

THREE-YEAR LECTIONARY



THE WORD IN *Song*

Hymn of the Day Studies for **LENT**



THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
MISSOURI SYNOD

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From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee

Lutheran Service Book 607 | study by Randall P. Wurschmidt

Introduction

Here's what Lutherans teach about confession in the Small Catechism: "Confession has two parts. First, that we confess our sins, and second, that we receive absolution, that is, forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself, not doubting, but firmly believing that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven" (*LSB*, p. 326). In a nutshell, this is exactly what we sing in Martin Luther's hymn "From Depths of Woe I Cry to Thee." Whether you say it together

as a congregation at the beginning of the Divine Service or individually with your pastor, Confession and Absolution has been an integral part of Lutheran piety since the earliest days of the Reformation.

- Why is it important that we confess our sins first, before hearing the words of absolution?
- What would be the advantage of private Confession and Absolution?

Exploring the Scriptures

This hymn is based on Psalm 130, one of the seven penitential psalms (see also Psalm 6, 32, 38, 51, 102 and 143). Read Psalm 130. The image is one of drowning in sin, being totally overwhelmed by the "depths."

- What is the confession in verse 3?
- What is the promise in verse 4?

Along with the cry for mercy, the psalmist also requests that the Lord hear his prayer. See Ps. 143:1-2 for a similar pattern. God promises to hear the prayers of the faithful (1 John 5:14), and He promises to hear our confession and forgive our sin (1 John 1:9). Read 1 John 1:5-10.

- Is anyone without sin? According to verse 7, what cleanses us from all sin?

Scripture makes it clear that our own efforts do not save us. Only the blood of Jesus Christ atones for our sins and

redeems us. St. Paul reminds us of this in passages such as Eph. 2:8-9. We do not deserve the mercy that God shows us in the forgiveness of sins, but He graciously provides it out of love.

- Can God's grace be understood apart from forgiveness? Why or why not?
- Do we have any part in meriting that grace?

God wants us to recognize our sin and our total dependence on Him for salvation. He wants us to turn away from those things that bring only death and return to Him who is life. It is His nature to forgive. Divine Service, Settings One and Two include an optional Lenten verse to be sung before the Gospel: "Return to the Lord, your God, for He is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love" (pp. 157, 173). Read Joel 2:12-14.

- What does it mean to "rend your heart"?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

This was one of the first hymns of Martin Luther (1483-1546), written in 1523 as an example that he hoped other poets, theologians and musicians would follow. He wanted to provide congregations with something they could sing in their own language during the service, something that would help people to learn the main articles of faith and that would be memorable. Luther felt it was essential that hymns teach the faith, and this hymn is one of several associated with the Six Chief Parts of the Small Catechism. *Lutheran Service Book* preserves this identification by including it in the section marked "Confession and Absolution." The hymn became one of Luther's own favorites and was even sung at his funeral in 1546.

- Can you think of examples of other hymns that have helped you to learn the teachings of the Christian faith?
- Thumb through the hymnal and see if you can identify all the chief parts by the headings.

Interestingly, Luther — who was a very good musician — also composed the tune for this hymn; it features a bit of text painting in the opening line. When we sing the words "from depths of woe," the word "depths" falls in pitch, musically depicting the singer's plight as he recognizes the depths of his own sinfulness.

- A text and its tune should fit well together, as this one does. What might be the consequences if a tune and text

are out of character with each other? (If you wish to try a famous example, sing the words of “Amazing Grace” to the tune of “Gilligan’s Island.”)

Text

The first stanza follows the first three verses of the psalm rather closely. The singer pleads for mercy from the depths of despair caused by the knowledge of sin. If God remembered every sin, we would be lost for sure. Who could stand in His presence?

- According to stanza 2, what instead do we rely on?

“Therefore my hope is in the Lord,” we sing in stanza 3, resting in the faithful Word and not in our own merit.

- To whom is the promise of mercy explicitly made?

Making the Connection

The Divine Service begins with a confession of sins. The Confession and Absolution in Divine Service, Setting Four (*LSB*, p. 203) even includes words from Psalm 130. Whenever Lutherans gather together in worship, the forgiveness of sins is central to that gathering. Whether at Baptism or in the remembrance of Baptism, we recall the life-giving water, which is “a lavish washing away of sin” (*LSB*, p. 269). And in the Lord’s Supper, the body and blood are given and shed for you for the forgiveness of sins. Luther writes in the Small Catechism, “For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation” (*LSB*, p. 327).

In Closing

Without forgiveness, there is no life and there is no salvation. What a wretched existence that would be! But we do not live in fear of eternal damnation when we believe that Christ overcame sin and death for us.

Therefore, although we are still by nature sinful and will continue to sin throughout this life, we rejoice in the forgiveness won for us on the cross. It is not necessary to sing this hymn with gloomy and disfigured faces. Rather, we can sing it with sincere confidence that God’s abundant favor is still greater than our greatest sins.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 607.

The hymn progresses the same way that the psalm progresses: First, a confession of sin and an appeal to the Lord for mercy (sts. 1 and 2); then forgiveness and trust in God’s Word (sts. 3 and 4); finally, an appeal for patience on the part of Israel.

- In the fourth and fifth stanzas, we sing about “Israel.” Who is meant here?

