



THE WORD IN *Song*

Hymn of the Day Studies for
THE SEASON AFTER
PENTECOST



THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
MISSOURI SYNOD

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* Available in Lutheran Service Builder and in *Lutheran Service Book: Accompaniment for the Hymns*.

Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest

Lutheran Service Book 498/499 | study by J.H. Sorenson

Introduction

“We don’t pray for the Holy Spirit!” said the young man to his pastor. The pastor was startled at first and wondered where this was coming from. He wondered if this man was paying attention to the service on Sunday morning and doubted the depth of his confirmation instruction, but of course did not say so out loud.

- How would you respond to that statement?
- What are some ways in which we do pray for the Holy Spirit?
- What does the Holy Spirit use to get through to people? (Hint: Means of Grace.)

Exploring the Scriptures

In John 14:16–26, Jesus promised to send His faithful disciples “another Helper ... the Spirit of truth,” who would remind them of everything He told them and be with them always.

- When was this promise first fulfilled?
- How does the Holy Spirit speak to us today?

In Rom. 8:5–11, Paul teaches that the Spirit gives life while the flesh means death.

- What does Paul mean by “life” in the Spirit?
- By contrast, what is “[living] according to the flesh”? Read Titus 3:5–7.

- What is the washing referred to here?
- Where does the power in Baptism come from?

This hymn is packed with biblical references. Every stanza has several, starting with Ps. 104:30.

- What other passages can you think of that tie the Holy Spirit to creation?
- What are the “graces sevenfold” (st. 3) in the hymn (Is. 11:2)?
- How do these differ from the “fruit of the Spirit” (Gal. 5:22)?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

“Come, Holy Ghost, Creator Blest” is one of the oldest and most highly respected of the ancient Latin hymns. It was written in the ninth century, but scholars are not sure of its author. The most likely one is Rabanus Maurus (c. 776–856), a monk, scholar, abbot and archbishop of Mainz in Germany.

This hymn found its way into many books of daily prayer and orders of worship over the centuries. To this day, it is prescribed or recommended to be used in ordination rites in Roman Catholic, Episcopal and Lutheran churches, including the rite in *Lutheran Service Book Agenda*. It is also used for the dedication of churches and several other occasions, such as the coronation of kings and queens of England.

- What makes this hymn an appropriate choice for the Holy Trinity?
- What is the value in a hymn being used by many denominations of Christians?

- Why do you think this hymn is widely used at ordinations?

Text

Many translations of this hymn have been made. Among them is one by Martin Luther into German. Our translation is by Englishman Edward Caswall (1814–78). The tune in 498 is a version of the one Luther used. The one in 499 comes from the ninth century.

- Why do you think the hymn reads “Holy Ghost” instead of “Holy Spirit”?
- Might the use of such traditional language fail to communicate with people today?

As the first stanza links the Holy Spirit to creation and filling the hearts of believers, stanza 2 calls on the Spirit as “Counselor,” or “Helper” (ESV).

- What event does “tongues of fire” refer to?

Romans 8:26 reads, “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.”

- What comfort and hope does this passage give you?
- Who is “our wily foe” (st. 5)?

In John 14, Jesus promises that the Holy Spirit will teach us all that we need to know.

Making the Connection

No more comforting and encouraging words have ever been spoken than Paul’s passage on life in the Spirit in Romans 8. This hymn reflects not only that passage, but most of the scriptural teachings and reflections on the Holy Spirit. The point of view of this hymn is corporate. It is a prayer on

- What doctrine do we ask to be taught in stanza 6?

Stanza 7 is called a “doxology,” a stanza of praise to God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Such stanzas are marked with a small triangle in *LSB*. Many congregations stand to sing these stanzas.

- Is this a good or not-so-good idea?

behalf of “us,” meaning the worshiping community gathered in prayer and song, but it applies to every worshiper as well, a heartfelt prayer for all the Spirit’s gifts and activity. This hymn is over a thousand years old, but its thoughts are current and important for today.

In Closing

The pastor talking to the young man about prayer for the Holy Spirit rightly understood that he had other “issues” besides prayer for the Holy Spirit. He recalled the prayer said every Sunday at that time, “Grant to Thy Church Thy Holy Spirit and the wisdom that cometh down from above ...” He remembered that every service began “In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.” The catechism teaches that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one God, and all interact together. The Word and the Sacraments bear the Spirit’s power to create and strengthen faith.

- Why is it especially meaningful to call on the Holy Spirit to enliven the Church’s mission today?
- How does the Holy Spirit move and motivate Christian people to their mission in our time?
- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 498 or 499.

Prayer

Almighty God, grant to Your Church Your Holy Spirit and the wisdom that comes down from above, that Your Word may not be bound but have free course and be preached to the joy and edifying of Christ’s holy people, that in steadfast faith we may serve You and, in the confession of Your name, abide unto the end; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (For the Church, *LSB*, p. 305).

O God, My Faithful God

Lutheran Service Book 696 | study by Allen D. Lunneberg

Introduction

This hymn is a prayer for strength and guidance in the daily living of the Christian life. As such, it is about the doctrine of sanctification. The term “sanctification” has both a wide and narrow sense. In the wide sense, it includes all that the Holy Spirit does in creating faith in the heart and the living of a holy life. Luther, in the Large Catechism, speaks of sanctification in the wide sense simply by quoting the creed as the method and means by which the Holy Spirit makes a person holy, namely, by the Christian Church, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.

Exploring the Scriptures

The first thing that should be said is that sanctification, or holy living, is God’s will for His people. “For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). As such, God also produces this as a gift through the means of grace.

“From this evidence the following is certain: as soon as the Holy Spirit has begun His work of regeneration and renewal in us through the Word and holy Sacraments, we can and should cooperate through His power, although still in great weakness. This cooperation does not come from our fleshly natural powers, but from the new powers and gifts that the Holy Spirit has begun in us in conversion. St. Paul clearly and eagerly encourages that “working together with Him, then, we appeal to you not to receive the grace of God in vain” [2 Corinthians 6:1]. But this is to be understood in no other way than the following: the converted person does good to such an extent and as long as God by His Holy Spirit rules, guides, and leads him” (FC SD II 65–66, 532).

In the narrow sense, however, sanctification is the internal spiritual transformation of the believer. It begins with faith and only thereafter issues good works.

- How important is living a Christian life compared to simply believing in Christ?
- How do justification and sanctification differ?
- Does sanctification play a part in obtaining salvation?
- Is sanctification in this life perfect or imperfect?

It should always be remembered that, whereas justification, or salvation, is totally the gift and work of God without our cooperation, sanctification involves active cooperation. But the good works of Christians are done not in the hope of gaining salvation, but as a response out of love and thanksgiving for God’s gift of salvation.

Many Christian people complain, “I just can’t be patient.” Yet the truth is that this is part of the “fruit of the Spirit.” God desires to give and work in the Christian’s heart, “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Gal. 5:22–23).

- Does failure in holy living necessarily affect a person’s salvation? Can it ever?
- The essence of the marriage vow is, “I promise to be faithful to you.” Is it possible to keep this vow perfectly? Is unfaithfulness forgivable?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

This hymn was written by Pastor Johann Heermann (1585–1647) during a most difficult time in his life, between 1623 and 1630, when he was plagued by various bodily afflictions. It is a prayer, a genuine cry of faith from the Christian’s heart, based on the confession of God’s promised faithfulness and goodness. As a preacher he was also concerned with speaking the truth without unnecessarily offending the weak. We also have received from his pen the hymns “O Dearest Jesus, What Law Hast Thou Broken” (LSB 439), and “O Christ, Our True and Only Light” (LSB 839).

- What is it about illness or other afflictions that move us to prayer possibly more than usual?

Text

The first stanza clearly states the basis for the prayer, confessing God’s faithfulness (James 1:17; Ps. 36:9). The prayer for “a healthy frame” is for physical health and strength. Sin is identified as the root cause of illness or trouble. Everything depends on the forgiveness of sins (James 5:14–16).

Stanza 2 continues as a prayer for strength to do everything required by “My calling,” that is, my vocation or

station in life. The “success” promised is in the confidence that “for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose” (Rom. 8:28).

- To what extent do we take our health for granted and neglect giving thanks to God for His gifts?
- What are some of the duties of your vocation or station in life?

Whereas the first two stanzas are concerned about actions, stanzas 3 and 4 are concerned about the power of words and speech. Words that “later need recalling” and “idle speech” recall the ability of the tongue to inflict damage on the neighbor (Rom. 15:1–3; James 3:2–10). But words can be gracious and kind, serving to strengthen the neighbor (Eph. 4:29; Prov. 15:1).

Not that, however, “hard” words are never to be spoken. Part of the preacher’s task according to St. Paul is to “rebuke” (1 Tim. 5:20; 2 Tim. 4:2). The task is to speak with God’s grace attached, that is, always in hope that words of discipline will benefit the other.

- Think of a time you said something to someone that you later wished you had not said. Did you (or could you) later do something about it?
- What are some situations when you “must and ought to speak” “hard” words or “rebuke”?

Making the Connection

Holy living, or the everyday life of the Christian, rests in his or her connection with and confidence in the faithfulness of God. It includes receiving the benefits of this life with thanksgiving and being a blessing to the benefit of others. While our sanctification is never perfect in this life and even can seem to disappear in the face of trials and troubles, God calls us to daily repentance, returning to our Baptism where He calls us forth every day anew. In this

The final two stanzas put the Christian life in perspective, that of our mortality and our hope for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come (1 Cor. 7:29–31; Heb. 13:14; Rom. 8:18–25).

Stanza 5 is a prayer that God would keep us faithful, even unto death (Rev. 2:10), even looking forward to that day as “a Sabbath rest for the people of God, for whoever has entered God’s rest has also rested from his works” (Heb. 4:9–10).

That our bodies should have “A quiet resting place / Within a Christian grave” and “sleep in peace” views death from our point of view. But is death such a “sleep”? Read 1 Thess. 4:13–18, especially the last phrase of verse 17.

Beyond death, Christian hope looks forward to the day of the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. That “final day” will see “all the dead” waking (Matt. 25:31–32). And we will hear the Lord’s voice, as Jesus promised, “Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming, and is now here, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). The hymn ends with a note of joy for those who have been baptized into the name of God.

- How does a biblical faith comfort and give confidence to you even concerning the death of a loved one or your own death?

grace we look forward to our eternal rest and the joy of life everlasting with the Lord.

- How does this hymn and prayer comfort or encourage you?
- What is more important, faithful living of the Christian life or reaching the goal of a Christian death?

In Closing

“For this is the will of God, your sanctification” (1 Thess. 4:3). We will never be perfect in this life. That’s why we have the daily forgiveness of sins. But we do live “set apart” (holy) as God’s people to bring His light and forgiveness and joy to others.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 696.

Prayer

O Lord, grant that the course of this world may be so peaceably ordered by Your governance that Your Church may joyfully serve You in all godly quietness; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Fourth Sunday after Trinity).

In the Very Midst of Life

Lutheran Service Book 755 | study by Scott R. Schilbe

Introduction

We don't have to look too far beyond ourselves and our loved ones to understand that death surrounds us. The pressures of feeling age limiting our bodies or of seeing our loved ones mentally or physically decline burden us with feelings of hopelessness. We feel hopeless because we can do nothing to escape the situation. Our bodies, not to mention the natural disasters we witness through television and the internet, point us to the reality that the present world is fading away. We truly are living in the midst of death's vale.

Today's hymn, "In the Very Midst of Life," forces us to confront living in a sinful world, while also providing assurance that our holy and mighty God is the only one who eternally saves us from it.

- In your life, do you feel that the "Powers of hell" (st. 2) overtake you? How?
- To what refuges do you think people turn in times of need? Are these refuges outside the church?

Exploring the Scriptures

In the Bible are many accounts of individuals who felt death surrounding them and their families.

- Read Luke 7:1–10 and Mark 5:21–43. In each account, identify the person feeling burdened and the serious situation that was faced.
- According to 2 Cor. 1:8–10, for what beneficial purpose can God use our burdens?

- How does Heb. 2:14–15, 18 help you when you struggle with sin and death "In the very midst of life"?
- How does a faith that rests on Jesus speak in situations of apparent despair and tragedy? Read Lam. 3:22–33.
- Despite the unpleasant reality of living on earth, what eternal hope does Is. 51:11 and Rev. 21:1–4 offer you?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

According to tradition, stanza 1 existed before Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote stanzas 2 and 3. These two additional stanzas clearly confess the Christian's refuge during gloomy times of life: Jesus and His mercy.

Discuss how Luther's call to take refuge in the holy and all-merciful Savior becomes more personal after reflecting upon the following significant situations of Luther's life:

- His conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church and the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire after posting the 95 Theses, conflicts resulting in his condemnation after the Diet of Worms.
- Luther's family tragedies, especially living under the threat of deadly disease in 1527, and enduring the death of two daughters, Elisabeth in 1528 and Magdalena in 1542.

Text

This hymn provides interesting ways of describing death. In stanza 1, death is described as an enemy, a snare eager to trap us into fear and despair. However, repentant of our sinfulness, we flee to the only hope, the only holy God. Because of our holy and merciful Savior, we have nothing to fear.

- How did Noah witness the snare of death surrounding him? Read Gen. 7:21–24.
- How did God deal with Noah's environment? Read Gen. 8:1.
- How did Noah react to his situation? Read Heb. 11:7; Gen. 8:10.

In stanza 2, death is portrayed as a valley through which we currently walk.

- How do the famous words of Ps. 23:4 help you realize that "death" is much more than the moment of physical death?
- What, according to Paul, is the source of this "vale" (Rom. 8:20; Rom. 5:12)? Who is your hope while living in this vale (Rom. 5:15–17; Ps. 23:4)?

In stanza 3, death is portrayed as utter woe. Again, Luther indicates that death is more than physical death; it is utter devastation.

- Contemplate times of your life when you've felt deeply distressed.
- Briefly review Jesus' passion. How did Jesus Himself experience utter woe and devastation? For what reason did Jesus experience it?

Making the Connection

As you examine the hymn, note that each stanza begins by sounding the realistic note of despair, yet each stanza ends by clearly pointing the singer to the merciful Savior. In this way, the hymn text parallels our natural feelings when confronting a crisis. It first gives voice to our hopelessness but then provides needed focus by pointing to Jesus.

The hymn guides us as we cope with suffering either in our lives or in the lives of others. It guides us to Jesus and to His atoning work. And it also guides us to repent of our fears and to cling to the ways in which God preserves us.

In Closing

Indeed, we constantly endure the sadness of living in a sinful world. This hymn helps us confront that reality, while at the same time it helps us look beyond that reality and cling to Jesus. Our holy and righteous God does show His mercy to us and saves, preserves and keeps us!

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 755.

Examine these two hymn phrases and discuss the related questions.

- “We mourn that we have greatly erred” (st. 1). In what ways do you express your contriteness over sin?
- “Lord, preserve and keep us / In the peace that faith can give” (st. 3). By what means does God preserve you in the faith?
- Choose a perplexing phrase from the hymn and discuss its meaning.

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).

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 Proper 5C, Proper 15A and Lent 2, On each of these Sundays, the lessons describe Jesus

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).

Today Your Mercy Calls Us

Lutheran Service Book 915 | study by Bruce E. Keseman

Introduction

Four-year-old Tony is caked in mud. Roughly five minutes before, he walked out the front door with his father and sister, ready for church. His little sister tripped and skinned her hand. Dad went inside to tend to her, asking Tony to sit at the picnic table. Tony did as he was told until he noticed the inviting dirt pile at the edge of the garden, recently soaked by several inches of rain.

Tony didn't intend to get messy, but by the time he reached the dirt pile, his shoes had sunk in the soft soil. When he reached down to steady himself, one hand and then the other ended up in the muck. Mud splashed on his face. Tony made matters worse by wiping his face with his filthy hand and then wiping that hand on his nice Sunday

clothes. That's when he heard, "Tony, come here." Tony didn't want to go to his father. A day earlier, Dad warned him not to go near the mud. Tony wished he had obeyed. Tony was sorry, but he knew he deserved to be punished. His father, however, took a damp cloth, washed Tony clean, and provided a clean outfit. Tony thought, "I'm sure glad I came to Dad when he called."

- How is Tony's experience with the mud similar to our experience with sin? Why do we end up caked in sin even when we have no intention of getting dirty?
- What connections do you see between Tony's story and the true story of David (2 Sam. 11:26–12:14)?

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Luke 7:36–8:3, today's Gospel. Old Testament prophets, priests and kings were anointed by having oil poured on their heads. This woman anoints *the* Prophet, Priest and King for burial by applying ointment to His feet.

- Is the woman the sort of person you'd invite for a meal? Why or why not?
- In their society, letting her hair hang loose implied a woman had loose morals. Why do you suppose Jesus condoned (and even praised) her behavior? Was her attitude sinful?
- Is the Pharisee's comment in verse 39 accurate? Explain.

- What is the point of Jesus' story? Which character represents the woman? Simon? You?

Jesus says we can tell that the woman's sins are forgiven because she loves much. (Her love doesn't prompt God's forgiveness; instead, God's forgiveness prompts her love.)

- What might that imply about Mary Magdalene and the other women (Luke 8:1–3)? About our lives?
- How would you answer the question of the guests in Luke 7:49?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Oswald Allen (1816–78), the author of "Today Your Mercy Calls Us," suffered from spinal problems. He also understood another affliction — sin. Allen's original text used singular rather than plural pronouns: "Today Thy mercy calls *me* / To wash away *my* sin; / However great *my* trespass, / Whate'er *I* might have been" (emphasis added).

- What advantages might the original wording have?
- What appropriate reasons might hymnal editors have for altering the words for use in public worship?

Text

Read through "Today Your Mercy Calls Us" (LSB 915). Identify the primary point of each stanza.

- What theme seems to tie the hymn together?

- What phrases in the hymn are especially meaningful to you? Why?
- When have "heart and eye run o'er" (st. 4) in your life? What troubles "drive us to despair" (st. 4)?
- Why might the hymnist repeat the word "today" three times? (See Heb. 3:7–15.)

The hymn reminds us that God's *mercy* calls us. Mercy is compassion that comes to the rescue of someone who cannot help himself. Read Is. 1:18, which helps explain God's mercy to us. It associates scarlet and crimson with sin, maybe because dark red dyes tend to stain clothing permanently. Ironically, while blood is the last thing we would use as detergent on stained clothing, Jesus' blood can "make us clean today" (st. 1) — you could say it contains "*redding* for extra whiteness" (to paraphrase an old commercial).

- How does the hymn (especially st. 1) reflect Is. 1:18?
- Considering the message of stanza 1, how would you respond if someone said, “God could never forgive what I’ve done”?

Read Luke 15:11–24. It’s usually called the parable of the prodigal son, but it’s really about a welcoming father who can’t wait to throw a party to receive his estranged son(s) back into the family.

- What evidence do you see that this parable is more about a welcoming Father than a prodigal son?
- How might it change our view of the parable if we focus on the father instead of on the son(s)?

In order to understand the parable of the pleased as punch partying papa, read Jesus’ concluding comment after the two preceding parables, namely, the searching shepherd (also known as (aka), lost sheep) and looking lady (aka, lost coin).

- What do Luke 15:7 and 15:10 tell you about our Lord? About what He desires of us?
- How does stanza 3 of the hymn help you to picture the angels waiting to rejoice over one sinner who repents? Who is that sinner?

Back in Luke 15:11–24, the prodigal in effect says, “Drop dead, dad!” After all, a son ordinarily receives his inheritance when his father dies. Then the prodigal wastes what his father entrusts to him. Notice that the prodigal repents when he recalls his father’s care even for slaves. The son

intends to return as his dad’s slave, but dad welcomes him as a full son.

