

## *The Power of a Hymn to Comfort*

All of America had been waiting to hear the fate of the miners caught in the collapsed mine in Utah. We can only imagine the fear that must have gripped their community from the beginning of the search. One night the news had a bit of the service held for those who waited for their loved ones. I heard the familiar strains of a hymn being sung by a huge crowd. The hymn was “Be Still, My Soul,” which some will know as the theme of Jean Sibelius’ *Finlandia*. I remember as a young person accompanying my Sunday School classes on the piano in the singing of that hymn. It is (was) a favorite of many congregations and is especially dear to those of Scandinavian descent, as is the case with the families of some of the miners.

Sadly, the hymn “Be Still, My Soul” is no longer in our Presbyterian hymnal. Why? Well, not having been on the committee that decided which hymns to include and which ones to exclude, there could be a number of reasons, ranging from “it’s old, it’s slow, it has no multicultural context. (I could argue that it is a part of Scandinavian culture, but then Scandinavians are not a target population for mission, since they are mostly already in the church.) Whatever the reason for its omission, it is a hymn of comfort and reassurance that God really is in charge and that he will remain faithful, no matter what. Here are the three stanzas of the hymn, written in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, by Katharina von Schlegel. It was translated by another woman, Jane Borthwick, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### Be Still, My Soul

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side;  
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain;  
Leave to thy God to order and provide;  
In every change he faithful will remain.  
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly friend  
Through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake  
To guide the future as he has the past.  
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;  
All now mysterious shall be bright at last.  
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know  
His voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on  
When we shall be forever with the Lord,  
When disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,  
Sorrow forgot, love’s purest joys restored.  
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past,  
All safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

Music, hymns, are there when mere words fail us. It is likely that most of the people at that service were singing these words from memory (I could have!), and that their hearts were so full, that the power of the hymn and the singing community lifted them up even when their own strength was spent.

I look forward to being with you all beginning in September. On September 2, I will teach a new hymn to the congregation as part of worship. Hope to see you there!

Blessings,  
Linda Lanier-Keosaian