Although Jesus’ name is never explicitly used in this hymn, we are never in doubt as to the identity of the Savior. He is “our shepherd good and true” (st. 5). He is the one who sets His people free “from all their sin and sorrow” (st. 5).

- Could this hymn be sung to anyone but the Triune God of Christianity?

Even repentance is God’s work. The Holy Spirit works in us when we hear the Word of God and through the Means of Grace. By faith, we are brought to repentance and to confess our sins; by grace, we are saved through the blood of Christ.

- Name some other places in the liturgy of the Divine Service (or in any service) where the forgiveness of sins is explicit.
- How does making the sign of the cross also remind us of forgiveness in Christ?

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, You despise nothing You have made and forgive the sins of all who are penitent. Create in us new and contrite hearts that lamenting our sins and acknowledging our wretchedness we may receive from You full pardon and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Ash Wednesday).

A Mighty Fortress Is Our God

Lutheran Service Book 656/657 | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

Introduction

Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote a poem to serve as the preface to Joseph Klug’s *Geistliche Lieder*, revised and published in Wittenberg in 1543. In his poem, Luther wrote, in part, “Of all the joys that are on earth / Is none more dear nor higher worth, / Than what in my sweet songs is found / And instruments of various sound. / Where friends and comrades sing in tune, / All evil passions vanish soon... . The heart grows still when I am heard, / And opens to God’s Truth and Word.”

Luther’s own hymn, “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God,” has captured these very sentiments over the five centuries since he wrote the text and composed the tune.

- What are some of the feelings you have when you sing this hymn? How do the text and music together contribute to these feelings?
- Describe the image that comes to mind when you think of the word “fortress” in this hymn.

Exploring the Scriptures

Luther’s famous hymn is inspired by the words of Psalm 46 and the comfort Luther himself found in this psalm. Read Ps. 46:1–3.

- In the opening verse, the writer states his confidence. What do you think is the basis for his confidence? If your answer is “experience,” what sorts of experiences might they have been? If your answer is “faith,” what is the source of such faith?
- Verses 2–3 use parallel thoughts to emphasize a major point. If the writer has events in Israel’s history in mind, what might some of them be? Although written long before the New Testament era, what are some events in the Gospels or in Acts in which these words of Psalm 46 could come to mind?

Read Ps. 46:4–7.

- Jerusalem, Israel’s capital and the site of the temple, had springs of water supplying the city but no river flowing through it. What could the writer have in mind with verse 4? The prophets wrote of such a stream in Jerusalem. Read Joel 3:18 and Zech. 14:8. What do the

prophets have in mind? See also Rev. 22:1–8. In what ways are these images of the Holy Spirit? What does God’s Spirit have to do with the confidence within this psalm? Based on Ps. 46:4–7, what sort of fortress is God?

Read Ps. 46:8–11.

- In the third part of the psalm, the writer invites the reader to meditate, “Come, behold the works of the LORD.” In this psalm, the writer points to the end of war and conflict as an act of God. What are some other possible “acts of God” on which a person could meditate beneficially?
- Verse 10 suggests the outcome of such meditation. Do you agree? Are the words of verse 10 words of fear or of praise? Or both? Why? To whom is God saying, “Be still” — the noisy world or the person of faith in the noisy world? Why? Read Mark 4:35–41. Notice any similarities?
- The final verse repeats the theme. After all has been said, what sort of fortress is God?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

While Luther’s hymn has been employed in triumphal ways — the Swedish Lutheran king Gustavus Adolphus made his army sing this hymn before the Battle of Leipzig in 1631; the 19th-century German literary figure Heinrich Heine (1797–1856) called it the Marseillaise of the Reformation — Luther himself called it a hymn of comfort. In the period 1527–31, when the hymn began to appear in a number of hymnals, Luther was surrounded by troubles. In 1527, 10 years had passed since Luther posted his 95 Theses in

Wittenberg. During this time and after, he was buffeted by theological and political storms. His own life was in danger from the empire, from Rome and from outbreaks of the plague. The darkness of depression often closed in on him.

- What are some major cataclysms of the present day that could send a person to seek the comfort expressed in Luther’s hymn?
- What sort of personal troubles — physical, emotional, spiritual — could also find comfort in this hymn?

Whenever Luther's world would "roar and foam" like the waters in Ps. 46:3, he would invite his friends to join him in singing this hymn. In 1530 at Coburg, while awaiting the outcome of the Diet of Augsburg, Luther sang his hymn often, perhaps daily.

- What is the comfort in the phrase "He's by our side" (*LSB* 656:4)?
- Luther mentions "weapons of the Spirit" (*LSB* 657:4). What might these be?
- What phrases in the hymn are helpful when a person's troubles are of long duration or an end to them is not in sight?
- What difference does it make, do you think, singing the hymn rather than simply reading the text?

Text

While Luther found inspiration for his hymn in the words of Psalm 46, he did not confine himself to that text alone. Read Rev. 19:11–16, where St. John sees a vision of a conquering rider on a white horse, who "in righteousness ... judges and makes war" (v. 11).

- According to stanza 2 of the hymn, who is this rider?
- What other clues to the rider's identity do you find in Rev. 19:11–16?
- Although the imagery of warfare is violent in this text, how does the rider's identity interpret that violence?
Hint: Think about the crucifixion of Jesus.