- Whom does the father in the parable represent?
- How are we like the prodigal?
- What specific words of the hymn — especially in stanzas 2 and 3 — echo the parable?
- What reasons do the parable and hymn give you to come to your Father in repentance?

In Jesus’ parable, a fattened calf died so dad could celebrate the return of his son. In real life, Jesus died (with our sins on Him) so the Father could celebrate the return of His children.

- Read stanza 2. It’s easy for us prodigals to understand what “past shall be forgotten.” But what “present joy” is given when we come to our Father? What “future grace”?

Read Rev. 22:17. The “Spirit,” of course, is the Holy Spirit. The “Bride” (Rev. 21:2 and Eph. 5:25–32) is the Church, that is, all who have been given saving faith in Jesus. Revelation 22:1 says the water of life flows from the throne of God and the Lamb. That’s the Lamb who was slain so His people can live and who, unlike Old Testament sacrificial lambs, came back to life.

- What makes us Christians thirsty for the water of life?
- Our Lord is present where Christ’s saving work is proclaimed, where Baptism cleanses sinners and where the Redeemer’s body and blood are served. How do we thirsty sinners “come,” as the Spirit, Bride and hymn invite us to do?

Making the Connection

Remember mud-caked Tony? Reread his story.

- How does the story of Tony help us to understand the message of “Today Your Mercy Calls Us”?
- What would you change in the story to make the connection even clearer?
- What does this hymn say to us when we realize that we are rebellious prodigals who disobey our Father, play in

the mud of sin and have no logical reason to expect mercy from our heavenly Father?

- Considering the end of the hymn, how would you respond to someone who says, “I’m overwhelmed by life, I’m not close to God, no one understands and no one can help me”?
- What makes Jesus not just the door (John 10:1–11) but the ever-open door (Rev. 3:7–8)?

In Closing

Because of Jesus, you have a merciful Father, who invites you to come to Him!

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 915.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us Your gifts of faith, hope, and love that we may receive the forgiveness You have promised and love what You have commanded; 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 Proper 6C).

O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth

Lutheran Service Book 834 | study by Paul F. Becker

Introduction

The first of the Ninety-five Theses states: “When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, “Repent” [Mt 4:17], he willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance” (*Luther’s Works*, American Edition, [Philadelphia: Fortress, 1957], 31:25). As Martin Luther nailed the Ninety-Five Theses to the church door in Wittenberg, Germany, on Oct. 31, 1517, he inadvertently began what today we call the Protestant Reformation. One of his primary concerns was with the sale of indulgences, which in his mind cheapened the grace of God and trivialized the treasure of Confession and Absolution, thus distorting the Church’s Gospel mission and witness. The good news of God’s grace held such importance for Luther that he was willing to defy the Emperor

at the Diet of Worms in 1521 with his statement, “Here I stand. I can do no other. God help me, Amen!”

Such a confession and prayer echoes in the lines of this Reformation hymn, “O God, O Lord of Heaven and Earth,” which points out the path for our continuing bold mission and witness to Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

- Discuss how the meaning of repentance — turning to God and changing the way you think and act — determines the nature of our mission and witness to Jesus.
- Are there any areas you can think of in which the Church today stands in need of reformation?

Exploring the Scriptures

Martin Franzmann’s text makes use of the work of each person of the Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, to draw out what each divine person has done and continues to do for our good. Read John 1:1–7.

- How does the phrase “All things were made through him” (v. 3) shape your thinking about life and creation?
- If darkness cannot overcome the light (v. 5), what prevents people from seeing the truth? Hint: What do we love more?

Who can fathom the depths of God’s love in becoming one of us (Rom. 11:33)? By sharing our flesh and blood, Christ did what we were unable to do. Read Heb. 2:14–15.

- How was the author of our salvation able to “destroy the one who [had] the power of death” (Heb. 2:14)?
- Describe the bondage from which we have been set free by His death.

Ultimately, only the Holy Spirit’s work of restoration will allow the Church to fulfill its task of bringing good news to a sick and dying world. Without His presence, “the way of peace they have not known” (Rom. 3:17). Read Rom. 15:5–6.

- What Scriptures give you endurance and encouragement?
- What kind of thoughts and words glorify God and advance the Church’s mission and witness?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Martin H. Franzmann (1907–1976) was called in 1946 to teach at Concordia Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1955, he joined the department of Exegetical Theology there. He was known for his traditional stance on biblical inerrancy and inspiration over against historical criticism, as well as his commentaries on Romans and Revelation. Five of his original hymns and one of his translations are found in Lutheran Service Book. Today’s hymn was written for the 450th anniversary of the Reformation in 1967.

- What uniquely qualifies a student and teacher of the Scriptures to compose new hymns for the Church?

- The 500th anniversary of the Reformation is Oct. 31, 2017. Discuss two or three Reformation themes that still energize us today.

Text

Even as the first stanza expresses the aimlessness, futility, and brokenness of life, consequences of the fall, it offers a powerful refutation of the false claim that would lay responsibility for sin and death on God. Call to mind Michelangelo’s well-known painting of the creation, in which the “living finger” of God the Father gives life to the yet lifeless figure of Adam.

- Discuss the phrases and word pictures that demonstrate God’s design and intention for mankind.

- In stanza 2, we discover the results of insisting on our “fatal” and “rebel will.” What evidence do you see today that man’s rebellion is still fatal?

Stanzas 3 and 4 capture in vivid terms how God spared no expense to win us back to Himself. He breathed our poisoned air, and drank the dark despair that strangle our “reluctant breath.”

- The hymn was written during the height of both the Vietnam conflict and the arms race of the Cold War. How does repeating the phrase “how beautiful the feet” (st. 3) — a direct reference to Is. 52:7 — bring a sense of hope and promise?

Making the Connection

As we give thanks to God for restoring His Church, there are many gifts for us to rejoice in.

- What means does the Spirit use to make the Church once again “the bringer of good news to men” (st. 4) today?

In Closing

Every Lord’s Day in each Divine Service, whether we feel it or not, God the Holy Spirit breathes afresh and anew on humble and repentant hearts through Word and Sacrament the very life and love that God desires for us to experience and share with our neighbors. God’s people gather where He has promised to bring us back to Himself.

- Read aloud or sing together *LSB* 834.

The final stanza evokes the “high doxology” of heaven heard in Rev. 5:12–13: “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing! ... To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!” To this our lives aspire even now in “these grey and latter days” by virtue of the Spirit’s breath.

- What are some things that would characterize your personal, family and church life if these were among “those whose life is praise”?

- How does God bring comfort and hope to us who still inhabit our “hall of death” (st. 3) and “house of doom” (st. 2)?

Prayer

O God, the strength of all who put their trust in You, mercifully grant that by Your power we may be defended against all adversity; 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 Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany).

Rise, Shine, You People

Lutheran Service Book 825 | study by Bruce E. Keseman

Introduction

Have you ever walked outside at night far from any intruding lights? It can be incredibly dark. Then again, if the sky is clear and the moon is full, the light from that moon may shine so brightly that you can see everything around you clearly.

Yet that bright moon has no light of its own. It simply reflects the sun's light. So it is with us Christians: the light we shine in this sin-darkened world is reflected light. The moon reflects the sun; we reflect the Son. And for people walking in sin's darkness, the light of Christ — even when it is reflecting from us — can be amazingly bright.

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Luke 8:26–31 from today's Gospel. The apostles do not yet realize that Jesus is God and Messiah (see Luke 8:25).

- In contrast to the disciples, what do the demons call Jesus? How can they know who He is?
- What evidence is there in the passage that the demons know that Jesus has power over them?
- Why is it so important, especially when we find it difficult to “shine” in this world, for us Christians to realize that Satan has no power over our Lord?

Now read more of the story, Luke 8:32–37.

- Jesus could have sent the demons into a bird, a cow or even a rock. Why might it be appropriate that unclean demons are sent into pigs? (See Deut. 14:8.)

Exploring the Hymn

Background

In the early 1970s, when Lutherans in America began working together on a new hymnal, gifted poets were commissioned to create new hymns that might be included in the hymnal. Ronald Klug (b. 1939), one of the poets, wrote “Rise, Shine, You People” for the Epiphany season. His hymn also fits well with today's Gospel that invites us to “declare how much God has done for you” (Luke 8:39). Composer Dale Wood (1934–2003) crafted the tune for Klug's text.

- Sing “Rise, Shine, You People” (*LSB* 825).
- In what ways does Wood's tune help to emphasize the mood and words of the hymn?

So Isaiah exclaims, “Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the LORD has risen upon you” (Is. 60:1). Echoing Isaiah, today's hymn begins, “Rise, shine, you people! Christ the Lord has entered / Our human story.”

- What evidence can you see — and show to others — that makes it clear that our world needs Christ's light because we dwell in darkness caused by sin?
- What hinders us Christians from “shining” as brightly as we could in this world?

- You are baptized. Satan has been cast out of you. How does the certainty that Jesus has overcome the devil give you courage to stand firm against temptation and shine in the world?
- In what ways does the power of Jesus scare some people (v. 37) still today? Is there good reason for humans to fear Jesus? Why or why not?

Read the end of today's Gospel, Luke 8:38–39.

- What does Jesus tell the formerly demon-possessed man to do? What does that suggest we will do now that we have been cleansed by Christ?
- List some specific things “God has done for you” (v. 39). These are some of the deeds you can declare as you arise and shine, because your light has come.

- Does the Church need new hymn tunes and texts today? Why or why not?
- What criteria would you use to decide if a new hymn text is good? (Poetic beauty? Focus on Christ? Scriptural faithfulness? Law and Gospel rightly distinguished? Sacramental emphasis?)
- How might a tune enhance a hymn text? Can you think of any ways that a tune could get in the way of a hymn text?

Text

Klug based “Rise, Shine” on his favorite Epiphany passage. Read it in Is.60:1–5.

- Isaiah 60:1 says, “Your light has come.” What words in verse 2 make it obvious that the Lord is that light?
- What words does the hymn use in stanza 1 to describe the coming of Jesus as the light?
- Isaiah speaks of darkness covering the earth. What examples of darkness are mentioned in the hymn?
- Stanza 1 includes the words “by death and sin surrounded.” Do you think it means that Jesus is surrounded, that we are surrounded or both? Why might the answer matter?
- The words “arise” (Is. 60:1–2) and “rising” (v. 3) might make you think of a sunrise. When did the “Son-light” begin shining in this world? In your life?

The Hebrew word translated as “nations” in Is. 60:3 implies unbelievers. As Christ’s saving light shines into our lives, it reflects from us to unbelievers in the deeds we do and especially in the words we speak about Christ.

- What does Isaiah say will be the result when Christ’s light shines from us to the nations (vv. 3–5)?

Read Col. 2:9–15.

- What unusual words does the hymn use to say that “in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily” (v. 9)?
- How is Col. 2:15 reflected in the hymn? What does stanza 2 suggest is the result for us?

- Paul explains that your Baptism unites you with the crucified and resurrected Christ. Using the passage and the hymn, make a two-column list — “Before Christ” and “After Christ” — to illustrate what has changed for you because Jesus has entered your story.

Read stanza 3 of the hymn and Is. 11:10–12, where Christ is a banner, or signal, to whom people rally.

- When do you think of banners being unfurled? How might that help explain the meaning of the hymn?
- The banners may be military flags flying as the Church Militant (that’s us!) fights Satan. What does the hymn suggest that you hurl when the foes of darkness work against you? When might you do what the hymn suggests?

Read stanza 4 of the hymn and Rev. 21:1–6.

- What roles in your salvation does the hymn especially associate with each person of the Trinity?
- Echoing 2 Cor. 5:17, the hymn calls us a new creation. Name some ways this old creation has been ruined by our sin. That is, what things do you wish were not part of your life on earth?
- How does Rev. 21:1–6 say that the new creation is different from the old? As a person who is part of that new creation, what are you most looking forward to?

Making the Connection

- What has Christ’s saving work done to overcome the fears that keep you from shining and speaking the story of Christ?
- In what ways do Christ’s coming and the assurance that you are His new creation allow you to turn your attention not inward to yourself but outward to those who do not have salvation?
- When your light does not seem to be shining brightly, what passages of Scripture might especially encourage you? How can your Baptism and Christ’s body and blood help you?
- What parts of the hymn do you find most helpful in your faith life? Why?

In Closing

Walking at night in the dark can be scary, even for adults. Walking in a world filled with the darkness of sin can also cause fear — including the fear of talking about Christ. We get to tell the story of Jesus’ glory! But we worry about how people will respond. When that happens to you, remember the light of the Son is still shining on you. No matter how people respond, you are baptized! Christ has entered your human story. Your sin is forgiven. Your death will be reversed. You will live forever. Arise, shine, for Jesus your light has come! His light can reflect from you, because His light constantly shines on you!

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, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Mission Observance).

"Come, Follow Me," the Savior Spake

Lutheran Service Book 688 | study by Robert A. Sorensen

Introduction

The Christian church has no shortage of stories involving people who hear Jesus' call to follow Him and immediately leave their old lives in order to begin new lives of service to Him.

When Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John, they left their nets to become apostolic "fishers of men." When Jesus later called Matthew, he walked away from his tax booth and became one of the twelve apostles. After the resurrection, Saul the persecutor came face to face with the

risen Jesus on the Damascus road and likewise heeded His call. He would become Jesus' chief witness to the Gentiles.

- Do you know any people who have made a dramatic about-face in their lives for the sake of a newfound Christian faith?
- What circumstances led up to their turnaround, and what are the results of their commitment to Jesus?

Exploring the Scriptures

Both the Old Testament and Gospel lessons appointed for the Fifth Sunday after Trinity recount stories about the Lord calling men into holy service. After reading 1 Kings 19:11–21, consider these questions.

- What were Elijah's circumstances and state of mind at the time this story takes place? What is his attitude towards his vocation at the moment?
- Was Elisha enthusiastic or hesitant about being called to take Elijah's mantle and serve as Israel's next prophet?

In Luke 5:1–11, Jesus calls Peter to leave his boats and follow Him, so that he might become a "fisher of men." After rereading this passage, answer the following questions.

- Why does Peter express reluctance to remain in Jesus' presence? Does his reaction seem justified?

- Put yourself in Peter's place. How would you feel if someone asked you to abandon your present life and vocation in order to assume a new and unfamiliar one?

The Bible has similar stories about men exhibiting reluctance when called into the Lord's service. Read Ex. 3:1–12 and Jer. 1:4–10.

- How are these stories similar? Why are Moses and Jeremiah reluctant to drop everything and undertake a new calling?
- What does it say about human nature that even great heroes of the faith at first tried to elude the Lord's call into service? What does it say about the faith?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Johann Scheffler (1624–77), author of this hymn, "Come Follow Me, the Savior Spake," knew firsthand the consequences of abandoning an old way of life and adopting a new one for the sake of religious convictions. This is because both Scheffler and his father walked away from privileged circumstances in order to live according to their religious beliefs.

Scheffler's father was a Polish nobleman whose Lutheran convictions moved him to leave his Catholic homeland and relocate in the Protestant city of Breslau. One can only imagine the kinds of displacement that taking such a step would occasion.

- What kinds of things impel people to pull up roots and move to other places today?

- Are there some life changes that are simply not worth the trouble? What about Scheffler's father?

Scheffler was born and spent his early years in Breslau. By about the age of sixteen, he began to write poetry. He later studied at several universities and became a medical doctor.

Scheffler then served as personal physician to Duke Sylvius Nimrod of Württemberg-Oels. Scheffler never stopped writing verse, even while practicing medicine, and so eventually published some 205 hymns.

In 1653, Johann made a change just as dramatic as the move his father once made: he left the Lutheran church of his youth and became a Roman Catholic. In this regard, his conviction was so great that he later left his medical practice and became a priest in 1661. His final years were spent in a Jesuit monastery near his native Breslau.

- Do you personally know any people who have left faiths in which they were raised?
- How should a Christian react to a family member who converts to another Christian denomination? To a non-Christian religion? If you were Scheffler's family member, how would you react to his conversion to Catholicism?

Text

The words of this hymn text highlight the theme of leaving an old way of life in order to put into action one's faith convictions.

The first and second stanzas of this hymn both echo the famous words of Matthew 16. They include these words: "Deny yourselves, the world forsake, / Obey My call and guiding. / O bear the cross, whate'er betide." Review the very words Jesus spoke about discipleship in Matt. 16:21–28.

- Exactly what is Jesus demanding when He calls His followers to deny themselves and take up their crosses?
- What can we learn from Luke 9:57–62 and 14:25–33?

The third stanza of this hymn has Jesus say, "And gracious words My lips express." We typically refer to such gracious words as Gospel.

Making the Connection

Not every Christian experiences the call to follow and serve Jesus as dramatically as Peter once did. However, through our hearing of the Gospel and our Baptism into Christ, we too are called to follow Him, deny ourselves and take up our crosses.

In explaining the ongoing relevance of Baptism, the Small Catechism says that this Sacrament "indicates that the Old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be

- Where in this hymn does one find gracious and encouraging words? In other words, how does this hymn describe Jesus' saving actions on our behalf?
- Turning to Matt. 16:24–28, where does one find similar words of promise?

The fourth stanza puts these words on Jesus' lips: "I teach you how to shun and flee / What harms your soul's salvation."

- What sacrifices have you made in order to obey Jesus' call to discipleship? What particular temptations must you "shun and flee"?

The concluding stanza of this hymn exhorts the believer to follow Him who first died and then rose again. It concludes by assuring us that "those who bear the battle's strain / The crown of heav'nly life obtain."

- How and when do you "bear the battle's strain"?
- What do Eph. 6:10–18 and Rev. 3:10 have to say in this regard?

drowned and die with all sins and evil desires, and that a new man should daily emerge and arise to live before God in righteousness and purity forever" (*LSB*, p. 325).

- What, if any, is the difference between "daily contrition and repentance" and heeding Jesus' call to discipleship?
- What is the ongoing power behind Baptism, even if it was received many years prior?

In Closing

Jim Elliot, a well-known evangelical missionary and martyr, once said, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." That sentence puts into perspective Jesus' challenging call to come after Him, deny ourselves' and take up our cross. The Spirit, working through the Word and Sacrament, empowers us to follow and serve Jesus, even unto eternal life.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 688.

Prayer

O God, You have prepared for those who love you good things that surpass all understanding. Pour into our hearts such love toward You that we, loving You above all things, may obtain Your promises, which exceed all that we can desire; 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 Fifth Sunday after Trinity).

Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure

Lutheran Service Book 533 | study by Bruce E. Keseman

Introduction

As a group, try to think of a title for Jesus for each letter in the alphabet. For instance, for A, you might use “Atoning Sacrifice.” “Bread of Life” or “Branch of Jesse” would be examples for B. When you finish your list, go on to the next paragraph.

Amazingly, when Johann L. C. Allendorf (1693–1773) wrote “Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure,” he did just what you did, but in a hymn. He assigned each successive letter of the German alphabet to one stanza of the hymn. Then in each stanza, he included at least one title for Jesus

that began with the appropriate letter. For instance, his first stanza called Jesus “*A und O*” (Alpha and Omega), the second called Him “*Bürge*” (Security/Guarantor), and the third “*Krone*” (Crown). His stanza for W actually uses four different names for Christ: *Weg* (Way), *Wahrheit* (Truth), *Weisheit* (Wisdom) and *Weinstock* (Vine).

- Which is your favorite title for Jesus? Why?
- Which titles seem to describe best who Jesus is and what He does for you?

