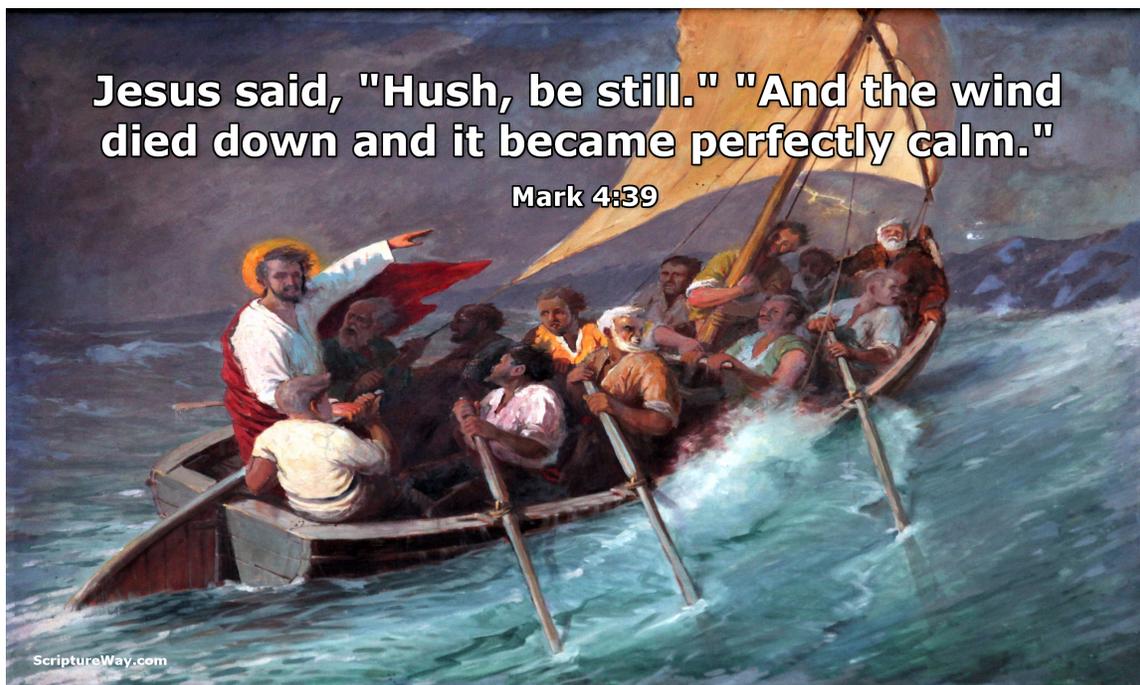


“Eternal Father, Strong to Save – Hymn Story and Scriptures”

5 May 2019

by Whitney V. Myers



Jesus Calms the Storm - Mark 4:39 - Photo Zvonimir Athletic©123RF.com - Used under license

"And He got up and rebuked the wind and said to the sea, 'Hush, be still.' And the wind died down and it became perfectly calm." (Mark 4:39)

Background. "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" is a hymn traditionally associated with seafarers, particularly in the maritime armed services (Ref. 2). The hymn became popular with the Royal Navy and the United States Navy in the late 19th century. The hymn also has a long tradition in civilian maritime contexts as well, being regularly sung during services on ocean crossings (Ref. 2).

In America, "Eternal Father" is often called *the Navy Hymn* because it is sung at the U. S. Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. In 1879,

Lieutenant Commander Charles Jackson Train was a navigation instructor at the U.S. Naval Academy and the master of the Midshipman Choir. Train began the practice of concluding worship services with the 1861 version of the hymn every Sunday. The hymn eventually became a service-wide tradition, becoming known as *the Navy Hymn* (Ref. 2).

The U.S. Navy Band played “Eternal Father” in 1963 as U.S. President John Kennedy's body was carried up the steps of the U.S. Capitol to lie in state. Kennedy was a PT (Patrol Torpedo) boat commander in World War II (Ref. 2, Ref. 3).

“Eternal Father” was played by the Navy Band and the Coast Guard Band during the funeral of U.S. former President Ronald Reagan. The hymn was also played at the Memorial Ceremony in Norfolk, VA for the USS *Cole* (DDG-67) after the bombing of the ship in October 2000. It was performed by the U.S. Navy Sea Chanters at the State Funeral of U.S. former President Gerald R. Ford, who had served in the U.S. Navy during World War II in the Pacific Theater (Ref. 2).

The congregation and choir at Washington National Cathedral sang "Eternal Father" during the funerals for Senator John McCain on September 1, 2018 and for former U.S. President George H. W. Bush on December 5, 2018. Both served as U.S. Navy pilots (Ref. 2).



Hymn Text Author. William Whiting (1825-1878) was an Anglican churchman and resided on the English coast near the ocean (Ref. 2, Ref. 4). At the age of thirty-five he felt his life spared by God when a violent storm in the Mediterranean nearly claimed the ship he was traveling on. The storm instilled his belief in God’s command over the rage and calm of the sea (Ref. 2).