Making the Connection

In the preface to the Wittenberg edition of his writings, Luther wrote, "I want to point out to you a correct way of studying theology, for I have had practice in that. ... This is the way taught by holy King David ... in the one hundred nineteenth Psalm. There you will find three rules, amply presented throughout the whole Psalm. They are *Oratio* [prayer], *Meditatio* [meditation], *Tentatio* [affliction, trial]" (AE 34:285).

- In what ways is Luther's hymn a prayer? What is it asking? What hope does it express?

In Closing

As Luther said in his hymnal preface for Klug's *Geistliche Lieder*, where people of faith sing hymns, there is joy, "all evil passions vanish soon" and hearts are stilled and open to God's Word.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 656 or 657.

Read Eph. 6:10–17. In this epistle, St. Paul uses the imagery of a Roman soldier.

- How is such imagery helpful and comforting?
- How can military imagery be misused within the Church?

For Martin Luther, the devil was no fictitious figure, but very real and troublesome. Read stanza 3 of the hymn.

- How is the devil portrayed?
- Luther writes in *LSB* 656:3, "This world's prince may still / Scowl fierce as he will." What do you think Luther means by "still"? Jesus' crucifixion is judgment upon Satan. What does this mean for us who live in the world?

Read Rom. 8:31–39. St. Paul's answer to his list of questions is verse 37: "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

- As the Small Catechism asks, what does this mean?
- Is this an answer based upon experience or on faith?
- Must a Christian have experiences similar to those listed by the apostle in this passage to express the same confidence? Why? Why not?
- If "the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (v. 39) does not eliminate all of our troubles, what does it do? What sort of fortress does this make of God?

- Luther sang this hymn often. What is gained by the repetition? Does singing the text make a difference for meditation?
- Do you think Martin Luther would have expressed the confidence of the Gospel as boldly and forcefully as he did if he had not endured the troubles he faced? How have your own troubles thrown you back onto the promises of God in Christ?

Prayer

Almighty and gracious Lord, pour out Your Holy Spirit on Your faithful people. Keep us steadfast in Your grace and truth, protect and deliver us in times of temptation, defend us against all enemies, and grant to Your Church Your saving peace; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Reformation Day).

Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart

Lutheran Service Book 708 | study by Randy Wurschmidt

Introduction

As the young woman lies dying in her hospital bed, the pastor is urgently summoned. He brings with him his well-used *Pastoral Care Companion*; anticipating that death is imminent, he opens to the “Commendation of the Dying.” Prayers are prayed, psalms are chanted, Scriptures are read; after the Creed and the Lord’s Prayer, he sings the Nunc Dimittis: “Lord, now You let Your servant go in peace...” Then he sings stanza 3 of this hymn: “Lord, let at last Thine angels come...” It is a beautiful and confident way for the Christian to face death, trusting in God’s promise

of the resurrection and in the hope of eternal life in heaven. This stanza is famously used as the final chorale in J.S. Bach’s *St. John Passion*, giving the Good Friday narrative an appropriate ending — not with our Lord dead on the cross, but with the open tomb and death defeated.

- Is a Christian’s death different from the death of an unbeliever? Why or why not?
- What is the benefit of the pastor being at the bedside of one who is dying?

Exploring the Scriptures

Anyone who is paying attention knows that this life is far from perfect. There are disappointments and heartaches, illnesses and pain. “Change and decay in all around I see,” we sing in another favorite hymn of trust and hope (*LSB* 878:4). And of course, there is death.

Most people think of death as an unfortunate but normal part of life. There may be some vague thought of heaven (never hell!) for the nice people; for some, death means simply disintegration back into the earth and no more. But there is more; there is much more, for Jesus has promised to return on the Last Day and raise the dead.

It won’t be just the righteous that He raises, but all people, as we confess in the Nicene Creed: “I look for the

resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come” (*LSB*, p. 191). The Athanasian Creed goes even further, stating, “And those who have done good will enter into eternal life, and those who have done evil into eternal fire” (*LSB*, p. 320), meaning that those who have rejected Jesus will experience weeping and gnashing of teeth in eternal damnation.

- Read 1 Cor. 15:12–28. When (or who) is the beginning of death and the end of death, according to verse 21? Why should this give us hope?
- Read Psalm 90. How should we consider this life in light of this psalm? Should we put our hope and trust in the things of our life now?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

The text was written by Martin Schalling (1532–1608), a Lutheran pastor and theologian who was a disciple of the reformer Philipp Melancthon, author of the Augsburg Confession. Schalling lived during a time of intense religious strife, which reached even outside Germany and throughout Europe. As the Reformation moved forward, the Roman Catholics often fought back, countering with their own documents and creeds. At that time, Germany was composed of many small principalities and kingdoms. It was up to each individual ruler to decide on the religious confession of his territory, leading to many changes as rulers came and went. Unfortunately, these battles of words often spilled out into battles of swords, and many were killed in wars and power struggles during this time.

Even if we were without religious strife, death is still a universal problem in this life, and all Christians should be

able to confess the truths sung in this hymn, finding comfort in these words.

- What would be some of the challenges for a pastor in a time of ever-changing allegiances? Could you continue to confess the truth even if your job or your life depended on it?