Exploring the Scriptures

Read today’s Old Testament Reading, Is. 66:10–14. God’s people are saddened when Isaiah prophesies that Jerusalem, their dear city, will be destroyed.

- Tell about an especially difficult event that you have experienced in your life.
- What does Isaiah invite the troubled people to do in verse 10? Why?

Now read today’s Gospel, Luke 10:1–20.

- What brings joy to the seventy-two in v. 17? What does Jesus suggest is even more joyous (vv. 18–20)?
- How does the fact that your name is written in heaven change the way you view the worst news in life?

As the hymn reminds us, the arrival of Jesus — by whatever title we may call Him! — gives us reason for *joy* at both the best and worst times of life.

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Ready for a little German? “Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure” originally included 23 stanzas with more than thirty alphabetized titles for Jesus!

Our English translation includes only four of those stanzas: for A (*A und O*, Alpha and Omega), for D (*Durchbrecher*, One Who Breaks Through), for E (*Erlöser*, Redeemer) and for K (*König der Ehren*, King of Glory). Even in Germany, they only sing a few of the stanzas today.

- If all 23 stanzas were translated into English, would you recommend including every stanza in the hymnal? Why or why not?
- What is lost by not including some stanzas? What are the benefits of including only the strongest stanzas?

Text

In German, the first line of the hymn is “*Jesus ist kommen, Grund ewiger Freude*,” that is, “Jesus has Come, the Foundation of Eternal Joy.” The translator, Oliver Rupprecht (1903–2000), lamented that sometimes English does not have words to express adequately the meaning

of the German text. In addition, translators struggle to maintain the meaning of the original while putting it into English poetry. For instance, Rupprecht might have preferred to use “joy” — a more literal translation — in the opening line instead of “pleasure.” However, doing so would have made it difficult to provide an accurate translation of the rest of the text, while keeping the correct meter and finding pleasing rhymes.

- Why might it be even more difficult to translate a hymn from another language than to write a new hymn in your own language?
- The word “pleasure” is intended to make you think about the confident joy that flows from knowing that “Jesus has come” to live, die, rise and redeem you. In what ways does that differ from the self-indulgent attitude involved in what our culture often calls “pleasure”?

For stanza 1, read Rev. 1:8, 21:5–6, and 22:12–13. Alpha and omega are the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet.

- What does “Alpha and omega” seem to imply about the person who bears that title?

- In Rev. 1:8 and 21:6, God the Father is called the Alpha and Omega. In Rev. 22:13, who calls Himself the Alpha and Omega? How might that show that Jesus is as eternal and divine as His Father?
- How are the two natures of Christ expressed in stanza 1?
- Why is it necessary for your salvation that Jesus be both God and human? For some insights, read the Small Catechism's explanation of the Second Article of the Creed (*LSB*, p. 322).

For stanza 2 and echoes in stanza 3, read Matt. 12:22–29, where the Pharisees claim that Jesus gets His power from Satan.

- How does Jesus show that their claim cannot be true?
- In verse 29, who (surprisingly!) is represented by the robber? By the strong man?
- Because “Jesus has come,” how has He “robbed” you from Satan? How is that wonderful “robbery” expressed in stanzas 2 and 3 of the hymn?

For stanza 3, read Is. 61:1–2, a prophecy that the Messiah will “proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound.”

- Where do you see this passage reflected in stanza 3?

Making the Connection

“Jesus Has Come and Brings Pleasure Eternal” expresses the joy that we have because Jesus has come into this world and into our lives. Read stanza 4.

- Why might it call this a “fast-fleeting hour”?
- How does God involve you in “capturing hearts with the heavenly story”?

In Closing

Every title used for Christ in the Bible and in this hymn, emphasizes some aspect of who He is or what He has done for us. Discuss the special emphasis in a few of the titles for Jesus that you listed at the beginning of this study.

If Jesus had never come, we would be condemned for our sins, secure in Satan's grasp and on our way to hell. But Jesus has come and brings pleasure eternal! He fills your life with joy — the joy of knowing that the Alpha and Omega who exists eternally has come for you; the joy of knowing that the one who breaks through has plundered Satan's house and set you free; the joy of knowing that death did not hold your Redeemer, so death cannot hold you; and the joy of knowing the King of glory shares with you His heavenly glory, so you can “Take the crown He has for you!” (st. 4).

- Consider the images of Jesus breaking into prison to set us free. How are we prisoners? How does Jesus break into our world? Into your life?

What a wonderful irony to call Jesus “the mighty Redeemer” (st. 3)! After all, it is through the weakness of the cross (1 Cor. 1:17–2:5) that our Lord powerfully crushes Satan (Gen. 3:15) and mightily redeems us, that is, buys us back, with His life as the price of redemption.

- Why was it necessary for Jesus to be “weak” in order to redeem you and end Satan's power to accuse you?
- What words in the hymn express Christ's power?

For stanza 4, read Ps. 24:7–10. Some scholars believe this psalm was sung when the ark of the covenant returned to the temple (2 Samuel 6). Since God promised to be where His ark was, its coming brought joy. The people could have sung, “The ark has come and brings pleasure eternal.” Instead, they express joy over the coming of the “the King of all glory.”

- The arrival of the ark, and therefore the arrival of the King of glory, took place about a thousand years before Jesus' birth. How then, by calling Jesus the “King of glory,” can the hymn imply that Jesus was there when the ark entered the temple?
- How is the King of glory described in Psalm 24? In what ways does Jesus fulfill this description?

- List some specific things we Christians can do to “ponder His love” (as st. 4 invites us to do).
- In what ways does the entire hymn suggest that our lives have changed because “Jesus has come”?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 533.

Prayer

Almighty God, You have built Your Church on the foundation of the apostles and prophets with Christ Jesus Himself as the cornerstone. Continue to send Your messengers to preserve Your people in true peace that, by the preaching of Your Word, Your Church may be kept free from all harm and danger; 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 Proper 9C).

Where Charity and Love Prevail

Lutheran Service Book 845 | study by Gifford A. Grobien

Introduction

The apostle John is sometimes known as the “Apostle of Love,” because love is one of the major themes in his Gospel and epistles. He is also called “the disciple whom Jesus loved” (John 21:20). As a recipient of Jesus’ love, he certainly would know how to speak about love! In fact, John has much to say about love, especially about how Christian love differs from human love that anyone can feel and express.

- What is Christian love? Do you think it is different from love that all people feel?

Sometimes Lutherans can have difficulty talking about works of love, because we don’t want to blur our teaching on the Gospel of the free forgiveness of sins. This desire to defend the pure Gospel is good.

- How do we speak of love without confusing the Gospel? How is this done in your congregation in preaching and various activities?

Exploring the Scriptures

1 John 4:7–21 elaborately describes the relationship between God’s love for us, Jesus’ death and resurrection for the forgiveness of our sins and our own love in response. Look at verses 7–11.

- Who or what is the source of love? In order truly to love, what must happen to a person? On the other hand, what is evident about someone who does not love? What is his relationship to God?
- How is love made most apparent and clear in the world? What does John say the Son of God became on account of our sin?

In speaking of Christ, the word “propitiation” should be understood as “a sacrifice that appeases God’s righteous wrath on account of sin.” God’s love is not a mere feeling, but He *acts* in love by sending His Son as a sacrifice to save us.

- With godly love expressed in such a deep, concrete way, how are we to respond to God’s love?

Now continue with verses 12–18.

- Who has seen God? How does God make Himself known to us?
- How do God’s Spirit and love relate to each other?
- What do we do in response to receiving God’s Spirit (vv. 14–15)? From this, can we connect the dots between God’s love, the Holy Spirit, brotherly love and confession/testifying of Jesus?

With these connections in mind, look at the final three verses of this passage.

- What practical example of lack of love does John give?
- John reiterates the relationship between God’s love and our own love. What new emphases do you see in these verses? What importance does John give to what is visible in relation to what is invisible?

John has given us an understanding of love that flows from God’s love in the concrete act of Jesus’ death for us. Consequently, our own love will manifest itself concretely in worship of God and service to others.

Exploring the Hymn

Background

In the Middle Ages, “Where Charity and Love Prevail” was traditionally sung as the final hymn on Maundy Thursday, in conjunction with a ceremony of foot-washing. This practice is based on Jesus’ washing of the disciples’ feet at the Last Supper, recorded in John 13:1–17. Lutheran congregations typically emphasize the institution of the Lord’s Supper on this day, and often do not include a ceremony of foot-washing.

- Based on what we read in 1 John about God’s concrete act of love being the giving of His Son for the forgiveness of our sins, why do you think the institution of the Lord’s Supper is emphasized? How should we understand Holy Communion as an act of God’s love related specifically to Christ’s sacrifice?
- Granted the centrality of the Lord’s Supper for Maundy Thursday, how would the practice of a foot-washing

ceremony adorn or detract from the remembrance of the institution of the Lord's Supper?

Text

Notice how the hymn brings out the relationship of God's love to the Holy Spirit and to our love for one another, the relationship we notice in our study of 1 John 4. Stanza 1 says, "Brought here together by Christ's love / By love are we thus bound." Stanzas 2 and 3 describe the charity we learn as those loved by God.

- According to stanzas 2 and 3, what are the ways we express the charity we learn from God?
- The first half of stanza 3 mentions forgiveness. How is forgiveness an expression of the link between God's love and our mutual love? How does forgiveness serve as a basis for other loving acts?

Read the account of the foot-washing in John 13:1-17. John says that Jesus washed the disciples' feet when He "knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world, ... having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end" (v. 1).

- To what event does "his hour" refer? (For more insight, see John 12:23-33.) What is the act of love that demonstrates that "he loved them to the end"?

By referring to Christ's crucifixion as "his hour," and that Christ loves His disciples to the very end, John again connects the love of God to Christ's sacrifice for sin. Continue through the story and focus on the last few verses, 12-17.

- What reason does Jesus give for washing the disciples' feet? Besides the humble and loving character shown by literally washing feet, what kind of position or attitude does washing feet suggest (v. 16)?

Christian love is distinctive by its servant attitude. It is not self-seeking, but forgives and attends to others' needs. This kind of love can only be given by the Holy Spirit; but it is a rich, soothing love that truly binds Christians together. When this Christian love is manifest in the Church, we know that "God abides in us" (1 John 4:12).

Finally, remember that we saw the relationship between God's love, the Holy Spirit, God's presence and our love explained in 1 John 4, and we saw how one aspect of God's abiding in us is our confession of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:14-15). Read the final two stanzas of the hymn.

- How does the hymn describe in stanzas 5 and 6 the notions of God abiding with us and of us confessing His name?
- Who is included in the love of God the Father and on what basis (st. 6)?

Making the Connection

- What are some ways you as an individual should strive to demonstrate true Christian love to others? Try to be specific regarding current experiences or struggles in your own life. What should you do to develop a true servant's attitude of brotherly love? Be specific about your own temptations to resist, sins to confess and discipline to practice.
- How can your congregation encourage and develop these things among the members? Are there certain people who may feel marginalized in the congregation? What can you do to extend and improve that brotherly love of God to them?

In Closing

Recall the continuous connection to the Lord's Supper that we have made. Love begins with God the Father and the sacrifice of His Son for our forgiveness. Only from His forgiveness and mercy do we receive the strength to grow and abide in love.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB 845*.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, in Your deep compassion You rescue us from whatever may hurt us. Teach us to love You above all things and to love our neighbors as ourselves; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 10C).

One Thing's Needful

Lutheran Service Book 536 | study by Tim Pauls

Introduction

One thing. Just one thing. In a lot of cases, it's hard to narrow it down that much. Here are a few examples. Some might be easy to answer and some might not:

- If you could change one thing about your life, what would it be?
- If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?
- If you could change one thing about your past, what would you change?
- If you could take one book to read on a deserted island, what would it be?
- If you could pack one thing for a trip, what would you take with you?
- If you could only have one food, what would it be?

Exploring the Scriptures

The hymn gets its title from the Gospel lesson for this Sunday. Before you read it, picture this ordinary scene: some guests are coming over for dinner, so a mother instructs her two children to clean up their toys from the living room beforehand. A few minutes later, it's obvious that one child is doing all the work, while the other child is goofing off.

- In this all-too-common-for-parents scenario, what should the mother do?

Now, read Luke 10:38–42, the Gospel lesson for this Sunday.

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Johann Heinrich Schröder (1667–99) is the author of the hymn (it is worth noting his death at the young age of 31). Schröder became a pastor in Möseburg, Germany, in 1696, and soon married Tranquilla Sophia Wolf. Less than a year later, Tranquilla died in childbirth. The child survived, but Johann himself died in 1699, leaving the toddler an orphan. This hymn, along with a handful of others, would be one of the few ways the child would ever know his parents.

- What sort of legacy would you like to leave for future generations?

- If you had to pick a favorite Bible verse, what would you pick?
- If you only had a chance to say one more thing, what would you say?

What makes the decisions difficult? Sometimes it's because we are so accustomed to variety that it is difficult to settle on a single choice. Or sometimes there are so many things we'd like to change that it's hard to pick just one. In some cases, we might be seriously concerned that our one choice is the wrong one.

The hymn for our consideration gives us some wonderful news: when it comes to salvation, the Lord leaves little room for confusion. For eternal life, there is only one thing needful.

- When Jesus comes to their home for dinner, what do Mary and Martha do?
- While one might expect criticism of Mary for failure to help her sister, how is Martha described in verse 40?
- Read Luke 9:12–17 and Luke 11:3. Why might Martha's concern about dinner preparations be especially unnecessary?
- Jesus does not say that Martha is wrong, only that what she is doing has made her anxious and troubled. What has Mary chosen? What is the "one thing needful" (v. 42)?

- If you could leave one last message for your descendants, what would it be?
- What sort of message and comfort would Schröder's child find in the text of this hymn?
- Considering Schröder as a brother in Christ, what comfort do you derive from this hymn by one who has gone before you?

Text

The first two stanzas of the hymn recall the scene of Jesus in the home of Mary and Martha.

- Which phrases describe Mary and which describe Martha? Which describe you?
- Stanza 2 makes clear that this story is not about Mary's devotion to Jesus. Rather, what was she receiving — and how? See also Luke 10:39.
- What did Mary forget in stanza 2? How might this instruct us about worship, as well as other opportunities we have to hear the Word?
- We certainly do not want to imply that good works are unnecessary, and do well to heed James' warning that "faith apart from works is dead" (James 2:26).
- But what is the relationship between faith and works? To put it another way, this hymn is about what is needful for *salvation*: for what are works necessary?

Stanza 3 says that "wisdom's highest, noblest treasure" is revealed in Jesus.

- What are some other words in the stanza to describe this wisdom?
- We normally think of wisdom as intellectual enlightenment. We might even think of wisdom as something that the world will readily recognize. What is wisdom according to Prov. 9:10?
- Read 1 Cor.1:22–24. What is the wisdom of God in verse 23?

Making the Connection

This hymn, along with the Gospel lesson from which it is derived, has great value and comfort for Christians throughout their pilgrimage on earth. It reminds us that salvation is by grace alone — the forgiveness won by Christ on the cross.

- Read Mark 8:34–37. What is the ultimate temptation and danger of trusting our works?
- Read Rom. 8:38–39. What is the ultimate comfort that we are saved by Christ alone?

There is also a valuable lesson about worship. Too often, Christians are tempted to think of worship primarily as a

Stanza 4 gives us a wonderful confession of the Gospel.

- In Luke 10:38–42, does Mary give Jesus anything in exchange for His teaching? What does this teach us? Read Eph. 2:8–9.
 - What is the significance of Jesus' "crimson-colored blood"? Read Heb. 9:14 and 1 John 1:7.
 - What is the significance of "salvation's white raiments"? Read Rev. 7:13–15 and Job 29:14.
- Stanza 5 prays that the Lord would "root out all hypocrisy," along with a prayer that He would keep us in His grace.
- Whom did Jesus accuse of hypocrisy in Mark 7:5–9?
 - What is the danger of hypocrisy?
 - How does the Lord guard and uphold us throughout life's pilgrimage?
 - Jesus is the one thing *needful*, but there are other adjectives that fit as well. What does the psalmist say about the Lord in Ps. 73:25? What adjective would you use to describe this?
 - How does Paul compare the one thing needful to everything else in Phil. 3:7–8? How does this challenge us in our stewardship of the many things God has given us?

venue where we demonstrate our love for God by works of praise, song, etc. This hymn, however, puts the focus back on Christ. So does Luke 10:38–42.

- Luke 11:27–28 give us a similar situation. Someone declares that Jesus' mother is to be blessed because it is she who did the work of nursing Him as an infant. How does Jesus respond?
- At the home of Mary and Martha, when Jesus was present, the visit began with teaching that was followed by dinner. How is this reflected in Lutheran worship today?

In Closing

Living in this sinful world, there will be many things you wish you had, wish you could take back or wish you could have done instead. Sin introduces all sorts of regrets and uncertainties. But when it comes to salvation, you have the one thing needful: Christ, who has made you His own.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 536.

Prayer

O Lord, grant us the Spirit to hear Your Word and know the one thing needful that by Your Word and Spirit we may live according to Your will; 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 Proper 11C).

Our Father, Who from Heaven Above

Lutheran Service Book 766 | study by Bruce E. Keseman

Introduction

Dad walks into the house at the end of the day. His daughter runs across the room, jumps into her father's lap and exclaims, "Daddy, Daddy, listen to what happened to me today! Oh, but first would you help me, Daddy, 'cause I can't ride my bike by myself. I need you. And Daddy, I heard that a bad man attacked a little girl yesterday, so I'm scared. But I'm not scared when you're with me. Thank you for being here for me."

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Luke 11:1–4, part of today's Gospel.

- What request do the disciples make that leads Jesus to teach them — and us — the Lord's Prayer?
- What differences are there between the words here and the words of the Lord's Prayer that you learned? Are any of the differences significant?

Now read Luke 11:5–11. Jesus' story isn't teaching us to pester God until He gives us what we want. Instead, His point is that if an ordinary man will give even to an "impudent" begging neighbor, how much more is our loving Father willing to give to us, His dear children, everything that we need. So, ask away!

- How might the promise in verses 9–10 affect how you pray?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote "Our Father, Who from Heaven Above" to help us understand the Lord's Prayer. He also wrote hymns to teach other parts of the catechism: the Commandments (*LSB* 581), the Creed (*LSB* 954), Baptism (*LSB* 406) and the Sacrament of the Altar (*LSB* 617).

Stanzas 2–8 of "Our Father" each explain the meaning of a different petition of the Lord's Prayer. So, singing this hymn is like singing the catechism! Luther and the reformers often used hymns to help plant the truths of Scripture into the hearts of the people.

- Educators say that we retain information that we sing better than information we speak. Why do you think that might be? How do you think that should affect the way we teach young Christians?

From the Small Catechism, read the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer and its meaning (*LSB*, p. 323).

- How does the story above help you understand what prayer is? In what ways might the story be inadequate to explain fully the privilege of prayer?
- What is your earliest memory of praying the Lord's Prayer? Who taught you to pray it?

Finish reading today's Gospel, Luke 11:11–13.

- Do even not-so-wise parents *try* to do what is bad for their children? Then what does Jesus' story teach us?
- What does Jesus call us in verse 13? Why? For what might that truth lead you to pray?
- Our Father not only *wants* what is best for His children, but, unlike the rest of us parents, He also *knows* what is best for His children and always *does* what is best for us. How might that certainty affect the way you pray?
- Why might Jesus particularly teach us to ask God for the Holy Spirit in verse 13? The catechism's explanation of the Third Article of the Apostles' Creed (*LSB*, p. 323) may provide some hints.