When Whiting was headmaster at Winchester College Chorister’s School some years later, the memory of his voyage allowed Whiting to provide comfort to one

of the boys he taught (Ref. 5). One day, a student confided that he was about to embark on a journey to America – "a voyage fraught with danger at that time" (Ref. 5). "A sympathetic Whiting described his own frightening experience, and he and the other boys prayed for the terrified student. And then Whiting told him, 'Before you depart, I will give you something to anchor your faith' " (Ref. 5).

Whiting wrote a poem describing God's power even over the mighty oceans (Ref. 2, Ref. 5). That poem, written in 1860, became the original text for the hymn, "Eternal Father, Strong to Save."



Hymn Tune Composer. John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876) was an English clergyman and a prolific hymn tune composer (Ref. 6). Dykes composed the tune for "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" in 1861. Dykes fittingly named the tune "Melita" after a location associated with a Biblical shipwreck. Melita was the island where the Apostle Paul was shipwrecked (Acts 27:41-28:1). Today we know it as the isle of Malta (Ref. 2).

Reverend Dykes published sermons and articles on religion but is best known for over 300 hymn tunes he composed (Ref. 7).

In addition to his tune, Melita ("Eternal Father, Strong to Save"), John Dykes' composed well-known tunes including Nicaea ("Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!") and St. Agnes ("Jesus, the Very Thought of Thee," "Happy the Home When God is There").

Scripture References. Ref. 2 and Ref. 8 provide the original verses of "Eternal Father, Strong to Save," 1861 version. You also can follow the verses by downloading the sheet music (link at top of this post, or by [clicking here](#)).

- Verse 1 - "Eternal Father, strong to save, whose arm hath bound the restless wave ..." Verse 1 refers to God establishing boundaries for

the waters so they do not flood the earth again (Psalm 104:1-9).

- Verse 2 - "O Christ! Whose voice the waters heard And hushed their raging at Thy word ..." Verse 2 refers to Jesus' miracles of calmly stilling the storm with his *voice* and walking on the waters of the Sea of Galilee (Psalm 65:5-7, Mark 4:35-41, Matthew 14:22-34).
- Verse 3 - "Most Holy Spirit! Who didst brood Upon the chaos dark and rude ..." Verse 3 refers to the Spirit of God moving over the surface of the waters in Genesis 1:2.
- Verse 4 - "O Trinity of love and power! Our brethren shield in danger's hour; From rock and tempest, fire and foe, Protect them wheresoe'er they go ..." Verse 4 refers to Psalm 107:23-32. This passage describes the stormy wind which lifts up the waves of the sea (Psalm 107:25). Psalm 107:28 tells us that men cry to the Lord in the midst of their trouble and the Lord brings them out of their distresses. The hymnwriter prays in verses 1, 2, and 3 "Oh, hear us when we cry to Thee, For those in peril on the sea." Only God can cause the storm to be still (Psalm 107:29). Consider then who Jesus is when he calms the sea (Mark 4:39-41). Consider then how Jesus alone brings us out of our distresses.

Listen - "Eternal Father, Strong to Save."

U.S. Naval Academy Men's Glee Club - U.S.S. Arizona Memorial - 19March2007

Dramatic Storm Video - Marine Nationale de France with Prague Philharmonic Orchestra and Chorus - 11June2013

Military Wives - Eternal Father, Strong to Save - 10March2013

Apply. Pray for those who are serving in harm's way and need God's protection. Pray for yourself and others who are going through a storm and ask Jesus to bring calm and peace out of distress and trouble.

References

1. https://www.navy.mil/navydata/nav_legacy.asp?id=172
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_Father,_Strong_to_Save
3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/PT_boat
4. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Whiting_\(poet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Whiting_(poet))
5. Ref. 5 begins on the next line
<https://theamericanrenewalproject.org/2015/11/the-navy-hymn-eternal-father-strong-to-save/>
6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Bacchus_Dykes
7. http://www.hymntime.com/tch/bio/d/y/k/dykes_jb.htm
8. <http://www.hymntime.com/tch/htm/e/t/e/eternalf.htm>

Eternal Father, Strong to Save

(The "Navy Hymn")

1. E - ter - nal Fa - ther, strong to save, Whose arm hath bound the
2. O Christ! - Whose voice the wa - ters heard And hushed their rag - ing
3. Most Ho - ly Spir - it! Who didst brood Up - on the cha - os
4. O Trin - i - ty of love and pow'r! Our breth - ren shield in

4
rest - less wave, Who bidd'st the might - y o - cean deep Its
at Thy word, Who walk - ed'st on the foam - ing deep, And
dark and rude, And bid its an - gry tu - mult cease, And
dan - ger's hour; From rock and tem - pest, fire and foe, Pro -

7
own ap - point - ed lim - its keep; Oh, hear us when we
calm a - midst its rage didst sleep; Oh, hear us when we
give, for wild con - fu - sion, peace; Oh, hear us when we
tect them where - so - e'er they go; Thus ev - er - more shall

10
cry to Thee, For those in per - il on the sea.
cry to Thee, For those in per - il on the sea.
cry to Thee, For those in per - il on the sea.
rise to Thee Glad hymns of praise from land and sea.

Words: William Whiting (1860)
(Gen. 1:2; Job 38:8-11; Matt. 8:23-27; Mark 4:35-41; Luke 8:22-35)

Music: John Bacchus Dykes ("Melita", 1861; 88.88.88)