Text

In the first stanza, we are reminded that earth’s pleasures are no match for eternal life in heaven, and that the most important thing for us is to be in the presence of God.

- Where does Jesus promise to be when we gather for the Divine Service each Sunday?

In the second stanza, we are reminded of the Creed, as you may have learned it from the Small Catechism. In the meaning of the First Article, Luther writes, “I believe that

God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them" (*LSB*, p. 322). We pray that the devil, the world and our own flesh would not betray us or lead us into temptation or doubt.

■ According to this stanza, how do we glorify God's lavish grace? To whom is our own love directed?

Sing the third stanza now, if you have not already.

Here we have the heart and soul of this hymn. Jesus said, "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world

and forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:26). All roads point to the end. The whole life of a Christian is one preparing for death. And in these words, we confess to what end we have held steadfast: "That these mine eyes with joy may see, / O Son of God, Thy glorious face, / My Savior and my fount of grace."

■ Each stanza closes with the refrain, "Lord Jesus Christ..." Compare each of these and describe how, just from the last phrase, each stanza summarizes our life of faith.

Making the Connection

When the Pharisees tested Jesus, asking, "Which is the great commandment in the Law?" Jesus answered by saying, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets" (Matt. 22:36–40). This hymn sums up these commandments very well: We love God because He loved us first and gave His only begotten Son for the forgiveness of our sins; we love our neighbor because God has given us everything we need for this life and the next.

This we do when we share Jesus' body and blood at the rail with fellow saints. We do this when we receive the forgiveness of sins promised from the cross and forgive those who trespass against us. We love our neighbors when we help them in time of need, pray for and with them, and comfort them with the beautiful hymns of our faith.

■ In times of distress, have you ever just sat down with your hymnal open and sung? Why or why not?

■ How does our own selfishness and sin keep us from facing death without fear?

In Closing

"We should fear, love, and trust in God above all things," we confess in the meaning of the First Commandment (*LSB*, p. 321). As you know, this is easier said than done, because by nature we look to other gods. This is why we need to regularly hear the Word of God, why we need to regularly hear the words of absolution from our pastors, why we need to regularly receive Jesus' body and blood: to ease our burdened consciences and to strengthen our faith in God and our fervent love for our neighbor. For God has promised salvation to you and baptized you into His life and death. He has assured you that as His sons and daughters, you will inherit eternal life with Him on account of Christ, who covers all your sins in His own righteousness. Therefore, sing

this hymn with all boldness and confidence. Sing it now if you haven't already. And sing it as you journey from this life into death and into life everlasting.

Prayer

Almighty, everlasting God, Your Son has assured forgiveness of sins and deliverance from eternal death. Strengthen us by Your Holy Spirit that our faith in Christ may increase daily and that we may hold fast to the hope that on the Last Day we shall be raised in glory to eternal life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (Hope of eternal life in Christ, *LSB*, p. 313).

May God Bestow on Us His Grace

Lutheran Service Book 823/824 | study by Thomas E. Lock

Introduction

When Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote in 1522, “recently many islands and lands have been discovered, to which the grace [of God] has not appeared for these 1500 years,” he wrote of the discovery of the Americas (AE 16:135n 7). The next year Luther wrote our hymn for today, “May God Bestow on Us His Grace,” a hymn of thanksgiving for the rich blessings of God. This paraphrase of Psalm 67 is also a hymn for missions; in fact, it was the first mission hymn of the Reformation.

All Christians, including those living in these discovered islands and lands of the Americas, can give thanks that they have been blessed with the bestowal of the Gospel, which converts and saves sinners.

- Of what types of grace was Luther writing in this hymn? Why was it important to ask for such bestowal of grace? Why is it important for you to ask for grace from God?
- How is the bestowal of God’s grace linked with Christian missions? How has — does — God’s grace come to these discovered islands and lands?

Exploring the Scriptures

Our hymn is a paraphrase of Psalm 67. Read Ps. 67:1–2.

- For what does the psalmist ask in verse 1? This verse reminds you of what part of the Divine Service?
- In verse 2, what was to be made known among all nations of the earth?

Read the Holy Gospel for Sexagesima (Luke 8:4–15), the parable of the sower. This sower spreads his seed on differing soils in hope that all the soils will bear fruitfully from his seed.

- In verses 5–8 Jesus described the results from the

sowing of the seed on the differing soils. What were the four differing types of soil upon which the seed was sown? What happened to the seed on each type of soil?

- The disciples asked for an explanation of this parable. Jesus’ reply is given in verses 10–15. What is the seed that was sown? How do the differing soils describe hearers of the Gospel?
- The sower in this passage demonstrates recklessness by tossing the seed not only onto soil likely to bear abundantly, but also onto soils where he knows it will not come to fruition. Who is the sower? Why is He so reckless? Whose fault is it if the seed of the Gospel does not result ultimately in salvation — God’s, or the hearer’s?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

After Luther was declared an outlaw by Emperor Charles V in 1521 (meaning anyone could kill Luther without fear of punishment), Elector Frederick the Wise spirited Luther away to Wartburg Castle near Eisenach. Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1522 to restore order within the congregations. He also soon began writing hymns for the people to sing. Today’s hymn is one of the first in that outpouring of new hymns in German.