- Most of us agree that it is important for sermons to be doctrinally pure. Since we retain what we hear sung longer than we retain what we hear spoken, is it even more important for what we sing in worship — and for what our children sing in Sunday school — to teach nothing but the truth? Explain your answer.

Text

In your *LSB*, place ribbons at page 323 (the Lord's Prayer section of the catechism) and hymn 766, so that you can turn back and forth. Then read the Introduction to the Lord's Prayer and stanza 1 of the hymn. Notice that the catechism emphasizes that God is our *Father*, while the hymn emphasizes that He is *our* Father, that is, it focuses on our unity as one family.

- In what ways are each of those emphases important?

- How might each of those emphases influence your prayers?

Read Rom. 8:14–17. It says the Holy Spirit teaches us that we are God’s children and heirs.

- How does your Baptism make it possible for you to call God “Abba,” that is, “Daddy”? What does He give you as an inheritance?
- How might understanding God as “Daddy” alter the way we pray?

Now read the meaning of the First and Second Petitions and stanzas 2–3 of the hymn.

- Can we make God’s name holy? What are some ways you can treat His name as holy?
- What connection is there between the First Petition and the Second Commandment (*LSB*, p. 321)?
- What is God’s kingdom?
- How are you made a citizen of God’s kingdom? Look at Luke 12:32 and Rom. 10:17.
- What is God’s will for you and all people? See 1 Tim. 2:3–6. How does God accomplish His will in our lives?

Read stanza 5 and the Fourth Petition, where Jesus teaches us to ask God to supply our earthly needs.

- Look at everything the catechism and hymn call “daily bread.” How might you be prevented from eating a slice of bread if God didn’t provide all those gifts? Consider everything necessary to permit a farmer’s grain of wheat to grow and then be harvested, milled, processed, baked, distributed and bought so that you can eat that bread.

Making the Connection

The Lord’s Prayer is a model prayer, that is, Jesus uses it to teach us to pray (Luke 11:1–4). So, for each petition of the Lord’s Prayer, write at least three things for which the petition prompts you to pray. For instance, “Our Father” might cause you to thank God for your Baptism, “Thy kingdom

- In what ways can you express your thanks to God for supplying your daily bread?

Now read stanzas 6–7 and the Fifth and Sixth Petitions.

- What would happen to our prayers if Christ had not given His life for the forgiveness of our sins?
- What does the Fifth Petition teach us to do when it is difficult for us to forgive someone?
- Why do we need to pray, “Lead us not into temptation”? What are we asking God to do?
- How does our Lord rescue us when we are tempted? (For examples, see 1 Cor. 10:13 and Eph. 6:13–20.)

Read the Seventh Petition and stanza 8 of the hymn.

- In what way can this petition be called a summary of the entire Lord’s Prayer?
- Why might Luther teach us that “a blessed end” is the ultimate way God delivers us from evil? How does 2 Tim. 4:18, which was probably written by Paul from the equivalent of death row, assure you as you pray and as you live?

Finally, read stanza 9 and the Conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer.

- What does “amen” mean?
- How are Jesus’ death and resurrection essential for you to be able to say “amen” with confidence?
- How can you be sure that your prayers are pleasing to God and that He will answer them?

come” could lead you to ask that God protect missionaries as they speak Christ’s kingdom-expanding Gospel, and “lead us not into temptation” might prompt you to ask for help with a specific temptation in your life.

In Closing

Look back at the story of the father and daughter at the beginning of this study. In order to better teach what prayer is, how might you change the story? How could the story better show how important Jesus’ death and resurrection are to your prayers?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 766.

Prayer

O Lord, let Your merciful ears be attentive to the prayers of Your servants, and by Your Word and Spirit teach us how to pray that our petitions may be pleasing before You; 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 Proper 12C).

Gracious God, You Send Great Blessings

Lutheran Service Book 782 | study by Charles Gustafson

Introduction

A little boy was at a local pizza shop in Queens, New York. He was there with his family awaiting a pizza the father had ordered. The lad noticed a homeless person with no food sitting on a bench outside the shop. He asked his father if he could take his slice of pizza and give it to the unknown person. “What a son that man has!” spoke a lady sitting at the counter. “I’ll bet he’s just like his dad,” replied another.

Today’s hymn focuses upon the blessings God grants to us and how we are to respond to them with the result that God’s name is glorified.

- Make a list of the gifts God has given to you this past year. In what ways have you shared them with other people?
- When you share what God has given you, do you share for the sake of bringing glory to God, or does that simply happen because of the act?

Exploring the Scriptures

Stewardship is sometimes understood to be a code word for the development of better giving habits within a church. This hymn is found in the Stewardship section of the hymnal, but rather than reflecting the motive for increased giving, its theme is the proper management of everything God has first given us.

- Look up 1 John 3:16–18. In what way did God show His love toward humanity? How does that way become motivation for us to show our love? What are some of the tangible ways that we can express godlike love to others?
- How do the ways mentioned above “bear the imprint of [God’s] grace” (st. 4)?

Sometimes congregations and individuals within the church can be accused of hoarding the blessings God has given to them. This happens at times in the forms of large bank accounts or even in endowment funds that go

unused. The Gospel for today, Luke 12:13–21, reminds us about our propensity toward hoarding, and the Old Testament lesson, Eccl. 2:18–26, reminds us of the vanity of our toil if we do not use, in accordance with God’s will, what it is we have reaped.

- How does the refrain of the hymn become a prayer for us to be better stewards?
- In light of the Gospel lesson for today, what do the words “As we tend that endless treasure / May our care encircle all” (st. 2) mean to you?

The Bible passage 1 Peter 4:10–11 serves as a core text for this hymn. According to this text:

- Is stewardship only about the sharing of *material* blessings?
- Is the point of stewardship the simple sharing of gifts, or is it something else?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Dr. Gregory Wismar (b. 1946) is an ordained minister in Connecticut who became chairman of the LCMS Commission on Worship in 2004. It was observed in the process of setting the hymn corpus of *Lutheran Service Book* that no entirely new texts were included in the Stewardship section. In order to respond to this concern, Dr. Wismar agreed to develop a text that would reflect the stewardship of creation as well as the traditional themes of stewardship of time and treasures.

- What does stewardship of creation mean to you? Why is it important?

The twenty-first century is being shaped by humanity’s concern over the earth’s ecology. Entire societies and individuals are urged to “go green.”

- How does this hymn support the concern about the environment and the preservation of the blessings God has granted through nature?

Upon review by the Hymnal Subcommittee, the final line of the hymn was changed from “Praise be Yours through time and space” to “Praise be Yours in ev’ry place.”

- How might our caring for God’s gifts bring praise to God in every place?

- How might our lack of concern for the same dishonor the gift as well as the giver?

Text

The words of the hymn remind us that all things come from a merciful and loving God. The first stanza recalls Lam. 3:22–23, “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning.”

- How aware are you of the mercies of God given to you each day? Can you enumerate them?

In the meaning to the First Article of the Apostles’ Creed, Luther speaks to the gracious nature of almighty God, who gives good things to humanity, when he writes, “He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. ... All this He does only out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy” (*LSB*, p. 322). The hymn’s second stanza reminds us that this has been God’s nature since creation.

- Why does God the Father give humanity “great blessings”? Are they given solely so that we can be blessed? Are they given so that we can show God’s mercy to others by using them to be a blessing to others? Are they given because God’s nature is to be benevolent?

Making the Connection

This hymn seems to diagram stages of stewardship. There are basically three stages to consider.

- In the hymn, what do you think stage one of stewardship is (st. 1)? Who are we to recognize in this stage and what is He to be recognized for?

Stanza 2 reinforces the point of stage one, stating, “By your Word You formed creation,” yet the second part of the stanza conveys even more, a stage two of stewardship.

In Closing

Sing the doxology, “Praise God, from Whom All Blessings Flow,” (*LSB* 805), which reflects the theme of the hymn studied, acknowledging that all comes from God and that the proper stewardship of His gifts is praise to the one from whom all blessings flow.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 782.

Jesus, God’s Son, our Brother and Lord, is like us in every way; He is fully human. During His ministry He suffered the needs experienced by all people. Stanza 3 of the hymn picks up on the fact that many people cared for Jesus. Luke 8:1–3 notes the fact that caring women provided for the needs of Jesus and His disciples. Mary, Martha and Lazarus provided a place for Jesus to stay (John 12:1–3), and Simon the leper offered hospitality as well (Mark 14:3). In Matt. 25:40 we are reminded that helping those in need is helping Christ indeed.

- How can assisting those in need by using the blessings God has given you be considered an expression of devotion to Jesus the Savior?
- Does your church have any special ministries to those in need inside the congregation and beyond the congregation? Discuss the needs and make possible additions to the list.

The final stanza serves as a doxological stanza, praising the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The context is not that of formal worship but of everyday caring for God’s creation and all of humanity.

- Do you think that the works of social ministry can be considered forms of worship?

- What is stage two of stewardship?

Stanza 3 explains that through proper stewardship the needs of others are met.

- Does stage three end in the serving of other people, or does that serving offer “love that never ends”?

Prayer

O Lord, grant us wisdom to recognize the treasures You have stored up for us in heaven, that we may never despair but always rejoice and be thankful for the riches of Your grace; 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 Proper 13C).

O Little Flock, Fear Not the Foe

Lutheran Service Book 666 | study by Larry A. Peters

Introduction

Buildings skip the thirteenth floor and some states skip “666” in their license plate numbers. We have all sorts of fears and superstitions. Maybe some were surprised that a hymnal would include a hymn numbered 666 — the familiar number of the beast from Rev. 13:18. Even saying the number can send shivers up our spines. The hymn chosen for this place in the hymnal directly confronts these fears with the power, presence and promises of God.

Though it is tempting to dismiss fear, our Lord never dismisses the enemies of His people but openly acknowledges them and their power. Our comfort comes not from being

told we have no enemies or that faith and life are easy, but rather from the promise, presence and power of Christ for us, with us and in us.

- Is the devil real? We live in a modern world. Are we tempted to deny the reality of evil and its power?
- How do we know the devil is real and powerful?
- How have perceptions of the devil and his power changed over time? Are the images we have of the devil and his power shaped by the truth of God’s Word or the imaginations of authors and screenwriters?

Exploring the Scriptures

The Lessons for today confront us with things to fear: our futures (Gen. 15:1–6), the world and our responsibilities to and in it (Heb. 11:1–16), this life and all the needs we have in it (Luke 12:22–40) and our faith tested, tried, tempted and assaulted. In the midst of so much that might cause us to fear, God promises to be our shield, reward, future, guard, guide and supply. He has sent His own Son to do battle in our place and for us. He calls us to surrender our fears, trust in His mercy, depend upon His wisdom and put our faith in His good and gracious will — no matter what our eyes see around us!

In Genesis 15, Abraham admits his fears and laments how hopeless his situation appears.

- Have you ever felt like Abraham and Sarah?
- Have you ever been tempted to give up because the future seemed impossible?
- Abraham laid out his fears before the Lord and His promises. How did the story turn out?
- Abraham’s faith was credited him as righteousness. Does faith still commend us before the Lord? In the face of so many and great enemies, is faith enough?

Hebrews 11:1 is the classic definition of faith, “the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.” In faith we struggle to trust in what we cannot see in the face of what we do see. The saints are remembered for their trust (faith). Many of them died without ever having seen with their eyes what they hoped for in their hearts.

- Do you struggle with the seeming contradiction between God’s promises and what you see around you?
- Our enemies shout while God is quiet and hidden. How do we respond to our loud enemies?

“Fear not” says Jesus (Luke 12:32). How easy fear is! We have needs, responsibilities and burdens. We live in a world too unfriendly to us and faith — one in which the evil prosper and the good suffer. We know that evil is real. Faith struggles to know God is real. That He knows our needs. Our problem is not with a weak or unwilling God but with the call to trust and endure.

- Do you believe this? Is faith enough? Is Christ enough?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

It is not certain who wrote our hymn. It has been attributed to Gustavus Adolphus, King of Sweden (1594–1632), his court preacher, Jacob Fabricius (1593–1664) and Pastor Johann Altenburg (1584–1640). *Lutheran Service Book* credits Jacob Fabricius as did *Lutheran Worship*. *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941) credits Pastor Altenburg. It is

generally thought that Gustavus Adolphus provided the inspiration for this hymn.

What we do know is the circumstance that thrust this text to the forefront of history. It was a time of despair and conflict. In the Thirty Years’ War, the battle of Lützen was the turning point. Gustavus Adolphus came with forces to strengthen the Lutherans. Before battle on Nov. 6, 1632,

the king sang this hymn and “A Mighty Fortress.” In the end, the Lutheran side prevailed but the victorious king was killed in battle. So it was called “The King’s swansong.”

- How well do these words work as a “fight song”?
- Gustavus Adolphus died valiantly in battle. Was he still victorious? Was he triumphant by faith?
- Many hymns from this period are in our hymnal. Do we face fears and challenges in our own age? Do we need battle hymns of the faith to sing today?

Text

The reality of the devil and enemies that threaten our present and eternal life is a somber subject. When this hymn was published in the Leipzig hymnbook of 1638, it was described as “A soul-rejoicing hymn of consolation upon the watchword — God with us.” Read the stanzas of this hymn.

- Do they bear out this claim?
- Do they cause us to rejoice? Do they console us with God’s presence and power?
- Read Jesus’ words in Luke 12:32 and read stanza 1 again.
- Faith’s challenge is always the same: Can we trust the Lord? Can we sing these words with confidence?
- Where do we look for the guarantee of our victory?
- What has limited Satan to this “little hour”?
- Read 2 Tim. 4:18. Can we ever have certainty?

Making the Connection

Christians do face loneliness and fear. We are tempted by quick and easy victories and a comfortable earthly life. Jesus warns us about the fight, about the enemies and about the struggle ahead of us (Matt. 5:1–11). Yet here we sing, “God is with us and we with God” (st. 3).

In Closing

In the Our Father we pray, “Deliver us from evil [literally, the evil one].” This prayer addresses our enemies but specifically the devil. We have a real and powerful Savior who fought once on Calvary and won and who still fights for us every day. When it seems the wicked prosper, the kingdom of God is in retreat and the devil is winning, we look to the cross. There our fears are met with His all-availing sacrificial death. There we learn to say, first haltingly, then confidently, “Christ is enough.”

“Vengeance is mine” says the Lord (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30). We often presume we must respond appropriately and proportionately to threats. God says He will avenge the wrongs done to us. Read stanza 2.

- Can we trust God to do this? Can we await Him and His timing to answer our desire for vindication?
- What if we never get to see the wrongs done to us avenged or evil punished? Is God’s promise enough?

Jesus promises that the gates of hell shall not prevail against His Church (Matt. 16:18). The hymn describes the assaults of Satan as a joke (st. 3).

- In what way are they a joke? Do they feel like a joke?
- On whom does our victory rest?

War imagery is ancient in Scripture and Christianity, but we live in an age in which such militancy is out of step with the times. The words to the hymn paraphrase the actual words of Gustavus Adolphus: “Jesus, Jesus, help me fight today for the honor of Your holy name.” St. Paul says we fight the good fight of faith (1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 4:7). Read stanza 4.

- Who is our captain? Who fights for us?
- Who has obtained the eternal victory for us?
- Who will raise the saints and martyrs from the dust of the earth to eternal life?
- Do we stand with them in the fight and in the faith?

- Is there a sense in which we sing this both to convince ourselves this is enough and to confess what God has promised?
- Our enemies are strong. Is Christ stronger?
- Has the outcome already been determined? Is the fight still in question or is the victory sealed?
- How do we know this?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 666.

Prayer

Almighty and merciful God, it is by Your grace that we live as Your people who offer acceptable service. Grant that we may walk by faith, and not by sight, in the way that leads to eternal life; 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 Proper 14C).

Lord, Keep Us Steadfast in Your Word

Lutheran Service Book 655 | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

Introduction

Read the Sixth Petition of the Lord's Prayer and its meaning from the Small Catechism (*LSB*, p. 324).

- Name some concrete examples of how “the devil, the world, and our sinful nature” attack a person of faith.

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Jer. 23:16–29.

- In verses 16–17, why does the Lord warn the people not to listen to false prophets?
- What is the great danger of listening to false prophets (v. 27)? Where can such forgetting lead?
- What do verses 19–20 suggest? Is there a connection between these verses and the people listening to the false prophets?

Read Heb. 11:17–12:3.

- What is the author's point?
- “By faith” is a recurring phrase throughout the list of the great works of God's people of old. How do these two words qualify and refine these great works?
- Like St. Paul, the author of Hebrews begins chapter 12 with “therefore” in order to draw a conclusion. What is his conclusion?
- How are joy, shame and endurance (v. 2) held together in Jesus?

- What does it mean to “overcome them and win the victory”? Do they no longer touch a person of faith?

Read Luke 12:49–56.

- How would you harmonize Jesus' words in verse 51, “Do you think that I have come to give peace on earth? No, I tell you, but rather division,” with the song of the angels at His birth, “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace” (Luke 2:14)?
- List some ways that the person and work of Jesus can be divisive today. Must these be divisive? Why or why not?
- In verse 50 Jesus refers to a coming “baptism.” Since He was already baptized in the Jordan by John, what is He speaking about here?
- Why might He have more distress waiting for that “baptism” than undergoing that “baptism”?
- How does Jesus' “baptism” bring together both the divisiveness and the peace inherent in His coming?
- In what ways might that “baptism” be the best sign for our times today (v. 56)?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

In the first part of the sixteenth century, not only was the young Lutheran church dealing with the conflicts of the Reformation, but the Ottoman Empire was also making inroads onto the European continent. 1521 marked Luther's confrontation with the Holy Roman Empire at Worms, Germany. In 1530, the Lutherans presented their confession to the Empire and to the Roman Catholic Church at Augsburg. Near the same time, Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent was leading the armies of the Ottoman Empire into the Kingdom of Hungary in 1526, attacking Hapsburg Vienna in 1529 and 1532, invading Moldavia in 1538 and taking the twin Hungarian cities of Buda and Pest in 1541.

Luther included this joint threat in his hymn of 1541/1542. The opening stanza originally listed both

enemies of the Gospel: “Lord, keep us in Thy Word and work, / Restrain the murderous Pope and Turk, / Who fain would tear from off Thy throne / Christ Jesus, Thy beloved Son.” In time, these particular enemies became the more general enemies of Christ's Church, as shown in stanza 1.

- Who or what could be named today as enemies of Christ and His Church?
- Did you include yourself? Why or why not?

Luther viewed these threats as the harsh “rod” or discipline of God, justly deserved by sinners (see AE 43:232).

- How can the severe trials of life be God's discipline? Is discipline the same as punishment? Explain.

- Where does a person of faith find hope under the harsh “rod” of God? How does such hope sustain a person of faith in the midst of troubles?

Text

The three stanzas of this hymn form a trinitarian prayer. In stanza 1, we implore God the Father to “keep” and to “curb.”

- Read Ps. 119:5–10. What keeps the psalmist steadfast (v. 5)? On what does he fix his eyes (v. 6)? What makes his heart upright (v. 7)?
- Is this merely a matter of obedience to God’s Law? What does verse 9 add to your answer?
- Read 2 John 9. What does it mean to “abide in the teaching of Christ”? What does it mean to “not abide” in that teaching?
- As he does in his first epistle, St. John writes of a fellowship in this “abiding.” With whom? In what ways does this make “the teaching of Christ” also a “confessing of Christ” in faith?
- These verses seem to address only the prayer of “keeping us steadfast.” In what ways do these verses from Psalm 119 and 2 John also speak to our prayer for God’s “curbing” work in this stanza?

