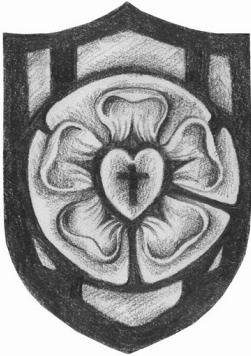


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HOLY CROSS LUTHERAN CHURCH

## Words from the Cross

### ***If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.***

John 8:36

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

"Unless I am convicted by Scripture and plain reason—I do not accept the authority of popes and councils, for they have contradicted each other—my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and I will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. God help me. Amen. Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise."

As Lutherans, most of us know the sense of what Luther said when the emperor of Germany called him to the city of Worms and required him to take back what he had preached and written. It is not that Martin Luther was the only person who ever dared to reform the church. There were others before him, but he was the first not to be burned at the stake for doing so. Like Elijah after his confrontation with the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel, Luther went into hiding, fearing for his life. His supporters arranged a friendly kidnapping and took him to the Wartburg Castle. The devil didn't leave him alone even there, however. Luther thought, "The whole world is against me. Am I the only one who sees it this way? Can over 1,500 years of history be wrong? Why haven't others discovered the good news of the gospel?" Perhaps you have felt this way when your life didn't go as you thought it would. Is God still with me? Why am I suffering like this?

It is said that as Luther looked out the window from his lofty perch in the Wartburg one morning after a sleepless night and saw a wisp of smoke from a distant fire, a gust of wind came and whisked the smoke away. A moment of relief came to him. His anguish was gone. He realized it didn't matter what the rest of the world thought of him. Call him a heretic. Make him hide out for his life. Imprison him. Take his life. It didn't matter; he was safe and free in Christ:

*Take they our life, goods, fame, child, and wife. Though these all be gone, our victory has been won; the kingdom ours remaineth (A Mighty Fortress Is Our God).*

That dark gloomy castle, intended to protect him, had become a prison. But even those cold stone walls could not keep out the warmth of a God who loves His people. The Book of Psalms says the church is like a fortress, a safe place where God guards us from evil. We must correctly understand this. Some preach that when you are a Christian, evil will not touch you. They haven't been to a hospital or nursing home lately. Neither have they had to travel to a hospital on a rainy night to see the lifeless body of a loved one. Preaching that the Christian life is without hardship is erroneous. God does not shelter us from hardship or evil in this world. Christ had to carry a cross and so must we. We must never think that once we come to faith in Jesus, nothing bad will ever happen to us. Nor should we pretend that once we are believers, we will stop sinning. Rather, in the fortress of God's mercy, we find the plain truth that we are all miserable sinners incapable of obeying God's holy law as we ought. St. Paul said it like this:

*For by works of the law no human being will be justified in His [God's] sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20).*

Thankfully, however, the truth does not end there. Paul continues:

*Continued on next page...*