

**THE  
WORD  
IN**

# Song



**Hymn of the Day Studies for**

**LENT**

**ONE-YEAR LECTIONARY**

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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.”

## 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

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.

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).

# When in the Hour of Deepest Need

Lutheran Service Book 615 | study by Larry A. Peters

## Introduction

A wise pastor once advised a young man just beginning in the ministry: “Preach to pain and need, and you will never have a shortage of hearers.” Pain, need, want and fear are the common companions of daily life. Where do we turn for aid? In our moments of greatest need, faith finds its greatest urgency.

God has always invited us to “call upon [Him] in the day of trouble” (Ps. 50:15) and promised to be our “very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). The hymns that remind us of God’s presence with us in time of need and that His grace is sufficient for that need are among the most treasured of all the Church’s songs.

## Exploring the Scriptures

This hymn was penned by Paul Eber (1511–69), but it flowed from a Latin hymn written by his teacher, Joachim Camerarius (1500–74). Both hymns are based upon the great prayer of King Jehoshaphat. Read this prayer in 2 Chron. 20:6–12.

- What does verse 6 tell us about God? What does it mean that He is the God whom “none is able to withstand”? How does that address us in our need?
- In verse 9, we hear the king say of God, “You will hear and save.” Are these just brave words in the face of trouble, or is this faith speaking?
- At the end of verse 12, we read: “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you.” Are these words a reflection of your own faith? Why or why not?

This hymn is appointed for Lent 2, Proper 5C and Proper 15A. On each of these Sundays, the lessons describe Jesus

healing or raising the dead. Read Matt. 15:21–28 and Luke 7:11–17.

- Today’s hymn confronts the questions, fears and wounds of this life directly. Its title directs us to where we can turn “when in the hour of deepest need.”
- What are some of the greatest needs that you have faced in life?
- What does it say about the God who delights in standing with His people in their weakness and anguish?
- Can we Christians expect to be freed from every ill (st. 5)? When does this full deliverance come to us? Does God require anything of us before delivering us from our fears, troubles and needs?

healing or raising the dead. Read Matt. 15:21–28 and Luke 7:11–17.

- How does illness or death challenge our faith?
- In both instances, the Lord showed “compassion” to those wounded by death and disease. Can we still be confident of His compassion in the same situations today? How do we know this?

Read Psalm 30.

- Verse 7 says, “You hid your face; I was dismayed.” Does it seem that sometimes God does hide His face from us in our need? Why or why not?
- In verse 5, we are told, “Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.” How have you experienced this truth in your own life?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Paul Eber was among the most gifted of the Wittenberg poets and hymn writers. He suffered childhood illness, was handicapped after being thrown from a horse, buried all but two of his 14 children, and endured blistering theological attacks.

Though we know little of the circumstances surrounding the composition of this hymn, one of its first known uses was in a service that was a call to prayer issued by Johannes Bugenhagen on Ascension Day 1547, after Emperor Charles V demanded that the city of Wittenberg lay down its arms.

- How might this hymn have been a personal response to all the troubles and trials of life endured by its author?
- How might this hymn have contributed to the calm and support of a people caught in fear at the military threat of their emperor?

### Text

Read the stanzas of this hymn again. Compare them to the prayer recorded in 2 Chron. 20:6–12. See how the hymn stanzas connect to the verses from Scripture.

- What passages come to mind that share this same theme and perspective? Read Rom. 8:31–39.

Look at where the hymn writer locates the source of our comfort.

- Is the throne referenced in stanza 2 the throne of the cross or the throne of God in heaven? Or is it both?

Stanza 3 directs us to the promises of God and to Him whose name alone is great. We call Jesus the Word of God and the fulfiller of His promises. We also call Jesus the one name under heaven and on earth by which anyone will be saved (Acts 4:12).

- Is this reference to Jesus implicit or explicit? Does the Christian always see God through the lens of Jesus Christ? Why or why not?

What do we have to offer the Lord? With this question, the hymn frames our definition of “need.”

- What do we have to offer God besides our fears and woes? When we lay them down before the Lord, it is an exercise of faith — not only that God will not be turned away by them, but that He will answer them with mercy.
- Is sin just one of our woes and fears, or is it the cause of them all?