Stanza 2 implores the defending work of Jesus, the Son. Read John 8:31. Jesus speaks about abiding.

- Is He using the word “abide” in the same way St. John does in his second epistle above? Different?
- Read Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer” in John 17. How do His words expand our understanding of abiding?
- In verses 14–15, Jesus speaks of a consequence of our abiding with Him. What is it? How does such hatred come about?
- In verse 14, Jesus’ prayer is similar to our prayer in this hymn. Verses 17–19 tell us how God answers this prayer. How are we sanctified/consecrated by abiding with Christ in God’s Word?

Stanza 3 draws the first two stanzas into a petition to the Holy Spirit.

- Read Eph. 4:1–6. Abiding with Christ becomes “walking” in that calling. How are these two expressions the same? What are the hallmarks of such walking (vv. 2–3)? Are such things the result of our walking or of the calling in which we walk? Explain.
- Stanza 3 implores the Spirit, “Send peace and unity on earth.” In what ways do the words of Ephesians 4 address the subject of peace?
- Who is the common element inhabiting and making possible the unity expressed in verses 4–6?
- See also Rom. 5:3–5. How does our abiding (God with us, us with God, by His Spirit) yield the sequence of suffering, endurance, character and hope?

Making the Connection

Luther wrote, “Jesus Christ, God’s Son, has by his most holy touch consecrated and hallowed all sufferings, even death itself, has blessed the curse, and has glorified shame and enriched poverty so that death is now a door to life, the curse a fount of blessing, and shame the mother of

glory” (AE 42:141). Luther’s hymn is less about escape from troubles than it is a cry for faithful endurance in the midst of troubles. What difference does this make for us in living as Christians?

- Where, then, does our hope lie in the midst of troubles?

In Closing

When we are tempted to discern God’s inscrutable will in the suffering of this world, the Small Catechism reminds us: “God’s will is done when He breaks and hinders every evil plan and purpose of the devil, the world, and our sinful nature ... and when He strengthens and keeps us firm in His Word and faith until we die” (*LSB*, p. 324).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 655.

Prayer

Merciful Lord, cleanse and defend Your Church by the sacrifice of Christ. United with Him in Holy Baptism, give us grace to receive with thanksgiving the fruits of His redeeming work and daily follow in His way; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 15C).

A Multitude Comes from the East and the West

Lutheran Service Book 510 | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

Introduction

In the Early Church, the believers “devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers” (Acts 2:42). It is revealing within that description that the fellowship of the believers is found between the Word and the Lord’s Supper. This is true for the Christian congregation still today. Fellowship always springs forth from the Gospel of Christ and finds its fulfillment in the Sacrament of His body and blood. The whole

of the Christian fellowship lives between the Word and the Sacrament, anticipating with eager expectation the glorious wedding feast of heaven.

- The first man, Adam, was alone until God created Eve. Who has God created as the bride for the Second Adam, Jesus?
- Why is the Christian never alone?

Exploring the Scriptures

This hymn is appointed for three different Sundays in the church year. While the Gospel Readings for each of these Sundays are different, the three also bear similarities.

Read Matt. 22:1–14 (for Proper 23A). In the banquet parable Jesus urges His listeners to repent. The generosity of the king’s invitation is matched with the severity of the king’s judgment.

- What does the king do in response to the rejection of his invitation (v. 7)?
- What made the initial recipients of the king’s invitation unworthy to attend (v. 8)?

Read Luke 13:22–30 (for Proper 16C). In this banquet parable Jesus speaks of the struggle of repentance. The struggle is not in getting through the narrow door itself, but rather between faith and the sinful nature, a struggle that the Lord’s call produces in the human heart.

- What does the master of the house mean when he says, “I do not know where you come from” (v. 26)?
- A multitude joins the patriarchs in the kingdom of God, but some will be cast out (v. 28). Who are the first? Who are the last (v. 30)? Why?

Read Luke 14:15–24 (for Trinity 2). This is a banquet parable that begins with a blessing (v. 15) and ends with a warning (v. 24).

- In verse 17 the master’s invitation says, “Come, for everything is now ready.” Do the invited guests have any requirement to fulfill in order to attend?
- From his words in verse 23, what is the master’s desire for this banquet?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Magnus Brostrup Landstad (1802–80) knew human suffering and the trials of life by personal experience. He grew up in the far north of Norway, a place of solitude, storm and darkness. War, hunger and inflation added to the trials of his childhood. Not surprisingly, Landstad could long for heaven, as he writes in this hymn, when “all trials shall be like a dream that is past” (st. 3).

- How do times of trial change in faith, when we consider that Christ comes to share them with us?

Landstad also put into poetic expression the deprivations of sin that the faithful can see within themselves. Called a “penitential hymn poet,” Landstad could plumb the depths of repentance in a hymn such as “To Thee, Omniscient Lord

of All” (*LSB* 613). Yet this hymn of repentance does not dwell so much on the sorrow of the repentant as on the joy that comes in Christ to the penitent. It is because of Christ’s lavish grace that Landstad wrote how he was always eager to sing a penitential hymn with joy.

- St. Paul wrote, “For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10). What does he mean?

In many ways Landstad writes his hymns for a pilgrim on his or her way toward heaven. While he writes about storms and trials, it is not to use fear to drive the pilgrim onward. Rather, Landstad’s portrayal of the pilgrim way is one of an eager longing and a hopeful expectation for that which lies ahead.

- St. Paul wrote, “One thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 3:13–14). How is it only the grace of God in Jesus Christ that allows us to say this along with the apostle?

Text

While the three parables discussed above all have the elements of blessing and judgment, the hymn text focuses solely on the blessing of the Lord’s invitation.

- In the distinction between Law and Gospel — the Law commands but cannot give; the Gospel bestows what it promises — how is this focus on the blessing in the parable a focus on the Gospel itself?

Read the closing refrain, “Have mercy upon us, O Jesus!” in light of the hymn’s focus on the blessing of the invitation.

- Is this repeated refrain a confession of sin or a cry for help in need? What difference does this make?

Stanza 1 also draws upon Matt. 8:11–12. Commending the faith of the Roman centurion, Jesus includes this Gentile

Roman among those reclining at table with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

- Does the hymn limit saving faith to the New Testament saints? Read Hebrews 11.

Stanza 2 sings of God as the Shepherd of His people. Read Ps. 107:2–9 and compare the imagery with Psalm 23.

- What is the urgency described in stanza 2 (“while there is time”)?

Stanzas 3 and 4 carry the singer to the communion of saints in glory, where “all trials shall be like a dream that is past,” where “the blest” receive the crown of life. Read Rev. 7:9–17 and Rev. 2:10.

- Is the Sacrament of the Altar also a sharing in the eternal feast? Why or why not?
- How does the promise of life forever with Christ, given in the Lord’s Supper, sustain us now in our times of trial?
- What would you say in response to the skeptic who understands these stanzas only as “pie in the sky”? Read St. Paul’s response in 1 Cor. 15:12–34.

Making the Connection

The sick person, the one who endures persecution for his or her faith, the prisoner, the lonely and many other sufferers each see in a fellow Christian the presence of the gracious God. Both the one who visits and the one who is visited recognize each other as “little Christs” (Luther’s term) of the Christ who is present with each and, more so, with both together.

- What does a Christian lose when he absents himself from the fellowship of believers in worship?
- Does the blessing of Christian fellowship deny a blessing to Christian solitude? Why or why not?

In Closing

Jesus promised His fellowship of disciples “... that where I am you may be also” and “I will not leave you as orphans” (John 14:3, 18). So we Lutherans believe, teach and confess that one Holy Church will remain forever. The Church is the assembly of believers among whom the Gospel is purely taught and the Sacraments are rightly administered according to that Gospel (see AC VII).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 510.

- What are some of the challenges when pondering the Christian fellowship on earth in light of the fellowship of saints in heaven?
- Stanza 4 says, “the heavens ... ring with an anthem more grand / Than ever on earth was recorded.” Name two or three temptations to despair because of the weaknesses of the earthly fellowship of believers. In what way is the earthly fellowship the means to sustain one another in those temptations to despair?

Prayer

Almighty God, You invite us to trust in You for our salvation. Deal with us not in the severity of Your judgment but by the greatness of Your mercy; 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 Proper 23).

Son of God, Eternal Savior

Lutheran Service Book 842 | study by Bruce E. Keseman

Introduction

During World War II, Rev. Henry Gerecke, an LCMS clergyman, served as a U.S. Army chaplain in England. At the conclusion of the war, Chaplain Gerecke was asked to provide spiritual care for his enemies, Nazi leaders who were being tried for war crimes at Nuremberg. Chaplain Gerecke knew about and sometimes witnessed the effects of the atrocities inflicted because of those Nazis. He also knew that he could decline the assignment and return to his wife whom he had not seen in two years. Still, he agreed

to minister to his enemies. Some in the United States criticized him for befriending men who were responsible for such horrible torture and death.

- Why might Chaplain Gerecke have provided pastoral care — and friendship — to enemies?
- If you were Chaplain Gerecke, how would you respond to criticism from U.S. citizens?

Exploring the Scriptures

“Son of God, Eternal Savior” was written by Somerset T. C. Lowry (1855–1932). The hymn reflects John 17:1–26, a prayer Jesus prayed for us the night before He died. Read those verses now, especially noticing Christ’s emphasis on unity and love.

- In verse 3, what does Jesus say is eternal life? Why is eternal life impossible apart from Jesus?
- The Father’s words lead us to know and believe that Jesus came from the Father (v. 8). Jesus spoke the Father’s

words directly to the first disciples, but how does He get those words to you (v. 20)? How might that have affected Chaplain Gerecke’s decision?

- What evidence have you seen that verse 14 is true?
- What is Christ’s prayer for us (vv. 15, 17, 20–21 and 26)? What comfort does that give to you in this often-difficult world?
- What indications are there that the love of God was in Chaplain Gerecke (v. 26)? In Christians you know?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Read through *LSB* 842. Most hymnals today — *LSB* included — omit two stanzas that Lowry wrote when he penned the hymn in 1893. Read the omitted stanzas.

Bind us all as one together
In your Church’s sacred fold,
Weak and healthy, poor and wealthy,
Sad and joyful, young and old.
Is there want or pain or sorrow?
Make us all the burden share.
Are there spirits crushed and broken?
Teach us, Lord, to soothe their care.

Dark the path that lies behind us,
Strewn with wrecks and stained with blood;
But before us gleams the vision
Of the coming brotherhood.
See the Christlike host advancing,
High and lowly, great and small,
Linked in bonds of common service
For the common Lord of all.

- In your opinion, do these stanzas strengthen or weaken the hymn? How do these stanzas alter the focus of the hymn? Explain.
- What good reasons might editors have for omitting these stanzas?
- When it was first published, editors called this a “Christian Brotherhood” hymn. In *LSB*, it is in the category “Society.” In your opinion, how does the inclusion or exclusion of the stanzas above affect the category of the hymn?

Text

Look again at stanza 1 in *LSB*.

- List the titles given to Jesus in this stanza. What unique truth about our Lord does each title provide?
- In what ways does Christ’s birth among us hallow (that is, make holy) the human race?
- Much of the hymn is about showing love, yet only one brief clause of stanza 1 alludes to anything we do for others (“Fill us with Your love and pity”). Why is the

emphasis on Christ's work essential before the hymn speaks about what we Christians do?

Read Heb. 7:23–25.

- What prevented most high priests from remaining in office? How is Jesus, our High Priest, different?
- What does verse 25 say Jesus is doing for us? Why? How is that reflected in the hymn?

Look at stanza 2 of the hymn.

- Notice that the entire hymn is a prayer. For what do we pray in this stanza?
- We often say that Christ *died* for others, but in what ways has Christ *lived* for others" (including you)?
- What are some ways we might live for others as Christ did for us?
- Lowry writes that our money really belongs to God. We are "stewards" and keepers of a "trust." How does that shape our Christian view of giving?

Read 1 Peter 1:20–23.

- Because of Christ, what have we become (vv. 20–21)?
- Why does Peter suggest (v. 23) that we can "love one another earnestly" (v. 22)?
- What does verse 25 say is the "imperishable seed" by which you have been born again? When did that rebirth happen?

Making the Connection

As Jesus works among us — speaking His Word, baptizing us into His death and resurrection, serving us His forgiving body and blood — He grants us faith that trusts in Him. The result is both unity (John 17:11) and love (John 17:26).

In Closing

When we pray for unity and love, as we do in this hymn (and Jesus does in John 17), God sometimes responds in surprising ways. When Chaplain Gerecke arrived at Nuremberg, few of the twenty-some Nazi defendants trusted Christ for their salvation. Jesus prayed "for those who will believe in me through their word" (John 17:20). And God's Word spoken by Chaplain Gerecke changed some of the unbelievers at Nuremberg. When Joachim von Ribbentrop, former Reich Minister of Foreign Affairs, went to the gallows, he was asked for his last words. His response: "I place all my confidence in the Lamb who made atonement for my sins. May God have mercy on my soul." Amazingly, that meant Chaplain Gerecke had Christian

Look at stanza 3 of the hymn.

- If we are going to live for others, what does the hymn suggest that Christ must first do for us?
- What strife, passions and discords are evident even among Christians? So why is it appropriate that we call Jesus the "King of *Love*" and "Prince of *Peace*"?

The hymn asks our Lord to "quench our fevered thirst of pleasure" (st. 3). Read John 4:1–26, where the Samaritan woman's thirst of pleasure led her to five husbands and her current live-in.

- Why do earthly pleasures fail to quench our desires?
- What does Jesus offer to the woman (and us) that provides what we really need? What hint of that offer is included in stanza 3 of the hymn?

Look at stanza 4, especially thinking about the final request of the hymn: "Here on earth Your will be done."

- How does repeating half of stanza 1 emphasize the true source of Christian sanctification? See also John 17:17–18.
- In what sense is Jesus our "Source of Life?" Of truth? Of grace? What alternate sources might we be tempted to rely on?
- What verses from John 17 especially seem to be reflected in the last half of stanza 4?
- What elements of God's will does Jesus mention in John 17?
- How is God's will done? (See the Third Petition in the Small Catechism, *LSB*, p. 324).

- Why are true unity and true love impossible apart from faith in Christ?
- How might your life look different when Christ's gifts of unity and love show more clearly in you?

unity with his earthly enemy! Christ's love worked through Chaplain Gerecke as he lived for others.

- Sing or read aloud together, *LSB* 842.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, You desire not the death of a sinner but that all would repent and live. Hear our prayers for those outside the Church. Take away their iniquity and turn them from their false gods to You, the living and true God. Gather them into Your holy Church to the glory of Your name; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen (For those outside the Church, *LSB*, 305).

How Clear Is Our Vocation, Lord

Lutheran Service Book 853 | study by Allen D. Lunneberg

Introduction

It may seem a bit strange at first to sing about a Christian's "vocation" against the background of choosing "life and good, death and evil" (Deut. 30:15) and Jesus' challenging call to renounce all, take up one's own cross and follow Him. Yet we are to think of vocation as Martin Luther did, as how we serve our neighbor in the world. When you stop to ponder it, however, how clear it is that service of neighbor always entails certain pressures, crosses and trials. The standard of Christian vocation and service, of course, is nothing less than the cross of Christ.

"When we pray the Lord's Prayer, observed Luther, we ask God to give us this day our daily bread. And He does give us our daily bread. He does it by means of the farmer who planted and harvested the grain, the baker who made the flour into bread, the person who prepared our meal. We

might today add the truck drivers who hauled the produce, the factory workers in the food processing plant, the warehouse men, the wholesale distributors, the stock boys, the lady at the checkout counter. Also playing their part are the bankers, futures investors, advertisers, lawyers, agricultural scientists, mechanical engineers, and every other player in the nation's economic system. All of these were instrumental in enabling you to eat your morning bagel."¹ Luther calls all of these "God's masks."

- How is our vocation and service to others "a mask" of God? How is God behind our service to others?
- What is the difference between seeing the troubles and trials of our daily life as either an annoyance or as a "cross"?

Exploring the Scriptures

In Luke 5:1–11 we're told how Jesus called the fishermen Simon Peter and the sons of Zebedee, James and John, to leave their nets and boats and everything to become "fishers of men."

- To what extent do you think they understood what Jesus meant?
- What *did* Jesus mean?
- How "clear" was their vocation to them at the beginning?
- In what way did they become catchers of men?
- Instead of boats and nets, what are the means the Church is to use to bring individuals in?

In Matt. 11:28–30 Jesus invites us, saying that His "yoke is easy" (v. 30).

- What is that "yoke"? What does the hymn in stanza 2 suggest is the cause when we think of Jesus' yoke as "hard to bear"?

Read Heb. 12:1–4.

- How are these words a comfort for us, especially when we find ourselves struggling either with sin in ourselves or with difficulties with others?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Fred Pratt Green (1903–2000) was a talented British poet at first, until he was asked to take up the related craft of writing hymns. He wrote over three hundred in his later years, of which we have but three in *Lutheran Service Book*. This hymn is the result of a request in 1980 by Erik Routley for a hymn on vocation, specifically to be sung to the tune Repton by C. Hubert H. Parry.

"Vocation" is not a word to describe only prophets, apostles, pastors, teachers and other "full time" church workers. Rather, following Martin Luther's lead, every Christian has a "vocation," that is, they are to serve others according to

their calling in life, not as good works to appease God but rather as a witness to their faith in Christ.

- What is your primary vocation?
- How is it related to faith in God?

Text

A Christian's vocation, says the first stanza of the hymn, is the result of heeding, learning and living according to God's Word. Only when we forget God's Word and the teachings of Jesus does our life become confused, a "tangled skein of care" (st. 2).

1 Gene Edward Veith Jr., *God at Work*, (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 13.

- What should we do with our “tangled skein” of care?

Stanza 3 contrasts the faithful service of the saints before us, for whom even troubles (“hindrances”) only seem to increase the joy and conviction of faith, with the “casual way we wear Your name.”

- Describe “the casual way we wear God’s name”. What effect does this have on our service and witness?
- How *should* we wear God’s name?

Making the Connection

We take quite literally the “call” of God, especially when it comes to the Office of the Ministry. We pray for God’s guidance in our selection of a candidate and, by unanimous vote, we extend to him a call document. We confess in the Augsburg Confession, “Our churches teach that no one should publicly teach in the Church, or administer the Sacraments, without a rightly ordered call” (AC XIV, p. 39). Pastors are to consider this “rightly ordered call” as coming from God through the Church.

The call or vocation of the pastor is to preach the Word, administer the Sacraments and shepherd God’s people. The

Stanza 4 reminds us that the cross of Christ is the standard of Christian service and vocation.

- Describe the “old routines” of vocation.
- Describe the “ventures new” we may encounter.
- How does the cross of Christ enable or empower what the Lord has given us to do?

call or vocation of the Christian, however, while just as divinely blessed, can be as varied as our stations in life. Look at the Table of Duties of the Small Catechism (*LSB*, p. 328).

- In the Table of Duties, after the ministry of the Gospel, how many “Orders,” “Positions,” and “Vocations” are listed? Notice that these are very general and seem to apply generally to the realm of the Fourth Commandment, family and other authorities.
- What is the advice given in the last sentence?

In Closing

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 853.

Prayers

O merciful Lord, You did not spare Your only Son but delivered Him up for us all. Grant us courage and strength to take up the cross and follow Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 18C).

Heavenly Father, grant Your mercy and grace to Your people in their many and various callings. Give them patience, and strengthen them in their Christian vocation of witness to the world and of service to their neighbor in Christ’s name; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (Christian vocation, *LSB*, p. 311).