- Imagine that the government was seeking your death. You would most likely try to hide out somewhere. Is there *any* reason why you would return to your hometown? What would motivate that return? When you returned, would you then start writing things for public consumption? Why or why not?

When Luther first reformed the Divine Service in 1523, he still retained the Latin, while removing those portions of the service that smacked of self-righteousness. Luther emphasized the work of God in the service. For the Benediction, Luther recommended that either the Aaronic Blessing (Num. 6:24–26) or Ps. 67:6–7 be used. The Aaronic Blessing was given by the Lord so that His name would be put upon the children of Israel (v. 27). On the other hand, Ps. 67:6–7 refers to God blessing the nations.

- What are the similarities and differences between the Aaronic Blessing and Ps. 67:6–7? What are their strengths and weaknesses at the close of the service? Why do you think Lutherans have retained the Aaronic Benediction?

Text

We have already discovered the recklessness of the sower, the one who casts the seed upon all nations and all people. In this first mission hymn of the Reformation, there are many references to the nations of the world.

- How many references to these nations can you find in this hymn?

Luther's understanding of right worship can be summed up with the German word, *Gottesdienst*, that is, Divine Service. In this Divine Service God first serves man, and then Christians return thanks and praise to God.

- Look at the first stanza. Which aspect of Divine Service is being described? How is God serving the people of the earth? What is the goal of that service?

Stanza 2 is the paraphrase of Ps. 67:3–4. The emphasis of the hymn text and of these verses from Psalm 67 is about praising God (the second aspect of Divine Service). The second half of stanza 2 includes these lines:

For Thou shalt judge the earth, O Lord, Nor suffer sin
to flourish;
Thy people's pasture is Thy Word Their souls to feed
and nourish,
In righteous paths to keep them.

- Why should the people praise God?
- Where has the judgment of the earth and its sinfulness taken place in Christ? When will the final judging of the earth and its sinfulness take place? If sin will not flourish, how was it removed and how will it be removed?
- What is the connection between Psalm 23 and the last three lines of this stanza?

Stanza 3 is a paraphrase of Ps. 67:5–7. It also includes a reference to the parable of the sower: "The land shall plentiful fruit bring forth, / Thy Word is rich in blessing."

- Read a portion of the Old Testament Reading for Sexagesima, Is. 55:10–13. How are seed and the Word linked? What is the connection between this reading and the parable of the sower? Who converts the people? To whom, then, do the people give thanks?

Making the Connection

Read Rom. 1:8. What does St. Paul say about the faith of the Roman Christians? How far had the knowledge of their faith gone even in the time of the apostles? (If time allows, see also Col. 1:3–6 and 1 Thess. 1:8.)

- If the Gospel has already gone to all the nations, does that mean that we no longer need to send out

missionaries or bear witness of Christ to those who do not believe in Him?

- For what blessings of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) do you give thanks? How can you show this thankfulness to God and to other people, both near and far away?

In Closing

The Holy Spirit distributes the rich blessings of Christ in His Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution and Holy Communion in the Church, even as we confess in the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed from the Small Catechism (*LSB*, 323).

- Read this explanation aloud together.
- Sing or read aloud *LSB* 823 or 824.

Prayer

Almighty God, in Your kindness You cause the light of the Gospel to shine among us. By the working of Your Holy Spirit, help us to share the good news of Your salvation that all who hear it may rejoice in the gift of Your unending love; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Mission Observance).

God Loved the World So That He Gave

Lutheran Service Book 571 | study by Scott R. Schilbe

Introduction

Look across a stadium of fans enjoying a professional sporting event and you may see a fan holding a John 3:16 sign. You may even see a sports fan paint “John 3:16” on his or her body. This emphasis on John 3:16 is because for many people, John 3:16 summarizes Christianity’s central belief. Thanks be to God that this short summary of Christianity enjoys a large pop-culture following. Aside from professional sports (especially football), a reference to John 3:16 is printed on the bottom of paper cups used by the In-N-Out Burger chain.

Exploring the Scriptures

John 3:1–21 is the account of Jesus teaching Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a Jew and a member of the Pharisees. Curious about Jesus, he secretly came to Jesus at night, so that no other Jew would know of his curiosity. A catechetical conversation took place between the two men. Jesus instructed Nicodemus on how one enters the kingdom of God. Toward the end of the instruction (starting at John 3:14), Jesus speaks very directly: “Whoever believes in him [the Son of Man Himself] should not perish but have eternal life” (v. 15). He continues by speaking John 3:16–21.

Jesus’ teaching in John 3:16 is certainly comforting to us. That’s because John 3:16 applies Jesus’ work to us. Here, the purpose of Jesus’ death is revealed. He died so that we can have eternal life.

- Have you ever shared John 3:16 with a friend to summarize the Gospel message?
- Why do you think John 3:16 has become this widely known summary of the Bible’s teaching?
- Is it our action of believing or is it the object of our belief that saves us from hell?
- Despite Jesus’ words here and elsewhere (e.g., John 14:6 and Acts 4:11–12), why do many people not believe that only Jesus saves? Why do people imagine that God includes all people in eternity, regardless of their belief’s object?
- Usually overshadowed by verse 16, verses 17 and 18 are also helpful verses that clarify how one enters eternal life. Read verses 17 and 18. What do these verses conclude? Again, how is one saved?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Little is known about the origins of this beloved hymn. Recent research suggests that the hymn was published in a 1778 Pomeranian hymnal. Whoever wrote it has enabled Christians to sing of the Gospel and the implications of the Gospel for the believer’s life.