## Making the Connection

Our lives are very different from Jehoshaphat or Paul Eber, yet our lives are still touched by adversity and need. Even with all our choices, all our technology and all our advancements, we so often find ourselves not knowing “where to look for aid” (st. 1).

- What are the biggest things that cause you fear, misery or anxiety today?

## In Closing

“Preach to pain and need, and you will never have a shortage of hearers.” This is no less true today than it was 500 years ago when this hymn was written, or even earlier when Jehoshaphat prayed these words. The challenge to faith continues to be the questions of whether our sufferings matter to God and if He can and will deliver us. The lens through which we see our sufferings is always the cross — where Jesus suffered on our behalf. Just as God’s good will and purpose were not confounded by His suffering but hidden there, so faith finds opportunity in our greatest needs. In the hand of God, these become the fruitful moments when we grow in that grace which is sufficient for our every need.

It is a common image to describe sin as a sickness or illness both in Scripture and in hymnody.

- How might we describe sin as an illness or sickness?
- How did we acquire it? Is it treatable or fatal?

Take a look at the psalms to see how often the author begins with a description of great need but then turns to thanksgiving to God for His merciful deliverance by the end of the psalm. See how this is mirrored in this hymn by the content and tone of the sixth stanza.

- Is the closing thought of thanksgiving because the author has already witnessed God’s intervention and seen evidence of His deliverance? Or is it because he has such confidence that the Lord will deliver him that he does not need to see the outcome to know it will happen?
- Do you need to see the outcome of God’s action at work in your life before you offer Him praise, or are you confident enough of His mercy that you trust Him to make “all things work together for good” (Rom. 8:28)?
- In the Small Catechism, Luther tells us that for all that God has done, it is our duty to “thank and praise, serve and obey Him” (*LSB*, p. 322). How is obedience and praise a fitting response to God’s grace and mercy in our lives? Are obedience and praise the prerequisites of God’s intervention, or are they our response to His gracious presence and deliverance?

- How is our Savior the advocate we can turn to in time of need? See 1 John 5:3–4.
- The hymn writer says, “Cast down, we stand.” How is this possible? See Rom. 5:1–5.
- Is there a connection between our sufferings and the sufferings of Christ? See 2 Cor. 5:5.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 615.

### Prayer

O God, You see that of ourselves we have no strength. By Your mighty power defend us from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; 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 Second Sunday in Lent).

# Lord of Our Life

Lutheran Service Book 659 | study by Randall P. Wurschmidt

## Introduction

“Therefore, we Christians must be armed [Eph. 6:10–18] and daily expect to be constantly attacked. No one may go on in security and carelessly, as though the devil were far from us. At all times we must expect and block his blows. Though I am now chaste, patient, kind, and in firm faith, the devil will this very hour send such an arrow into my heart that I can scarcely stand. For he is an enemy that never stops or becomes tired. So when one temptation stops, there always arise others and fresh ones” (LC III 109).

- Have you found this to be true in your own life?

In this hymn, we pray to God in the midst of strife and threats from Satan and the world. As Martin Luther wrote

in the Large Catechism, we are under constant attack, though sometimes we are more aware of it than at other times. But it is against the Church that the greatest assaults are made, and thus this hymn — in the section of the hymnal called “The Church Militant” — is a prayer of steadfastness against the enemies of the Church.

- It seems that in our lifetime the Church is under especially harsh attack. Describe some ways that you believe this is so.
- How does Satan use assaults against the Church to try to undermine your own faith?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Read Rev. 12:7–17.

- According to verse 11, how has Satan been defeated?
- What do you think it means for us that the devil’s “time is short” now (v. 12)?
- If he can no longer engage Jesus directly, where does he now turn his attention (vv. 13, 17)?

Left on our own, we have no defense against the schemes of the devil. But God has given us a way to shield ourselves from the onslaught. Read Eph. 6:10–18.