Lord God, You have called Your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that Your hand is leading us and Your love supporting us; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (For guidance in our calling, *LSB*, p. 311).

Jesus Sinners Doth Receive

Lutheran Service Book 609 (Also found in Lutheran Service Builder 974) | study by Paul J. Cain

Introduction

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. This is most certainly true!

Consider the following statement: “If someone is not willing to confess that he or she is a sinner, can Jesus save them?” Discuss. Why not?

- If someone isn’t willing to confess, “I, a poor, miserable sinner ...” (*LSB*, p. 184) what does that say about his spiritual state?
- Optional: Sing or read *LSB* 609.

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Luke 5:31–32. Compare Matt. 9:9–13.

- What does Jesus mean in a time before preventive medicine?
- Do those who think they are well think they need a doctor?

Read Luke 15:1–10.

- What was the complaint of the Pharisees?
- Who is given today to leave the “ninety-nine” to “go after the one”?
- How can we better demonstrate joy when a long-time absent member shows up at church?

Read Luke 18:9–14.

- Which man went to his home justified? Why?
- Should we thank God that we are not like the Pharisee in the text? How can we avoid hypocrisy?

Read 1 Tim. 1:12–17.

- Who is speaking here?
- What does he confess?
- In whom does he rejoice? Why?

Read 1 Peter 1:13–25, with a focus on 18–19.

- Contrast a person before Christ and after conversion, using words and ideas from this passage.
- How are our souls purified? How does the cross-won forgiveness of Christ get delivered to you?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

The author of this hymn, Pastor Erdmann Neumeister (1671–1756), was a well-known poet, hymn writer and author of an explanation of Luther’s Small Catechism.

From the pulpit and in print he opposed the theology and practice of Pietism. (Pietism de-emphasized Word and Sacrament and congregational life in favor of smaller study groups of supposedly more “faithful” Christians [see Luke 18], emotionalism and personal experience.)

Often, Neumeister’s new hymns were specifically written to fit the appointed lectionary reading of the day, and served to conclude his sermon at St. James’ Church in Hamburg, Germany.

- What benefit is there in a repeated one-year or three-year cycle of Bible readings? How could this help church musicians?
- Why should we sing old hymns? Why should we sing new hymns? Why have Lutherans always sung both?

Text

This hymn breathes in Luke 15:1–10, the appointed Holy Gospel for Proper 19C, and other Scripture and confesses biblical truths in song. Note the richness of that Bible text in stanza 3.

Jesus is the Good Shepherd of John 10 and Psalm 23. We have hope in Him because He searches for all who have wandered far “from God and heaven,” those who live in “sin’s delusions” (st. 1).

- How and when do believers wander from the faith?
- Recall and share a time when you were brought back.
- Why is it important in Latin, German and English that the word “pastor” means “shepherd”?

Examine stanza 2. Using the words of the hymn, answer the following.

- What do we deserve? What are we given instead?

Look at stanza 4. You may wish to compare it to Psalm 51, especially verse 3.

- How does the hymn writer help us express what is in a contrite heart? How is that different from mere sorrow for sin?

Turn to stanzas 5 and 6.

- How do they express the comfort of the Gospel? How do they speak of the perfect cleansing from sin that Jesus gives us?
- The Gospel can be confessed using terms from the courtroom and marketplace. Give examples.

Stanza 7 confesses the Office of the Keys. Consider Matt. 16:19 and John 20:23.

- What and/or who is more important than the feeling of our hearts? What is more solid and certain than our sinful flesh?

Making the Connection

If your congregation made the transition from *The Lutheran Hymnal* to *Lutheran Worship* and then to *Lutheran Service Book*, some may wonder why the tune was “changed.”

Two tunes bear the same title, *Meinen Jesum lass’ ich nicht*, differing only with a last identifying word in parentheses.

Darmstadt refers to the city where *LSB* 609’s tune was published in 1699. This tune was used in both *TLH* and *LSB*.

(Ulich) refers to Johann Ulich (1634–1712), the composer of the *LSB* 974 tune, which was also used in *LW*. (*LSB* 974, while not available in the pew edition, is available through *Lutheran Service Builder*, *Lutheran Service Book: Hymn Accompaniment Edition* and *Lutheran Service Book: Guitar Chord Edition*.)

In Closing

On page 203 in *LSB*, the scriptural truth that “Jesus Sinners Doth Receive” is applied in pastoral care at the beginning of Divine Service, Setting Four. If time permits, read this page aloud responsively, ending with the prayer found in the first column at the bottom of the page (prayer 407).

- Read or sing aloud together *LSB* 974 found in *Lutheran Service Builder* (or *LSB* 609) if not sung at the beginning of this study.

This hymn originally had eight stanzas. *Lutheran Service Book* has omitted the original fourth stanza. Why? The hymn text committee thought this stanza was weak, using ambiguous language like that used for the new Arminian false practice of altar calls. That stanza read:

Come, O sinners, one and all,
Come, accept his invitation;
Come, obey his gracious call,
Come and take his free salvation!
Firmly in these words believe:
Jesus sinners will receive.

- How could this stanza be easily misunderstood to teach “decision theology?” Read John 15:16 for help.
- How could this stanza be properly understood in context?

- Why is there sometimes such a passionate attachment to some hymn tunes and not to others?
- What benefit is there in having a favorite comforting text that could be sung to more than one hymn tune?

As Christians, we can confess our sins and be absolved by the pastor, receiving forgiveness “from the pastor as from God Himself,” “plead guilty of all sins [before God] ... as we do in the Lord’s Prayer” (*LSB*, p. 326), and ask for forgiveness from others even “as we forgive those who trespass against us” (*LSB*, p. 323).

God’s Word creates a new reality. When His Word proclaims the forgiveness of sins, your sins are forgiven because “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1 Tim. 1:15). Amen!

- Why do we sometimes doubt that we are forgiven?
- How are we continually reminded of Christ’s salvation?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You are the Good Shepherd, without whom nothing is secure. Rescue and preserve us that we may not be lost forever but follow You, rejoicing in the way that leads to eternal life; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 19C).

Seek Where You May to Find a Way

Lutheran Service Book 557 | study by Christopher I. Thoma

Introduction

The story of the RMS *Titanic* is a familiar one. It is quite possible that the very mention of its name conjures thoughts of pompous vanity in newspapers calling it “unsinkable.” Even worse were the recorded quotes from the crew, “Not even God can sink this ship.” And even though the *Titanic* was a visible testimony to man’s ingenuity and drive to conquer nature, early in the morning of April 15, 1912, on its maiden voyage, the first-rate ship hit an iceberg and sank, killing about 1,500 passengers.

I remember watching a movie version of the tragedy and asking myself, “If I were on that ship, what would I have done to save myself?” The ship was going to sink. That’s a fact. The only issue now was how to survive, how to be saved.

- Consider and discuss manmade structures. Which ones remain? Which ones have been destroyed?
- Which ones need maintenance and repair for preservation?

Exploring the Scriptures

Read John 6:68–69.

- What do Peter’s words reveal about the objective truth of the Gospel?
- Where do we hear these words in the Divine Service?

Read Matt. 11:2–6. In this text, John the Baptist sends word to Jesus to ask Him if He is the “one who is to come.” He is “seeking” an answer to this question.

- Why do you suppose John asked this question?
Considering the context of his imprisonment, what does

John do that we have a tendency to neglect doing in our daily lives?

- How does Jesus respond to John? In other words, no matter what the need may be, does He do anything for John other than what He does for us? In a time of great need, where does Jesus focus John’s attention (and ours)?

Read, compare and discuss the words of Ps. 49:5–15 and Rom. 8:28–39. Both of these texts speak of tragedy, trust, endurance, life and death.

- How does 1 Peter 3:21–22 shed light on this discussion?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

It is suggested that Georg Weissel (1590–1635), the son of a mayor and the author of at least twenty hymns, penned this hymn and used it at his ordination, which took place one week after the dedication of the new church building in Königsberg, Prussia. He served this church as pastor until his death.

As with any building project, even in medieval times, the building of a new church structure was a magnificent accomplishment that heralded the abilities of man.

- Based upon the context above, does Weissel reveal in his hymn a familiarity with man’s pride in the face of accomplishment? In what ways?
- Have you experienced a new building project in your congregation? If so, what care was taken to see that all glory was given to God?
- What do the following words reveal about the pride of man and perhaps imply Weissel’s intentions as a newly ordained pastor? “My heart is stilled, / On Christ I build,

/ He is the one foundation ... / Through Him I more than conquer” (st. 1).

Read Joshua 24:15.

- What similarities do you find with Joshua’s words to the Israelites and the text of the hymn?
- Where in particular in the hymn do you see Weissel driving the reader away from the works of man to the works and accomplishments of God given in holy worship within the building?

Text

In somewhat of a rhetorical sense, with stanza 1, “Seek Where You May to Find a Way” immediately begins by presenting the looming problem.

- What is the problem?
- What is the only viable solution?

- Read 1 Cor. 3:11–13. What is absolutely necessary for a secure faith structure that will not sink, collapse, crumble or decay?

With stanza 2, Weissel continues to place before us the impenetrable hull (that is, doctrinal absolutes that cannot be rejected) of God’s redemptive plan in history.

- What does it mean that Jesus was “God-man,” and why does it matter? How is this denied in the world?
- Why is Jesus referred to as our “Servant-King”? How is this denied in the world?
- Which pinnacle event is referenced as the event that justifies? How does our Baptism connect to this objective truth? Read Titus 3:3–7.

Read Matt. 6:19–21, 25–34 and Luke 6:37–38.

- How do these texts speak to the abundance of God’s grace? How do they speak to God’s mercy reshaping our lives for service in this life?

Making the Connection

This hymn is calling for the reader to locate his trust and hope in the Savior, Jesus Christ, and the accomplishments of His life, death, resurrection and ascension for those who could not save themselves.

- Where does Weissel call for the reader to locate Jesus with certainty?

In Closing

Whether it is the almost immediate and epic sinking of the *Titanic* or the slower, drawn-out epic of the deterioration of all things in this world, “Seek Where You May to Find a Way” is a poetic division of Law and Gospel that has at its heart the epic of the Gospel solution for sin. It reminds the reader that all those who by faith build upon Christ, no matter the tragedy, no matter the strife, are secured for an eternity in the glorious presence of Jesus in heaven.

- What does this mean for your life and death in this world?

- How does the hymn reflect these truths in stanza 3?

Perhaps you noticed that within stanzas 1–3, the conversation of the hymn is taking place between the author and the reader. With stanza 4, we see a change. Stanza 4 becomes the confession of certainty of the hymnographer himself, making the joyful declaration that Jesus is his source of delight and eternal joy.

- Read John 15:18–19 and Matt. 25:34. What do these texts say about the inheritance of faith in Christ?
- Consider again Rom. 8:35–39 and consider the possibilities, worldly and spiritual, that seek to assault and separate us from Christ. Is Paul bold or timid in his words? How is this reflected in stanza 4? According to both, where is the power found to remain connected to Christ? In other words, is it man’s work or God’s work?
- Read Ps. 119:105 and 2 Tim. 4:7–8. How is the Gospel promise revealed and to what end will it carry those who fight the fight of faith in this world?

- Read John 1:14. Who is the “Word”?

Saint Augustine referred to the Word of God as being given in two forms, verbal and visible.

- What is the *verbal* giving of Christ?
- What is the *visible* giving of Christ?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 557.

Prayer

O Lord, keep Your Church in Your perpetual mercy; and because without You we cannot but fall, preserve us from all things hurtful, and lead us to all things profitable to our salvation; 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 Proper 20C).

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 and 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.”² 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, 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 heartache, illness 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. Martin 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?

2 *LSB Pastoral Care Companion* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2007), p. 93.

In the second stanza, we are reminded of the Creed, as you may have learned it from the Small Catechism. So 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?

Making the Connection

When the Pharisees tested Jesus, asking, “Teacher which is the great commandment in the Law?” (Matt. 22:36). 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.

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

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” (st. 3).

- 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.

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?

you haven’t already. And sing it as you journey from this life into death and into life everlasting.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 708.

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).

I Know My Faith Is Founded

Lutheran Service Book 587 | study by Paul F. Becker

Introduction

Most evangelical Christians think of faith in a man-centered way, as this previous Wikipedia entry illustrates, “[faith] was an act of trust and self-abandonment in which people no longer rely on their own strength and policies but commit themselves to the power and guiding word of him in whom they believe.”³

Lutheran Christians, on the other hand, hold a God-centered view of faith, as stated in the Augsburg Confession: “Through the Word and Sacraments, as through instruments, the Holy Spirit is given [John 20:22]. He works faith, when and where it pleases God [John 3:8], in those who hear the good news that God justifies those who believe that they are received into grace for Christ’s sake. This happens not through our own merits, but for Christ’s sake” (AC V 2–3, p. 33).

The question could not be more important, Will I rely on my personal acts of trust, self-abandonment and commitment, or will I turn to something outside myself, to Christ and the Holy Spirit working through the Word and promises of God? How we answer the question of faith will shape our view of salvation, personal growth in holiness, worship, mission, spiritual warfare and preparation for death and eternity.

This hymn delivers a very personal testimony and confession of trust in God that points to the blessing of keeping our focus on Jesus Christ, the founder and perfecter of our faith (Heb. 12:2).

- Discuss some of the consequences of a man-centered approach to Christianity.
- What are some of the challenges and blessings of a God-centered view of Christian faith?

Exploring the Scriptures

In his 1522 “Preface to the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans,” Martin Luther wrote: “Faith, however, is a divine work in us which changes us and makes us to be born anew of God, John 1[12–13]. It kills the old Adam and makes us altogether different men, in heart and spirit and mind and powers; and it brings with it the Holy Spirit. O it is a living, busy, active, mighty thing, this faith. It is impossible for it not to be doing good works incessantly” (AE 35:370).

Read 2 Tim. 1:6–14.

- Notice the God-centered verbs: gave, saved, called, manifested, abolished death, brought life, appointed.
- What can we do? Find four actions for believers in verses 6–14.

In John 17:8, Jesus says that three things have happened in those to whom the Father’s words have been given. What happens when we welcome the gifts Christ freely gives?

Responding to His command to forgive those who sin against them, the disciples entreat the Lord, “Increase our faith!” (Luke 17:5). When our relationships become strained, what can strengthen them? See 1 Peter 1:3–9.

- Describe the hope you have because of the resurrection of Jesus from the dead.
- Have you or someone you know been grieved or distressed by various trials or even tested by fire? What impact did this have on your relationship with God?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Erdmann Neumeister (1671–1756), a Lutheran pastor in the age of Pietism, wrote several hymns and various cantata texts for the church year that were set to music by his contemporary J. S. Bach. Through his hymns and cantata texts, Pastor Neumeister preached the sure and certain comfort given in God’s Word.

Text

At the conclusion of His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus contrasts two dwellings, one built on sand, and one built on solid rock (Matt. 7:24–27). The latter represents all those who hear His Word and practice it. Stanza 1 reflects this parable: “Unmoved I stand on His sure Word” versus the failure of using reason: “Who trusts in human wisdom / Relies on shifting ground.” A clear choice between human

³ “Faith in Christianity,” The Distributed Wikipedia Mirror, last modified May 2017, accessed May 15, 2018, ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/Faith_in_Christianity.html

and divine wisdom confronts us all. Our Lord promises that we will find rest for our souls, “rest secure” (st. 1), when we trust in His all-sufficient Word.

- Often the foundation of our lives remains hidden, unseen, until catastrophe strikes. Discuss how even natural storms, such as Hurricane Katrina, reveal the folly of trusting human wisdom.
- Why will human reason and human wisdom ultimately prove insufficient sources of security?

In stanza 2, we see that faith built on God’s Word is not static or inert, but dynamic, capable of growth and vulnerable to attack from the one who come to steal, kill, and destroy. As Jesus keeps His promise to be with me always, and the Holy Spirit leads and guides, I am undismayed, unafraid. Because God gets all the credit for my firmer faith, I can now defy what would otherwise rob me of hope.

Making the Connection

While faith is clearly the main theme of our hymn, almost every area of the Christian life will be affected by whether we come to it with a man-centered or God-centered view. St. Paul says that the life he now lives in the body he lives by faith in the Son of God, who loves him and gave Himself for him (Gal. 2:20).

In Closing

The Post-Communion Collect of the Divine Service prays: “We give thanks to You, almighty God, that You have refreshed us through this salutary gift, and we implore You that of Your mercy You would strengthen us through the same in faith toward You and in fervent love toward one another” (*LSB*, p. 201). At the weekly Eucharist, God does indeed strengthen us in true faith toward Him and in fervent love toward one another.

- Read aloud or sing together *LSB* 587.

- What spiritual habits (think exercise, nutrition) can keep us on a trajectory of growing in our relationship with God?

Genuine faith as portrayed in stanza 3, created by God’s Word and Spirit, cannot be content to sit back and watch the world go by, but always seeks opportunities to serve God by loving our neighbor. The hymn mentions experiences that might be perceived as negative, such as persecution, grief and pain. How might they also become opportunities to serve our neighbors in love?

The end of life comes into the text as the fulfillment of faith, as Jesus takes us home and we inherit His riches. His keeping and His mercy are the focus from beginning to end.

- Where else but in church, singing hymns of faith, do we ever think or speak about death and dying? What does the “end of faith” mean to you?
- How does this kind of Christ-centered faith give you a view of death, and life after death, that sees what is invisible to the natural eye?

- What are some things we can do to remind ourselves throughout the day and week that all of life really revolves around God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit?
- Take a few moments to read the great chapter on faith, Hebrews 11. How would seeing yourself with a similar faith change the way you pray about things, or the kind of risks you are willing to take?

Prayer

O God, our refuge and strength, the author of all godliness, by Your grace hear the prayers of Your Church. Grant that those things which we ask in faith we may receive through Your bountiful mercy; 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 Proper 22C).

Your Hand, O Lord, in Days of Old

Lutheran Service Book 846 | study by Robert A. Sorensen

Introduction

According to statistics compiled by the Center for Disease Control, the average American lifespan is about seventy-eight years. That number represents a remarkable increase over the past century. In 1900, the average American lifespan was about forty-seven years. By 1930 this number had still not reached sixty. It was not until 1961 that the average American lived to the age of seventy.

These numbers are skewed downward somewhat by the fact that previous generations had significantly higher rates of infant mortality. In the time of Jesus, it is estimated that only about half of the children born reached the age of five.

Today we enjoy not only longer lives but also healthier ones. Inexorable advances in pharmaceuticals, diagnostic

tools and surgical procedures are such that we are often amazed at the progress. And yet sickness, disease and human suffering have not been eliminated. Deep within all of us is a gnawing fear of untreatable disease and the unavoidable effects of aging.

- What illness or disease is most frightening to you?
- Does it seem credible that science will ever eradicate all disease and physical suffering?

Today's hymn and Scripture lessons focus upon Jesus' healing power. Despite great advances in medicine, this remains most relevant and important.

Exploring the Scriptures

The story about the single Samaritan leper returning to thank Jesus (Luke 17:11–19) highlights several important themes. The motif most often stressed is the failure of the nine to return and thank Jesus. Beyond this theme are several others, however. These too are worthy of our consideration.

Another important theme involves the social and religious isolation suffered by lepers in Palestine that first century. Because Lev. 13:1–3 and chapter 14 declared lepers to be unclean, they were effectively quarantined. They had to live apart from the rest of the community. Leviticus 14 stipulated that if lepers were judged by a priest to be healed, they could return and be restored to their place in society.

Such laws explain why Luke 17:12 depicts the ten lepers standing at a distance from Jesus and yelling to Him. By Mosaic Law, it was unlawful for them to approach Jesus or have close contact with Him.