Text

Stanza 1 is a paraphrase of John 3:16. The stanza puts the verse in poetic form. Stanzas 2 and following begin explaining the implications of having faith resting on John 3:16.

- John 1:14 and Col. 1:15 express that Jesus is the infinite, uncreated and eternal Son of God. According to stanza 2, what did this Son of God do?
- What is the result of the Son of God’s work (end of st. 2)?
- What is the significance of a “cornerstone”? Who is the cornerstone (read 1 Peter 2:6; Ps. 118:22; Eph. 2:19–22)?

- In stanza 3, God’s good and gracious will is proclaimed. What is His will? Read 1 Tim. 2:3–4.
- The Holy Spirit’s work is highlighted in stanza 3. By the Word, what does the Spirit declare? Read John 15:26; John 14:26; Titus 3:4–7.

Stanzas 4 and 5 calm fearful and anxious hearts. Sickness and death make us anxious, worried and fearful of life’s end. Questioning whether or not God forgives also creates fearful and anxious hearts.

- According to Rom. 6:3–10, how can Baptism grant us the “highest good”?
- To such fearful and anxious hearts, what good news does the hymn writer give us in stanzas 4 and 5? To help answer, read Rom. 3:21–28.
- When facing death, why are constant reminders of Christ’s work for us sinners especially important?

- Based on stanza 5, how can the Christian face death and the grave?

Stanza 6 concludes the hymn with a trinitarian reference. As with all stanzas marked with a triangle in our hymnal, we stand in reverence as we sing this trinitarian doxology.

Making the Connection

In Matt. 10:1–15, Jesus commissioned His apostles to proclaim that the kingdom of God is at hand (Matt. 10:7). The kingdom of God is God’s rule and reign of grace and mercy. The kingdom of God is the Gospel, the saving message that God forgives sins and opens heaven to us because He gave up His only begotten Son unto death.

- In what present-day ways do pastors (those who follow the apostles in the apostolic ministry) continue to proclaim the kingdom of God?

- Who gives the apostles authority to proclaim the kingdom? Who gives pastors this same authority today? Read Matt. 28:18 and Matt. 10:1 to help answer this question.

- As the Gospel promises of God are proclaimed, the Holy Spirit is creating faith “when and where it pleases God” (AC V 2). Besides pastors, all of us can proclaim God’s Gospel promises (Is. 40:9; Ps. 105:1; 1 Peter 2:9). Think of yourselves as sowers of the Word. While sowing the Word is difficult at times, what promise does God give us (Matt. 13:23)?

In Closing

The next time you see “John 3:16” displayed at an athletic event or on a paper cup, perhaps you’ll be reminded of today’s featured hymn. John 3:16 nicely summarizes the main teaching of the Bible. The Augsburg Confession expresses it this way: “Our churches teach that people cannot be justified before God by their own strength, merits, or works. People are freely justified for Christ’s sake, through faith, when they believe that they are received into favor and that their sins are forgiven for Christ’s sake. By His death, Christ made satisfaction for our sins. God counts this faith for righteousness in His sight (Romans 3 and 4 [3:21–26; 4:5])” (AC IV 1–3).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 571.

Prayer

Almighty, eternal God, in the Word of Your apostles and prophets You have proclaimed to us Your saving will. Grant us faith to believe Your promises that we may receive eternal salvation; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 6A).

I Trust, O Christ, in You Alone

Lutheran Service Builder 972 | study by Paul J. Cain

Introduction

One of the surprises of *Lutheran Service Book* is that there are more hymns in the *LSB* collection than those found in the pew edition. While the pew edition's highest hymn number is 966, today's Hymn of the Day Bible Study covers hymn 972. "I Trust, O Christ, in You Alone" can be found in the *Lutheran Service Builder* computer software as well as *LSB Accompaniment for the Hymns* and *LSB Guitar Chord Edition*. "I Trust" appeared as *Lutheran Worship* 357, and as *Lutheran Book of Worship* 395 in a translation prepared for that hymnal. "In Thee Alone, O Christ, My Lord" was its title as hymn 319 in *The Lutheran Hymnal*. It has also since appeared in *Christian Worship: A Lutheran Hymnal* as hymn 437.

Exploring the Scriptures

Typically, the core Bible texts for a hymn are found at the bottom of a hymn's page in the *LSB* pew edition. If you are studying "I Trust, O Christ, in You Alone" from a copy printed from *Lutheran Service Builder*, you may not see the following four Scripture texts listed.

Turn to Acts 4:12.

- Who is speaking in this verse?
- What is the context for Peter's preaching by God the Holy Spirit?
- What "name" is given to us by which we may be saved?
- What other names compete for worship as divine in your community? How does this verse correct the idea that "all roads lead to heaven"?

Read Rom. 8:38–39.

- What main promise are Christians given in this passage?
- As necessary, review verses 31–37 to better understand these verses in context and more completely understand God's everlasting love of us.

