliest source for this hymn is Klug’s Wittenberg hymnal of 1543. An earlier Zwickau print of 1542 supposed to have contained it is now lost. Luther may have written it sometime between the end of 1541 and the spring of 1542. These were turbulent and critical days for the Empire. King Ferdinand of Austria was defeated by the Turks at Budapest in August 1541. Two months later a storm destroyed the imperial fleet near Algiers. Luther responded with his *Vermanunge zum Gebet Wider den Türcken* (*Admonition to Pray Against the Turk*). The Elector requested pastors to offer special prayers for divine help and protection. This hymn may have been written with this in mind, for Luther repeatedly stressed the children’s prayers as the best defense against the Turks.

The Church’s three enemies—the devil, the world, and our sinful nature—are always hounding us and pushing us towards unbelief. Despite this, Our Lord has given us a weapon with which we can fight them: His holy Word. “Take the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God” (Ephesians 6:17). With God’s Word we are able to stand against Satan, and we remain constant in prayer that God would defend us in the true faith.

To that end, “Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Thy Word” is a prayer in three stanzas, each stanza addressed to a different Person of the Trinity. The first is a prayer to the Father to keep us steadfast in His Word, and that He would “set at naught” the plans of the enemies of the Word, especially those who not only teach false doctrine but accompany it with the sword, using violence to spread their doctrine.

The second stanza is a prayer to Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of lords. We pray that He would defend His bride, the Church, from all her enemies. Jesus has promised to defend us: “I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it” (Mt. 16:18). Because of His protection we “may evermore sing praise to Thee.”

The final stanza is a prayer to the Holy Spirit, the “Comforter of priceless worth.” He comforts us by bringing to us all Christ has done, the forgiveness of our sins. Finally, we ask Him to give us the peace and unity that can only come by the Word, peace which we will ultimately know as He “leads us out of death to life.”