- Put yourself in the shoes of a leper in Jesus' day. Which would bother you more: suffering a chronic physical malady or enduring the social isolation?
- What kinds of modern illnesses render people today like the lepers of old? Do you know anyone who suffers from a comparable social isolation?

Given the social isolation of lepers, Jesus' command that the ten go to present themselves to the priest makes perfect sense. His intent was not merely to heal them. That He did, of course. But He also commanded them to go show themselves to the priest. His purpose in this was to have them pronounced clean and restored to their former places in society.

- Do you know a story that illustrates the power of restoration? It could involve recovery from illness, exoneration from a false charge, a reunion with lost loved ones, etc.

Exploring the Hymn

Background

The author of this hymn, Edward H. Plumptre (1821–91), was a man of great education and accomplishment. He studied at excellent schools, first at King's College, London, and then at University College, Oxford. By the age of twenty-five he was ordained and serving in the Anglican Church. Throughout his long years of service, he preached from some of England's most distinguished pulpits, among them the ones at Oxford and St. Paul's Cathedral.

Over and above his pastoral work, Plumptre was a great scholar and university professor. At different times he held professorships in New Testament Exegesis and Pastoral Theology. His mastery of ancient Greek was such that he had translations of Aeschylus and Sophocles published. And, as the hymn here under review testifies, he was a poet and hymn writer of great ability.

- Of all his great accomplishments, which do you imagine gave Plumptre the greatest satisfaction and feeling of

accomplishment? You might consider 1 Corinthians 13 as you formulate your answer.

Professor Plumptre's pastoral heart is clearly visible in "Your Hand, O Lord, in Days of Old." In fact, he wrote it and first had it published for use in the chapel of King's College Hospital in London. Given the reception and popularity of the hymn, however, it soon began to appear in many other places as well. Today, it is found in many different hymnals.

- If your pastor was as multitalented as Dr. Plumptre, would your congregation allow him to pursue activities outside the parish, such as teaching and writing? Or would you insist that he confine himself to working for the congregation?

Text

The first stanza of this hymn refers to people suffering from a broad spectrum of maladies and diseases: the blind, mute, palsied, lame, lepers and those afflicted with fevers.

- Which of these maladies strikes most dread in you? Do you know anyone who suffers from one of these maladies?

Making the Connection

The Gospel accounts repeatedly draw a connection between Jesus' healings and His status as promised Messiah. Thus, when Jesus is asked by John's delegation if He truly is the promised Messiah, He responds, "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, the poor have good news preached to them" (Luke 7:22).

In Closing

If we compare our medical care to that of previous generations, we can only marvel and thank the Lord for the wonderful wisdom He has granted to those who practice the healing arts. And yet the age-old problems associated with disease and aging remain. These will never be completely removed from us in this world.

Jesus, the Great Physician, will someday come again. Then, He will remove death and illness from us once and for all. In the meantime, He does not abandon us or ignore our suffering. He stands ready to hear our supplications and then send healing as He sees fit. His faithfulness moves us to respond as did the healed Samaritan leper—he "fell on his face at Jesus' feet, giving him thanks" (Luke 17:16).

- How would these illnesses affect the lives of those afflicted with them in first-century Palestine? How would it have affected their families? See John 5:1–8 and 9:1–5, as well as Acts 3:1–10.

This hymn's second stanza calls to mind healings Jesus performed in His day: "Your touch then, Lord, brought life and health." It also implores Him to act in our day, saying, "And now, O Lord, be near to bless, / Almighty as before."

- How is Jesus "near to bless" today?
- How does Jesus come to "crowded street, by beds of pain" today?

The concluding stanza has these words: "To hands that work and eyes that see, / Give wisdom's healing pow'r." This seems to suggest that Jesus sometimes works His healing power through people's hands.

- Might this mean that the Lord uses doctors, nurses and medical research as a means for imparting health to His people?

Jesus' ultimate act of healing and restoring is the one He will complete on the Last Day. Then He will banish sin and death, transform our mortal bodies into glorified heavenly ones and wipe every tear from our eyes.

- What malady will you most rejoice to see banished on the Last Day, when Jesus restores all things? Whom do you most look forward to seeing in a glorified, heavenly body?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 846.

Prayer

Almighty God, You show mercy to Your people in all their troubles. Grant us always to recognize Your goodness, give thanks for Your compassion, and praise Your Holy name; 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 Proper 23C).

I Trust, O Lord, Your Holy Name

Lutheran Service Book 734 | study by Scott R. Schilbe

Introduction

God has a way of using problems in life to drive us closer to Him. Though we may see no benefit to our struggles as we endure them, we, in faith, believe that our problems and afflictions “are God’s works, intended for our benefit, and that God’s power might be made more apparent in our weakness” (Ap XII [VI] 63).

“I Trust, O Lord, Your Holy Name” is a hymn that expresses the patient faith we have in God whenever life

becomes chaotic and unsettled. In other words, the hymn gives voice to how we cling to God all the more when difficult times come our way.

- Examine times of your life when you’ve felt the most unsettled and vulnerable. What or who gave you comfort?
- How does God’s presence provide peace when you are upset?

Exploring the Scriptures

Today’s appointed lessons discuss trial and difficulty experienced in the lives of God’s people. In Gen. 32:1–21, we read of how Jacob feared his brother Esau. Genesis 27 reveals reasons for Esau’s anger against Jacob. Jacob evidently feared that Esau would take revenge upon him for dishonestly acquiring the coveted blessing.

- In Gen. 32:22–30, we read of how lonely and fearful Jacob wrestled with God. How could today’s hymn give voice to Jacob’s fears? How could today’s hymn have calmed Jacob’s fears?

Today’s Epistle, 2 Tim. 3:14–4:5, encourages pastors to preach God’s Word.

- Do you think that your pastor(s) and church workers need encouragement? How do you think your church workers

suffer for proclaiming Christ’s Word “in season and out of season” (v. 2)?

- How could pastors become fearful as they fulfill their ministry? What are some of the pressures that pastors and church workers face? How could today’s hymn remind them of God’s presence and faithfulness in times of anxiety?

The parable of the persistent widow, Luke 18:1–8, reminds us of the importance of persistence in our prayer life with God.

- In times of fear, what does this parable remind us of concerning God’s faithfulness?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Adam Reusner (1496–1575) was an acquaintance of Martin Luther and was familiar with the reformer’s cause. But he didn’t confess Luther’s theology. He instead aligned himself with Caspar Schwenkfeld and Schwenkfeld’s radical beliefs, beliefs not confessed by the Augsburg Confession.

Though Reusner wasn’t a confessor of the Augsburg Confession, Reusner did live in this turbulent Reformation environment.

- From your understanding of the Reformation era, what were some of the political and religious struggles that would drive the reformers to trust God even more than they already did?
- What phrases of the hymn could have been especially meaningful for Luther and other confessors of the Augsburg Confession?

Text

Psalm 31 serves as the basis for the hymn. The hymn paraphrases the psalm’s thoughts. Read Psalm 31 and answer the following questions.

- Whose righteousness delivers you from trouble (v. 1)?
- What are some of the images the psalmist uses to describe God (vv. 2b and 3a)?
- Why can the psalmist say that the Lord knows his afflictions (v. 7, also Heb. 2:14, 18)?
- The psalmist’s physical and emotional well-being seems to be in danger according to verses 11–13. Despite his present predicament, God uses his troubles to draw the psalmist closer to Him. How does the psalmist express this faith relationship in verses 14–17?
- How does this psalm of trust conclude (vv. 21–24)?

- How does this conclusion comfort us as we endure life's unpleasant times?
- Point out hymn phrases in stanzas 1, 2 and 3 that are similar to the Bible verses you studied above.

Ultimately, by faith, we commit our lives to the mercy of our living God. Ps. 31:5 teaches us to constantly pray for strength to do such committing.

- Read Luke 23:46. Who in this verse committed His life to His Father?
- How does the hymn's author include the thought of Psalm 31:5 in stanza 4?

The hymn provides comfort in the certainty of God's abiding presence. What comfort do the following verses give you as you face chaotic times in life?

- Col. 1:21–23
- 2 Sam. 22:2–7, 18–20
- Heb. 12:1–2

Stanza 4 includes the phrase “Lord, be my stay, / And lead the way / Now and when life is ending.”

- How does God lead you now?
- By what means does God assure you that He has not forsaken you no matter what problems you face?

Note that stanza 5 includes a doxology of praise to the Triune God. This stanza of praise is similar to Job's statement in Job 1:21. Both the stanza and Job's statement remind us that because of God's faithfulness, we praise Him even in spite of our problems.

Making the Connection

Whatever hardships we face on earth, we have the gracious assurance that God's rich grace is with us “Till we depart victorious” (st. 5).

- How does this “victorious” perspective help you view your momentary problems with faith and patient trust?

- Should you wait until you're humbled by some problem or change to commit your life to God's keeping? Review Luther's Morning and Evening Prayers (*LSB*, p. 327). How do they remind you to daily commit your life to God?

In Closing

Relocating to a new city, graduating high school and entering college, a poor medical report and a medical diagnosis you'd rather not receive all present moments of vulnerability and weakness. And those moments are also opportunities that the devil uses to his advantage to get us to doubt God.

Today's hymn and corresponding Bible verses remind us that God is not absent in our sufferings. He continues to listen to our prayers and — according to His plan — lead our way. It's in that assurance that we live.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 734.

Prayer

O Lord, almighty and everlasting God, You have commanded us to pray and have promised to hear us. Mercifully grant that Your Holy Spirit may direct and govern our hearts in all things that we may persevere with steadfast faith in the confession of Your name; 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 Proper 24C).

In God, My Faithful God

Lutheran Service Book 745 | study by Scott R. Schilbe

Introduction

Driving on an unfamiliar road at night can be a stressful experience. You're not too sure when your next turn takes place. Darkness permeates the landscape. Few cars — especially if you travel on a desolate and dark country road — provide clues of where to turn. How you wish you had guidance as you travel! At last, somehow you make it to your final destination.

- How can life be viewed as a dark, unfamiliar road?
- What are some situations you face in life for which you desire guidance?

Today's featured hymn compares life to a dark road of uncertainty. Yet as you travel this world, your faithful God guides you and embraces you with His abiding presence.

Exploring the Scriptures

St. Paul lived a dangerous life. Many times, opposition to the Gospel and even natural disasters threatened Paul's life. Many occasions must have caused Paul to think that great woes would overtake him. Read about these threats in 2 Cor. 4:8–11; 2 Cor. 6:4–5; 2 Cor. 11:24–29; and 2 Cor. 12:10.

- Based on the Bible verses above, with what attitude did Paul encounter these threats? Read also Phil. 1:21.
- How can Paul's attitude encourage you when you face life's dark road?
- According to 2 Tim. 4:6–8 and 16–18, what goal are we to keep in mind as we face danger in life?

How comforting it is to know that while we face dangers God does not abandon us. God is our faithful God and He will not forsake us!

- How can Heb. 12:3–11 help us cope with life's challenges? What comfort can verse 11 instill in us?

Life's dark road doesn't necessarily have to be one of danger and suffering. Life's dark road is also the "unknown." God doesn't necessarily reveal every detail to us about our life.

- Have you seen God working in your life? How?
- Look back over the past five or ten years. How has reality differed from your initial plans and expectations?
- Think about Abram. He certainly traveled the unknown road of life (Gen. 12:1–4). God changed the plans Abram had by telling him to go to Canaan. Whatever plans Abram had, God changed! How did Abram cope with such changes? Read Heb. 11:8–9.
- God's plan reminds us not to follow the example of the Pharisee in Luke 18:9–14. Instead of trusting ourselves, who does this parable teach us to trust?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Very little is known about the hymn's author, probably Sigismund Weingärtner. The text first appeared in a collection of hymns in 1607, as one of two texts in that collection attached to the Weingärtner name.

Though details about the author aren't known, the thoughts conveyed in the hymn could very well have been written by any Christian. The author really isn't too important. What is important is the expression of trust and hope that the hymn gives those who face life's dark road of twists and turns.

- Returning to the comparison of life to a dark road, who does the hymn identify as actually driving (guiding) your life?

- Are there moments in life when you question the driver's wisdom? Do you find yourself being a "backseat driver"? If so, how can the hymn calm your anxiety?

Text

Life can certainly lead us on a dark road of twists and turns. In stanza 1, the hymn writer discusses real woes that he experienced in life. When facing woes of your life, how do the following psalm verses help you to sing "My troubles He can alter; / His hand lets nothing falter"?

- Ps. 7:1
- Ps. 27:1
- Ps. 25:4–5
- Ps. 139:3
- Ps. 25:9–10

Stanza 2 is a stanza of confession and absolution. In the stanza, we acknowledge our sins, including our lack of trust in God's plan for us. Yet such acknowledgment need not lead to despair!

- According to stanza 2, to whom do we flee once we're convicted of our sins? Read also 1 John 1:8–9 and Ps. 25:6–7.

In the Lord's Prayer, we pray, "Deliver us from evil." Read Luther's explanation of this petition in the Small Catechism (*LSB*, pp. 324–25).

Making the Connection

This hymn is a hymn of faith. Faith speaks of ultimate trust in our faithful God. Faith attached to Jesus' righteousness allows us to simply say, "So be it," whenever we're faced with suffering and death. We can resolutely say, "So be it," because by faith we know God's grace will guide us through life and through death — until we praise Him yonder.

In Closing

Driving on a dark country road may be lonely and tense. But when it comes to driving life's dark road, God's presence guides you despite your not knowing all of the twists and turns that life takes. When you're caught up in moments of darkness prompted by uncertainty, disease or impending death, remember that God is in control and that "for those who love God all things work together for good" (Rom. 8:28).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 745.

- When we pray this petition, what are we praying towards?
- How does stanza 3 remind us of the petition asking God to deliver us from evil?
- How is Phil. 1:21 reflected in the sentiments of stanza 3?

The Christian's certain hope is that God makes us heirs of His eternal inheritance only for the sake of Christ's righteousness, which covers all our sins.

- After reading stanza 4, how can you be sure that you are an heir of heavenly gladness? Read Titus 3:4–7.

- How do Rom. 11:33–36 and Rom. 8:37–39 reassure you that God is your life's driver, and that He is in control of your life?
- How does God give you the power to confess, "Thy will be done"?

Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, in this earthly life we endure sufferings and death before we enter into eternal glory. Grant us grace at all times to subject ourselves to Your holy will and to continue steadfast in the true faith to the end of our lives that we may know the peace and joy of the blessed hope of the resurrection of the dead and of the glory of the world to come; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (In times of affliction and distress, *LSB*, p. 317).

How Firm a Foundation

Lutheran Service Book 728 | study by Frank J. Pies

Introduction

Architects who design buildings, contractors who construct them and those informed occupants who live and work in them are all in agreement when the subject of a building's foundation arises. No matter how glorious the superstructure may be, if the foundation is inadequate, the building's integrity is seriously compromised if not doomed. The need to anchor, support and sustain the superstructure is indisputable, and that's what a good, solid foundation does.

- What are some things that could happen to a building with a poor foundation?

- If you have experienced any of these consequences, what was it like?

This same reality is true in the spiritual realm, as our Lord Himself indicates in His story of the wise and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24–27). To build life on the Word of God, on hearing and believing it and living according to it, is to build on a firm foundation that will not collapse here in time or hereafter in eternity. It is of this blessedness that today's hymn sings.

Exploring the Scriptures

The lessons and the psalm for today are the firm foundation laid down by the Lord for the faith of His people. Prominent in this foundation is the chief cornerstone, Christ Jesus, the Savior through whom we have forgiveness and justification and everlasting life.

- In what striking terms is the Gospel announced in verse 18 of the Old Testament Reading, Is. 1:10–18, and in Ps. 130:3–4? How are we to build on this foundation according to Ps. 130:5–8?

- Read the Epistle, 2 Thess. 1:1–12. On what amazing facet of the Gospel declared in verse 11 is the Christian grounded? See Eph. 1:3–6.
- How is the good news of salvation in Christ dramatically personalized in today's Gospel, Luke 19:1–10? What constituted the spiritual foundation of Zacchaeus' home (vv. 5, 6 and 9)? What do verses 7 and 10 teach us about the glorious grace of Christ in providing unworthy sinners with life's sure foundation?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Unlike the majority of sacred hymns, the identity of the author of our hymn is uncertain. Since it was first published in London in 1787 with the simple signature "K," a number of names have been suggested: Kirkham, Keen or George Kirth. To this day the matter remains a mystery.

- Despite the questions surrounding the authorship of the hymn, it has a strong history of use in the Church and continues to comfort and strengthen those who sing it. What light does 1 Cor. 3:5–9 shed on this fact?

When initially published for public worship in the Rev. Dr. John Rippon's *A Selection of Hymns from the Best Authors*, "How Firm a Foundation" was subtitled "Exceeding Great and Precious Promises." The rich content of the hymn validates this description.

Text

The structure of the hymn is compelling. The first stanza is addressed to the saints of the Lord and contains a declarative statement of fact and a rhetorical question. The

remaining stanzas are written in quotation marks, stated in the first person singular, as if the Lord Himself were speaking to His own people.

- Who are God's saints, referred to in stanza 1? Read Rom. 1:7; 1 Cor. 1:2; Eph. 1:1; and Phil. 1:1. How are these saints described in 1 Peter 2:4–5? What does it mean to you to be one of God's saints, "built up as a spiritual house?"
- What is that "excellent Word" laid as a firm foundation for this "spiritual house": Jesus Christ (John 1:1, 14; 1 Cor. 3:11) or Sacred Scripture (John 10:34–36; 2 Peter 1:19–21) or the Church's preaching and teaching (1 Thess. 2:13)? Why is this foundation firm? See Is. 28:16.
- What is the answer to the question posed in the last half of stanza 1? See Luke 16:27–31.

In His divine Word, God has mercifully given us everything needed for life's foundation. Stanzas 2–5 of the hymn proclaim that Word, sometimes quoting Scripture verbatim, with the goal of establishing the saints on the sure foundation.

- Stanza 2 exhorts us not to be afraid or dismayed. What is the divine promise that engenders this confidence? See Is. 41:10.
- What related promise is emphasized in stanza 3 (note the triple “never” in the last line) that deepens faith’s foundation? See Rom. 8:31, 38–39.

- The Gospel declared in stanza 4 reflects Is. 43:1–7 and 2 Cor. 12:7–9. How does this Word support and stabilize our faith when it is tested and we are given the cross to bear? See 1 Peter 1:6–7.
- What endearing image is employed in the final stanza? See Is. 40:11. In what ways do we “prove” or experience God’s saving love throughout our lifetime, whether we are young or old?

Making the Connection

Christians benefit greatly from this hymn. It reminds us that there is a firm foundation for our lives. It is the one laid by the Lord. It is His Word. We are also wonderfully served by the hymn as it proclaims that Word in its truth and purity. Thereby our stand on the foundation is strengthened and our faith in the Lord is increased. What a delight it is to sing this hymn!

That we need to embrace and hold fast the “precious and very great promises” (2 Peter 1:4) intoned in our hymn is undeniable. Though we are the Lord’s saints through faith in Christ and Baptism into His death and resurrection, we are still sinners who fail to “fear, love, and trust in God above all things” (*LSB*, p. 321) as we should. We often yield

to temptation and build the home of life upon a sandy foundation like a foolish man (Matt. 7:26–27).

- Have you ever been afraid and dismayed, shaken by your foes and uncertain about life?
- What were the circumstances surrounding and fueling these thoughts?