Read 1 John 2:1–2.

Exploring the Hymn

Background

As a deacon, hymn writer and hymnal editor in Strasbourg, Germany, Konrad Hubert (1507–77) wrote "I Trust, O Christ, in You Alone." It appeared in Nürnberg as early as 1540. From 1545 on, it was introduced in hymnals as "A

- Why might a hymnal committee choose to include or not include a biblically faithful Lutheran hymn?
- Read through *LSB* 972.

Prayer

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, because of Your tender love toward us sinners You have given us Your Son that, believing in Him, we might have everlasting life. Continue to grant us Your Holy Spirit that we may remain steadfast in this faith to the end and finally come to life everlasting; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (For steadfast faith, *LSB*, p. 311).

- To whom is John writing? What does he mean by "little children"?
- Discuss what John says about sin. Of what sin is he warning his readers?
- Define "advocate." Describe Jesus' role as your advocate.
- Define "propitiation." How would you define this concept for a non-Christian?
- John writes about Jesus' work being enough "for the sins of the whole world" (v. 2). Why then do not all benefit from His sacrificial death and victorious resurrection?

Read Col. 3:16–17.

- What benefit is there in singing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs outside of corporate worship?
- How does the Word of Christ dwell in us richly in corporate worship?
- Some Christians do what they do in the Christian life almost as a "Please, Lord, accept and forgive me because of these works." Compare and contrast this with the "thank-you note" response to the gifts of God in Christ in verse 16.

prayer-hymn to Christ, our only Savior, for the remission of sins and the increase of faith and true love."

- How are hymns also prayers?

- What are the consequences of Jesus being humanity's only Savior?
- "Remission" is intended as a Gospel word, but its use in the Church has recently been questioned because of modern cancer treatment and the statement that a cancer is "in remission." What theological concern is there now with regard to this word? What alternatives would you suggest? Compare the translation of Jesus' Words of Institution for the Sacrament of the Altar in *LSB* (p. 197) and your congregation's previous hymnals (*The Lutheran Hymnal*, p. 27; *Lutheran Worship*, p. 150).
- How would you answer the question of a person investigating Christianity who asks, "Saved from what?"
- How are faith and love related in Christianity?

Text

Longer hymns like "I Trust, O Christ, in You Alone" often have the blessing of giving us more Bible verses to study. As we turn to the Scriptures, it is helpful to remember that "trust" is a synonym for "faith" and that the "hope" sung of in stanza 1 is not merely a wish, prayer or "maybe." Our hope in Christ is rock-solid and sure, unlike the often un-kept promises of sinful human beings.

Read stanza 1.

- What reasons does this stanza present for why we trust in Christ alone?
- Define "propitiation" as used in Rom. 3:25. How is this helpful in the "evil hour" and when "human strength" fails?
- What phrase in the stanza confesses John 6:39? John 10:27–28?

- How does 1 Peter 5:8–9 describe the threat of the old evil foe? Where does this show up in stanza 1? Where do Gen. 3:15 and Rom. 16:20 come in?
- Why is 2 Cor. 3:5 important? How does it shape our Christian confidence in this stanza?

Read stanza 2.

- How does Luke 23:40–43 shape our prayer? What parallels are in the Lord's Prayer? How is stanza 2 a prayer? When would we pray such a prayer?
- Review Rom. 3:25. How has the Lord answered our prayer of confession of sin? Use 1 Peter 2:24 to give a fuller answer.
- How does the world misunderstand love? Read 1 John 4:10 and restate it in chronological order.
- Read Rom. 8:34 and 1 Tim. 2:5–6. What does it mean for Jesus to intercede/mediate for us? Where are these truths sung in stanza 2?

Read stanza 3.

- The Rite of Confirmation is a confirmation of Holy Baptism. How is the word "confirm" used in stanza 3? What is meant here?
- Define "vocation." Give examples.
- What does it mean according to Jesus' words in John 8:31 and John's teaching in 2 John 9 if one will not abide in God's Word?
- Turn to John 14:23. Where is this verse found in stanza 3? Are we talking about Law or Gospel here?

If you have time, discuss the connection between these verses and the word "mandate," from which comes the name "Maundy Thursday."

Making the Connection

Did your parents ever teach you the "magic words" of "please" and "thank you"?

- What is their proper use in human society?

- How could they be misused or at least misunderstood and misapplied with respect to the Lord and His gifts in Christ of forgiveness, faith, life, salvation and our promised hope of heaven?

In Closing

The love of God to us is manifest in Jesus Christ, our Lord. We love because God in Christ first loved us. The God-given gift of faith expresses itself in love of God and our neighbor.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 972.

Prayer

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Your mercies are new every morning; and though we deserve only punishment,

You receive us as Your children and provide for all our needs of body and soul. Grant that we may heartily acknowledge Your merciful goodness, give thanks for all Your benefits, and serve You in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Fourth Sunday in Lent, Three-Year Lectionary).

