

Column

A rousing and much-loved hymn of Christendom begins with the words, 'Stand up, stand up for Jesus'. Written in 1858, the message of this hymn transcends time and seems especially appropriate and needed in our own day, a time when many, instead of 'standing up' for the truth of Christ and the Gospel, have 'sat down'.

The story behind this hymn has been written up in many places. Its words come from the pen of George Duffield, a Presbyterian pastor, and were written in response to the tragic death of a fellow clergyman, Dudley Atkins Tyng.

In March 1858, Tyng preached a sermon at a YMCA meeting attended by over 5000 men. His text was: "Go now ye that are men, and serve the Lord" (Exodus 10:11). Over 1000 came to Christian faith following this sermon. A month later Tyng died following a farming accident in which he was badly maimed.

On his deathbed he instructed his father: "Tell my brethren of the ministry, wherever you meet them, to stand up for Jesus." His father did as his son had directed. Upon hearing his friend's dying words, George Duffield was so moved that he wrote this hymn.

There are a number of examples in the Bible of men who did just what Tyng had directed his colleagues to do: to be men of bold courage. Micaiah, son of Imlah, comes to mind.

In case you have not heard of him, Micaiah was a prophet in the Northern Kingdom during the reign of wicked King Ahab. According to 1 Kings 22, when Ahab called him in to see if the Northern Kingdom should enter into a confederacy with the Southern Kingdom of Judah and go to war against a common enemy, Syria, Micaiah gave the unpopular and politically inexpedient answer of No. "I saw all Israel scattered upon the hills, as sheep that have not a shepherd," he told Ahab.

What made his prophecy so controversial was he was going against the word of 400 other prophets who had given King Ahab the green light to go to war. As a result, they received honour in the king's court, while hapless Micaiah went to prison. In the end, however, Micaiah was vindicated. King Ahab did not return from battle, and the armies of Israel suffered defeat.

I once heard Bishop N.T. Wright say, "Micaiah sat humbly in the counsel of the Almighty in order that he might stand boldly in the counsel of men." Surely, we need more like him today, people who, when duty calls or danger, will not be wanting there. Will you be one of those? Will I?

The American author Josiah Gilbert Holland (1819-1881) must have had just such ones in mind when he wrote:

"God give us men! A time like this demands strong minds, great hearts, true faith and ready hands; men whom the lust of office does not kill: men whom the spoils of office cannot buy; men who possess opinions and a will; men who have honour -- men who will not lie; tall men, sun-crowned, who live above the fog in public duty and in private thinking!"

Or, I suppose we could say, God give us more Micaiahs.

ALMIGHTY God, whose kingdom is everlasting and power infinite; Have mercy upon this whole land; and so rule the hearts of those in authority, that they, knowing whose ministers they are, may above all things seek thy honour and glory; and that we and all the People, duly considering whose authority they bear, may faithfully and obediently honour them, according to thy blessed Word and ordinance; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with thee and the Holy Ghost liveth and reigneth ever, one God, world without end. Amen. (The Book of Common Prayer)

The Rev. Victor H. Morgan is rector of St. Luke's Episcopal Church, Blue Ridge.