- What are the vivid ways that Paul suggests you arm yourself?
- Where will you find all these things supplied for you?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Although it seems that in our time Satan and the world are working especially hard against the Church, the truth is that there have been many such times in our history. One time was the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48); although it was a time of death, disease and destruction, many great hymns of faith were born out of the horrific conditions caused by this conflict (for example, the many hymns of Paul Gerhardt). It was a largely political and territorial war, though it is also remembered — at least superficially — as a battle about religion. The author of today’s hymn, Matthäus Apelles von Löwenstern (1594–1648), was an imperial counselor in the courts of two Holy Roman Emperors during these years. He was a devout Lutheran, but his employers were Roman Catholic and very determined to destroy the Lutheran faith.

- Why do times of great affliction and suffering produce such outstanding hymns of faith?

- Should we expect the world to become increasingly more peaceful as the day of Jesus’ return draws ever nearer? Why or why not?

The English translation of “Lord of Our Life” that we sing comes from Philip Pusey (1799–1855). His brother, Edward Bouvier Pusey, was a leader of the Oxford Movement in the Church of England (in the early-to-mid-1800s). Pusey, too, lived during a time when his Church was under assault, not by princes and emperors, but by secularization and liberal theology. The Oxford Movement sought to reverse some of those trends. They found this hymn to be a source of comfort in their struggles.

- Some hymns are more timeless than others; hymns like this one successfully work well over many generations, while some seem quickly and embarrassingly dated. What makes some hymns more successful than others in crossing over the centuries?

## Text

There is marvelous imagery in every stanza of this hymn: light and darkness, storm and calm, battle and peace. The Church is the ark that protects us from the hungry billows outside and from the enemy, who unfurls his banners of war. The metaphor of the Church as the ark on stormy waters is an ancient one, and it is even found in our baptismal liturgy (see *LSB*, pp. 268–9).

- How would you interpret the “star” in the first stanza? See Is. 14:17 and Rev. 22:16.

The second stanza is an especially vivid description of how the enemy lurks outside, surrounding you and waiting to devour you (1 Peter 5:8).

- Does the imagery of the ark help you to feel secure? Why or why not?

## Making the Connection

“Lord of Our Life” is an affirmation of spiritual warfare, that Satan and his minions are at work against Christians and the Church in every effort to destroy her. Here we pray that God would hear us as we cry out to Him for help in our fight against the wily foe. He sent us Jesus to defeat him; He sends His Holy Spirit to us to strengthen us in faith and to arm us against temptation and despair.

With every crisis in worldwide Christianity, Satan tries to convince us that God has abandoned us. Modern atheists try to prove that Christianity is evil and that it causes wars like the Thirty Years’ War.

In the end, our only comfort in the midst of this world’s troubles is Jesus. He is the one who defeated Satan so

John’s Gospel, especially, uses the language of light to describe Jesus. Read John 1:4–5 and 8:12.

- How does darkness describe the world?
- How has the light overcome the darkness?

The hymn generally follows a pattern of prayer that goes like this: (1) Address to God; (2) an attribute or quality of God; (3) a petition to God; (4) the expected result; and (5) conclusion.

- Describe how this hymn fits the form of prayer stated above.
- What are the various forms of “peace” that the last stanza describes? What sort of peace has already been achieved for us in Jesus? When will we finally know true and everlasting peace?

that we can thumb our nose at him. Jesus is the one who conquered death so that we need not fear it. Jesus is the one who took on our sins so that we would be assured of forgiveness.

- Why is it so disconcerting for us whenever a church leader falls to sexual temptation or covetousness?
- How do Holy Baptism and the Lord’s Supper help us to put on the armor of God? Can these Means of Grace help keep us from being easily disillusioned or cynical?
- How else does the Divine Service deliver to us the means to shield ourselves against the evil one?

## In Closing

In this life, we cry, “How long, O LORD?” (Ps. 79:5); yet, we rightly look to Jesus as the “God of our salvation” (Ps. 79:9); He is our sun and shield (Ps. 84:11). Our Lord saves us through the blood of Jesus Christ, who is our hope in every need and our only source of peace in God. Because Jesus has defeated Satan, the gates of hell shall never prevail against Christ’s Church (Matt. 16:18). Jesus is the Lord of your life because you have been baptized into His death and resurrection, to be raised with Him and to live with Him in life everlasting.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 659.