My Song Is Love Unknown

Lutheran Service Book 430 | study by David R. Schmitt

Introduction

Jim stands with his son at Gettysburg. They have toured the battlefields by car with a Licensed Battlefield Guide. They have visited the Civil War museums, looked at the black-and-white photographs, listened to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and remembered those three days in July 1863. Now they are about to leave, and Jim tells his son, once again, the story. It's what they have heard from others and what he has gleaned from history, but this time it's personal. It is his story, as a father tells his son why this place has meaning for him, not only as a student of history, but as a citizen of this country and as a father raising a

son to treasure the freedoms for which others have fought and died.

There are places in this world that evoke stories — stories that one generation passes on to another. By telling these stories, we not only remember the past, but we encourage one another to live in the present with a deeper sense of the value of life and community.

- What are some places that are important to you and to your family? Why?
- What stories do you tell to communicate the significance of those places?

Exploring the Scriptures

Just as places in our lives have significance and stories, so, too, do places in Scripture. One such place throughout Israel's history was the temple in Jerusalem.

Read about the dedication of the temple by Solomon in 1 Kings 8:12–26.

- What is the story of God's relationship to His people that Solomon tells when he dedicates the temple?
- Although God is beyond our understanding (v. 12), He promises to dwell in the temple for His covenant people. What other promise about God's dwelling among His people does Solomon recall in his prayer (vv. 25–26; see 2 Sam. 7:4–13)?

Isaiah continues this story by prophesying of a time when God will dwell among His people through a chosen servant in a mysterious way. Read Is. 52:13–53:5.

- What is strange about this servant of God?
- What does God promise to do for all people through this despised and rejected servant (Is. 53:5)?

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Peter and John went to pray at the temple in Jerusalem. There,

Peter healed a lame man who was begging outside the temple. After the man's healing, Peter preached to the crowd. In this sermon, Peter told the story of God. It was the story of Jesus, the suffering servant, who was God (the "Author of life") and had come in the midst of His people to save them from their sins. Read Acts 3:11–26.

- How is the story of Jesus connected to the history of Israel (vv. 22–26; see Gen. 12:1–3)?
- How did God's people respond to Jesus (vv. 13–15)?
- How did God act in response to their rejection (vv. 15–16)?
- What was God now doing through Peter's preaching of the story of Jesus (v. 26)?

The history of Jesus that Peter preached was not just for others but for himself as well. Recall from memory or read about Peter's relationship with Jesus (cf. John 13:36–38; John 20:19–23; and John 21:15–19).

- How was the death and resurrection of Jesus a personal story for Peter?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Samuel Crossman (1624–83), an Anglican priest, composed this poem in the latter part of the 17th century. It was not originally intended to be a hymn. Instead, Crossman's poem first appeared as one of a collection of nine that he attached to a conduct book he had written for young men. Here he

told religious stories and offered encouragement for godly living that children might grow in the faith.

- As you read through the stanzas of the hymn, what is the story being told? Where does it start? What happens? And where does it end?

- What are creative ways we retell this same story today to our children?

As a piece of devotional verse, Crossman's poem has much in common with the religious lyrics of earlier 17th-century poets such as John Donne and, more importantly, George Herbert. The religious lyric sought not only to communicate a religious subject but also to foster personal meditation upon it.

- Where does Crossman invite you to meditate personally upon the story of Jesus that he is telling?
- What discoveries about yourself and about God's work in Jesus happen in those moments of personal meditation?

Text

The first line of the hymn offers the major theme for devotional contemplation: God's love for us in the Passion of Jesus Christ ("My Savior's love to me") is a love that lies beyond our understanding ("is love unknown"). Each stanza of the hymn takes a different moment in the Passion of

Christ and ponders how that moment reveals a divine love beyond human understanding. Read stanza 1 and then read Rom. 5:6–11.

- Why is this love of God something beyond our understanding?
- How should God treat us on the basis of our actions?
- How does God treat us because of His love?
- How does the death and resurrection of Jesus relate to that strange act of divine love for the "loveless" (cf. Rom. 5:15–18)?

Choose one stanza (or more if you have time) and meditate upon the story of Jesus' Passion and its meaning for your life by answering the following questions.

- What moment in the life of Jesus does this stanza describe?
- How do we see our sin in that moment?
- How do we see God's amazing grace?

Making the Connection

In the closing stanza of the hymn, the poet desires to stand outside the tomb of Jesus and to devote his days to telling the story of God's love in the Passion of Christ ("Here might I stay and sing, / No story so divine!"). As God's people gather in worship, we, too, join in that activity.

- What are ways in which we, as God's people, retell the story of Jesus' Passion every time we gather on Sunday morning?
- How do we do this particularly in the season of Lent?
- This story could obviously be retold as merely a fact of history. How do we proclaim that this is a personal story, a present-tense experience of God's real love for each and every one of us in Christ?

While we retell this story in worship, we also share it with others out in the world. Like the father with his son at Gettysburg, we share the meaning of this event in all aspects of our lives.

- How does God's love for us, made known in the death and resurrection of Jesus, relate to how we live and how we speak in the world?
- Think about the past week, the people you have met, the places you have been, and the things that have happened. Identify one place in this past week where you can now look back and see God's love for you and for others in Jesus Christ. Share that place and that story with one another.

In Closing

Whether out in the world or gathered in worship, God's people have been given a story to sing. Today, we sing again that story of God's love for sinners in Jesus Christ.

- Sing or read together *LSB* 430.

Prayer

Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (For blessing on the Word, *LSB*, inside front cover).