## 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).

# Jesus, Priceless Treasure

Lutheran Service Book 743 | study by Paul F. Becker

## Introduction

The Lutheran Confessions describe the priceless treasure that has come to us in the Gospel of Christ Jesus. “Since the promise can only be received by faith, the Gospel (which is properly the promise of forgiveness of sins and of justification for Christ’s sake) proclaims the righteousness of faith in Christ. The Law does not teach this, nor is this the righteousness of the Law. For the Law demands our works and our perfection. But, for Christ’s sake, the Gospel freely offers reconciliation to us, who have been vanquished by sin and death. This is received not by works, but by faith alone. This faith does not bring to God confidence in one’s own

merits, but only confidence in the promise, or the mercy promised in Christ” (Ap IV 43–45).

Today’s hymn is addressed to Jesus, the source of true and lasting joy, and alternately to all counterfeits, which are renounced in no uncertain terms.

- Given the natural belief that we can and must do something to save ourselves, discuss the fact that there are ultimately only two religions in the world: the religion of the Gospel and the religion(s) of Law(s)?
- What earthly treasures are people willing to fight and die for? How does new life in Christ change our perspective?

## Exploring the Scriptures

Given Peter’s bold statements — “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16); followed by “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt. 16:22); to the night of Jesus’ betrayal, “Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!” (Matt. 26:35); and finally post-resurrection, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you” (John 21:17) — how would we expect him to describe the treasure of grace in Christ? Read 1 Peter 1:17–19.

- Discuss how the image of the lamb would remind Peter’s readers of John the Baptist’s cry, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).
- What phrase does Peter use to describe what we were *not* redeemed with? What significance do such things have in our lives as believers?

Almost everyone nowadays has insurance on things they hold that are of value. What “insurance policy” does God offer us? Read Rom. 8:35–39.

- What sort of things threaten to separate us from the love of Christ? What makes us “more than conquerors” (v. 37) in the midst of these troubles?
- What has God done to persuade you that even the most terrifying things we might imagine cannot separate us from His love?

At one point in Jesus’ ministry, many of His disciples left Him because of His “hard sayings.” Peter has another opportunity to stake his claim in Christ. Read John 6:66–69.

- How does someone get to the place where he has evaluated various truth claims and can say with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life” (v. 68)?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

Johann Franck (1618–77) published this text after the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), during which his hometown suffered invasion from both Saxon and Swedish armies. Franck embarked on a distinguished civic career as an attorney, city councilor and mayor. He wrote both secular and religious poetry, including 110 religious songs.

- How can we encourage believers to embrace their vocation in this world as service to Christ?

### Text

The first two stanzas express a creative tension between boundless confidence in Jesus as my “truest friend” and “purest pleasure” and a sense of distance from God. Though the very worst of this fallen world combine to seek our ruin, however, we children of God find safety when resting in Jesus’ arms.

- How has this fallen world hurt or disappointed you? In the midst of these difficulties, how did you come to know the truth that “Jesus will not fail me” (st. 2)?

- A sense of God’s distance or absence could be seen as a sign of weak faith. What other explanations could you offer to help a friend?

Stanzas 3–6 address the realities that confront us in rather vehement, even violent, terms. Satan, death, earthly treasure, empty glory, pain or loss, evil world, sinful life, fear and sadness — all are told in no uncertain terms: Hence!

## Making the Connection

Consider Franck’s hymn in light of Peter’s first epistle:

In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, so that the tested genuineness of your faith — more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire — may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. Though you

The dangers of being deceived by the evil world and blinded or bound by sin are recognized and dealt with almost in the spirit of an exorcism. “Get thee far behind me, / Come not forth again” (st. 5), Franck writes.

- In the face of evil, are believers ever tempted to think of themselves as weak, helpless victims? What kind of therapy does Franck offer those struggling in this way?

have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (1 Peter 1:6–9)

- Why does God allow trials and fiery tests to come your way?

## In Closing

- Read aloud or sing together *LSB* 743.

### Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, our support and defense in every need, continue to preserve Your Church in safety, govern her by Your goodness, and bless her with Your peace; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 19B).

# 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

## 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?

## 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.

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?

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.

### 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).