Thanks be to God for His merciful patience with us for the sake of Jesus. Confessing our iniquities and clinging to the Savior by faith, we receive His forgiveness won by His atoning sacrifice, and are strengthened by His Spirit to be like the wise man, building life on the sure foundation of God’s Word (Matt. 7:24–25).

In Closing

One of our beloved fathers in the holy faith, Martin Luther, has written: “God’s Word alone is the true, abiding rock on which a person can depend with certainty”⁴

- How is this single sentence a succinct summary of the hymn? How would you sum up the hymn?
- In the week to come, thank and praise the Lord each day for the gift of His Word, and build anew upon it as the sure foundation of your life.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 728.

Prayer

Almighty God, by the working of Your Holy Spirit, grant that we may gladly hear Your Word proclaimed among us and follow its directing; 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 Proper 8A).

⁴ Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says*, (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1959), 1467).

From God Can Nothing Move Me

Lutheran Service Book 713 | study by John G. Fleischmann

Introduction

Worries. Cares. Fears. Life is full of them! Sometimes they distract us. Sometimes they may even paralyze us. Ever since sin came into the world they have been a part of every human life.

Our Lord Jesus made it very clear that we should not worry about anything (Matt. 6:31–34).

In this wonderful hymn from the pen of Ludwig Helmbold (1532–98), a lecturer at the University of Erfurt, in Erfurt, Germany, we are shown what it means to trust

the Lord and His promises especially when our worries and uncertain future take our eyes off the cross.

- Name some of your fears. What keeps you awake at night?
- How do these things distract you from trusting God's promises in Christ Jesus?
- Have the things about which you worry ever come to pass?

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Psalm 73 the basis for this hymn.

- In this psalm, what does the Lord tell us will happen to all evil?
- What promise of hope is given?

This hymn is also based on the well-known and often-cited passage from Rom. 8:38–39. Read this section of Scripture.

- What are the things Paul mentions that cannot separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus?
- Are any of your worries left off from this list?

God's chosen, Israel, often wandered from the Lord. Because they did not obey God, God dealt severely with them. Yet, even in their exile, God gave them tremendous

hope. Read the Old Testament lesson for Proper 25B, Jer. 31:7–9.

- What restoration does God promise?
- How have you wandered and disobeyed God?
- How has the Lord restored you?
- How do we walk in His ways?

Read the Gospel for Proper 25B, Mark 10:46–52. The account speaks of Bartimaeus, a “blind beggar.”

- What may have been some of Bartimaeus' worries?
- Who made his worries vanish?
- Martin Luther once said, “We are all beggars. We are saved by one who became a beggar.” Who is it that makes our worries vanish? How?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

This hymn was written during the plague that struck Erfurt in 1563. Ludwig Helmbold wrote this hymn for the rector of the university and his wife, Pancratius and Regina Helbich. They fled the city to escape the deadly spreading disease. It was intended by Helmbold to give them strength on their journey.

- Name times when your future was uncertain.
- Have you ever had to leave your friends and start a new life elsewhere?
- How did God's Word help you at those times?

Text

The stanzas of this hymn unfold the wonderful assurance of God's abiding presence in our lives at all times. Stanza 1 begins with the surety that God will never leave us. It then speaks of what God does in our lives.

- What does it mean that He “gently will reprove me”? See Heb. 12:6, 10.
- “He stretches out His hand” is a powerful biblical image. What are some biblical examples of this? What does God do each time this happens?

Stanza 2 speaks about losing those in life who were regarded as “trustworthy and sure.” This can mean those whom we love that are left behind when life takes a different course. It can also refer to those who betray us.

- In either case, what is true about God?
- What are the “chains that bind me”?
- How does one receive “peace ... within”?

Stanza 3 speaks of the providence of God. We don’t plan our lives — He does.

- Why is understanding this truth so important?
- How does God change “All sorrow into joy”?
- How does God’s love “still” us?

Stanza 4 assures us that God’s will is done each day in our lives.

- Read the Third Petition of the Lord’s Prayer and its meaning in the Small Catechism (*LSB*, p. 324). What is God’s will?

- What is the most important gift the Father gives us according to stanza 4?
- What is meant by “The bread of earth and heaven”?

Stanza 5 speaks about our worship of God — our response to His grace, love and mercy.

- What is meant by the word “vocation”?
- How is our worship eternal?

Stanza 6 speaks of suffering and assures us that our deliverance is in Jesus.

- What is meant by “That day of bliss divine”?
- How do we look forward to that day?

Stanza 7 is a doxological stanza, that is, it gives glory to the Holy Trinity. It also sums up the hymn.

- What did the Father will?
- How did His Son fulfill this will?
- What does the Spirit give?
- What is our hope?

Making the Connection

We don’t know what happened to Dr. Helbich and his wife after they fled Erfurt. Their departure was a painful experience for them and those whom they left behind.

Likewise, we don’t know what life has in store for us this side of heaven. Without Christ the journey of life is dangerous and uncertain.

But we have been baptized into Christ! God’s promises stand. Nothing can separate us from His love.

As the biblical truths captured in this hymn brought the rector and his wife hope and encouragement, they speak the same to us.

- “The Lord my life arranges; / Who can His work destroy?” (st. 3). How, with the power of the Holy Spirit, can we reframe our thinking so that we understand this truth, causing worry to cease?
- “The bread of earth and heaven / Are by His kindness given” (st. 4). Why is the Eucharist so vitally important in our lives?
- “Praise God with acclamation / And in His gifts rejoice” (st. 5). What are the gifts of God that cause you to rejoice?

In Closing

So, what about those worries you shared at the beginning of this study? What assurance has God given you in the words of this hymn?

Worry and fear are sins. Jesus slew them on the cross.

As we sing this hymn laden with the declarations of God’s grace and presence, we are moved to trust Him above all things, even our worries and fears.

It is through this life of uncertainty that “He leads us home to heaven. / O praise the Three in One” (st. 7).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 713.

Prayer

O God, the helper of all who call on You, have mercy on us and give us eyes of faith to see Your Son that we may follow Him on the way that leads to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 25B).

The Day Is Surely Drawing Near

Lutheran Service Book 508 | study by Allen D. Lunneberg

Introduction

Whereas the Last Sunday of the Church Year will proclaim and celebrate the promised victory of eternal life for all who by faith confessed Jesus as their Savior, this next-to-last Sunday sounds a solemn warning to all who have not yet come to that faith and confession. Our hymn of the day describes the Last Day both as something to be feared for those who have neglected or rejected God's invitation of grace, and as a treasured promise and goal for those who

wait and pray in confident faith. In a day when so many are ignorant of or even reject God's plan revealed in His Word, the Bible, we point to Jesus who spoke plainly regarding His return, the Day of Judgment, and the deliverance available to all by faith in Him.

- How do you imagine most people think about the end of the world or the end of their lives? Or do they think about it at all? Why or why not?

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Matt. 25:31–46.

Angels show up at every major step forward in God's plan of salvation. Here they will accompany the return of Jesus on the Last Day as the last major step in God's plan. "All the nations" will be gathered, that is, everyone who ever lived will be raised with their bodies. Then "he will separate people one from another ... the sheep from the goats" (v. 32).

- When does "the judgment" actually happen? See 2 Cor. 6:2.

The proceedings begin with the sheep, the righteous. A summary of their good works is listed.

- How is this not to be interpreted as salvation by works? Why are the works mentioned? Hint, see James 2:18, 22, 26.
- What detail here shows that the good works of a Christian's active faith are almost automatic and certainly not kept record of by the Christian?

To the "goats" (unbelievers) on His left the King says, "Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt. 25:41). Sin results in separation. Unrepented sin results in eternal separation. What makes the judgment of hell most agonizing and fearful is that "the eternal fire" was not prepared for people to be there in the first place; a detail that supports the universal

claim of John 3:16, that God so loved the whole world, not just part of it.

Next, read 1 Thess. 4:13–18.

The question was, "When the Lord returns, when will the dead be raised, and will we who are still alive have to die first in order to be raised?" St. Paul uses the word "sleep" to describe the death of a Christian. His goal is "that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope" (v. 13). "Encourage one another with these words" (v. 18).

If you have a King James Bible (KJV), you need to know that the word "prevent" in v. 15 is a literal translation of the Latin *praevenio*. Whereas today the word prevent means to stop something, this word originally meant to precede, or go before. This is how modern translations have it. The point is that we who are alive when the Lord returns will not precede, or go before, those who have fallen asleep. It all happens at once, in the "twinkling of an eye." The dead are raised first, then we who are alive will be changed (1 Cor. 15:52).

- Describe what it means to grieve the death of a loved one but not "as others do who have no hope."
- Do you think the warning of hell and eternal punishment for unbelievers is necessary?
- Do you think the return of Christ is coming soon? See Rev. 22:7, 12, 20.
- What is the difference between the day of the death of a Christian and the Last Day?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

This hymn appeared first as an anonymous text in 1565. In 1586, however, a Lutheran pastor, Bartholomäus Ringwaldt (1532–99), revised it, calling it "a hymn about Judgment Day." It quickly became increasingly popular and sung

frequently, especially as the Thirty Years' War (1618–48) caused many to think that the Last Day was presently at hand.

- Is church attendance larger during wartime or peacetime? Why?
- What causes people these days to think that the world is coming to an end?

Text

The original seven stanzas have been restored to *LSB*. Only four of the seven stanzas, however, appeared in *Lutheran Book of Worship* (1978) and in *Lutheran Worship* (1982), namely, stanzas 1, 2, 6 and 7.

- What do the formerly missing stanzas (3–5) have in common?
- Why do you think these stanzas were removed in the 1978 and 1982 hymnals?

In stanza 1, that “fright shall banish idle mirth” almost goes without saying as the very “powers of the heavens will be shaken” (Luke 21:26). No one will be ignorant of what is happening when the Lord returns (1 Thess. 4:13–18; Mark 14:62; Matt. 16:27; Rev. 1:7).

Stanza 2 begins with the sounding of “the final trumpet,” the sound that accompanies the Lord’s return (Zech. 9:14; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thess. 4:16). The resurrection of those who have died and the instant change of those who are still alive is described.

“The books” of stanza 3 refer to the record of human activity. See Matt. 25:31–46; Rev. 20:12–15; Dan. 7:9–10; Matt. 16:27; and Rev. 22:12.

- Will a person have to “wait and see” what the verdict will be? Why or why not?
- What is the purpose of “the books”?

Stanza 4 is devastating Law describing the biblical truth for those who “scorned” the Lord and “despised His precious Word,” preferring “carnal pleasures” and “earthly treasures.” The “delivery” to Satan is described in Matt. 25:41 and Rev. 20:15.

- What “tool” or procedure does the Church have to call a Christian back from falling away and despising God’s Word? See Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5:1–5; 2 Cor. 2:6–11.

Stanzas 5–7 spring from the Gospel. Stanza 5 describes the confidence of faith in the gift of Christ’s atoning sacrifice. For the Christian there is no more condemnation possible (Rom. 8:1–2) because of Jesus’ salvation (Heb. 2:14–15; Gal. 3:13; 1 Peter 1:18–19; 2:24). Since Baptism, our names have been recorded in the Lamb’s “Book of Life” (Rev. 3:5; 20:12; Dan. 12:1).

The confidence of faith begins to turn to prayer in stanza 6, relying on Jesus’ promise to intercede for us before the Father’s throne (Rom. 8:34; 1 John 2:1; Is. 53:12; Luke 23:34; Heb. 9:24). We are saved by the “blood and merit” of Christ (1 Peter 1:18–19) and numbered with “all His saints in that blest place” (Rev. 7:9–17) where “we shall see Him face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

Finally, stanza 7 is a prayer for Jesus’ return and our endurance.

Making the Connection

With its sobering imagery and words of warning for all who would ignore, neglect or reject God and His gracious plan of salvation, this hymn helps us sing with calm confidence in God’s promise of salvation by simple faith in Christ and reliance on His Word and grace. In this faith we remain vigilant and ready for our Lord’s return and the culmination of our deliverance from sin, the devil and death.

- Do you think the return of Christ and our final endurance should occupy our attention and our prayers more than it does?
- Our receiving the Lord’s body and blood in the Sacrament of the Altar is a proclamation of His death until He comes (1 Cor. 11:26). How does it also speak of His resurrection, ascension and coming again?

In Closing

With thanksgiving and faith in the whole story of God’s grace in Christ, which we have reviewed in the past liturgical year, we sing with confidence and joy of our final deliverance and hope of eternal life.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 508.

Prayer

O Lord, so rule and govern our hearts and minds by Your Holy Spirit that, ever mindful of the end of all things and the day of Your just judgment, we may be stirred up to holiness of living here and dwell with You forever hereafter; 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 Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Trinity).

Lord, Enthroned in Heavenly Splendor

Lutheran Service Book 534 | study by John G. Fleischmann

Introduction

Jesus is our King. That is the emphasis of the readings, prayers and hymns for the Last Sunday of the Church Year.

The Explanation to the Small Catechism reminds us that there are three kingdoms over which our Lord reigns: the kingdom of power, which is the world; the kingdom of grace, which is the Church; and the kingdom of glory, which is heaven (*Luther's Small Catechism with Explanation*, Question 212).

Centered on the Holy Eucharist, this hymn praises Jesus for His reign in the Church through the Means of Grace and His reign at the right hand of God in heaven.

- How is Jesus present in the world today?
- When is a person brought into the kingdom of grace from the kingdom of power?
- How does Jesus reign in the Church today?
- When does the kingdom of grace become the kingdom of glory? How does this tie in with the theme of the Last Sunday of the Church Year?

Exploring the Scriptures

This hymn uses the wonderful worship imagery that is given to the Church in the Book of Revelation.

Read Rev. 1:5–6.

- What has God made us to be? Explain.
- What does the phrase “to him be glory and dominion forever and ever” mean?

Read Rev. 5:11–14. Here we have an illustration of the antiphonal worship that takes place in heaven.

- What is Jesus worthy to receive?
- Why?
- Where in the liturgy do we sing these words?

Read Rev. 7:9–17. The heavenly worship continues.

- Who is worshiping the Lamb?
- Who are those in white robes? Why are they singled out?
- What are the promises given about the kingdom of glory? What will God ultimately do?

Read Col. 1:13–20, the Epistle for this day.

- What has Jesus done for us (v. 13)?
- What do we learn about Jesus in verses 15 and 16?
- Of which kingdom do verses 17 and 18 speak?
- How did Jesus reconcile all things to Himself?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

This hymn was penned by the Rev. George Hugh Bourne (1840–1925), an Anglican priest and warden of St. Edmund's School at Salisbury.

The author desired to provide students with post-Communion hymns that would delve into the Eucharistic mystery. “Lord, Enthroned in Heavenly Splendor” was one of seven hymns included in a private publication in 1874. It was first offered to the Church in 1889 in the supplement to *Hymns Ancient and Modern*.

The imagery used by Bourne links the glories of heaven to the Eucharist on the altar in a beautiful way.

- How do hymns help you to better understand deep theological and biblical truths?
- As you read the stanzas of this hymn, how do they build upon each other?

Text

Stanza 1 begins by acknowledging that the Christ of Holy Communion is the same Christ who rose and is now reigning in heaven.

- What are the things that Jesus does for the Church at God's right hand now?
- How does Jesus lift up your head?
- What is the connection between Holy Communion and the phrase “Jesus, true and living bread”?

Stanza 2 makes the connection between the bread and wine on the altar and Jesus' lowly birth at Bethlehem. To the world, neither are spectacular or miraculous: the birth of a child; common bread and wine.

However, with the Word of God, bread and wine on the altar are no mere forms! They are the very body and blood of Jesus, given and shed for us!

- How do the angels hail Jesus here?
- What is the significance of the phrase “Branch and flow’r of Jesse’s stem”?
- What part of the Communion liturgy speaks of us joining our voices with the angels?

Stanza 3 takes us to *the* altar: the cross. It is there that the Paschal Lamb was slain for the redemption of the world.

- What comfort does the phrase “In its fullness undiminished / Shall forevermore remain” bring to you?
- According to the last line of this stanza, what is the effect of this once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus? See Heb. 10:10.

Stanza 4 makes the connection between the wilderness wandering of the children of Israel, the reign of Christ in heaven, and the lowly bread and wine on the altar.

- Read 1 Cor. 10:1–4. How did the Lord provide for the children of Israel?
- Read John 6:31–34. How does Jesus feed us in our journey to heaven?
- Read Ex. 17:1–7. How did God provide water for the children of Israel?
- How is Jesus the “Stricken rock with streaming side”?

This final stanza culminates with the heavenly worship of the Lord by all creation.

- How do we worship “with loud hosanna” as we celebrate the Eucharist?
- What certainty does the phrase “Ris’n, ascended, glorified” bring to you as you receive Holy Communion?

Making the Connection

This powerful hymn draws out the biblical imagery of heavenly worship and applies it to the Holy Eucharist.

As each stanza builds on the previous stanza, the words crescendo to the point where one can almost hear the angels joining their voices!

- How do the “praise songs” of today differ from the worship in Revelation and the words of this hymn?
- How does this hymn assist you in better understanding what takes place as you receive Holy Communion?

In Closing

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 534.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, You reign among us by the preaching of Your cross. Forgive Your people their offenses that we, being governed by Your bountiful goodness, may enter at last into Your eternal paradise; for You live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 29C).

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).

Salvation unto Us Has Come

Lutheran Service Book 555 | study by Christopher I. Thoma

Introduction

If you take a test and fail it because you didn't study, do you deserve an A? If you studied all week and memorized all of the necessary information and answered all of the questions correctly on the test, do you deserve an A? These are not difficult questions to answer because it is natural for man to play by the rule which says quite simply, "You get what you deserve."

Today's hymn, like the Gospel theme it supports, gets this rule a little mixed up. In fact, it turns it around completely.

- What do you believe to be the focus of the hymn?
- In your opinion, what is a "good work"?

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Matt. 20:1–16. In this Gospel Reading, Jesus makes it clear that God's fairness is different from the fairness of man. He tells us that the reward of heaven is not based on what we do; rather, God gives to us something other than what we deserve.

- After working all day, how would it make you feel if you received the same amount of pay as someone who worked for only an hour?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Paul Speratus (1484–1551), a colleague of Luther and a significant contributor to the efforts of the Reformation, fashioned this hymn from the gut-wrenching threads of experience. Speratus was an ordained preacher who was expelled from several cities for his evangelical preaching. He was excommunicated for preaching salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ and was eventually arrested, imprisoned and condemned to death. He did manage to escape his captors, and in this freedom was used by the Lord to great ends.

- During Speratus' time, what were the widely held views regarding good works? What role did monasticism play in this?
- How might the title of this hymn reflect the situation of the Reformation and the feelings of those hearing the pure Gospel through men like Luther and Paul Speratus?

Text

The language and tune of this hymn are borne along with what is seemingly a sigh of blissful relief. There is so much

Read Article IV of the Augsburg Confession:

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, 33).

- What light does this quotation shed on your understanding of good works in the Christian life?

- Remember that Jesus tells us that this parable represents the kingdom of heaven. With this in mind, what do we learn about the generosity of God?
- Read Is. 64:6. If we were to demand from God what we deserve because of our acts, what would we receive?
- Read Eph. 2:8–9. Salvation is referred to as what in this text?

joy, it appears that Speratus cannot stop writing stanzas, and so we are given a hymn with ten stanzas of great substance. Let's consider a few of these stanzas.

Stanza 1 does a wonderful job of telling the reader the purpose of the joyful hymn to follow. Stanzas 2–4 drop us into the dirty reality of the Law's requirement, our sinful condition, and our helpless standing against it.

- According to stanza 1, for whom did Christ die?
- Who else might have been considered as an advocate and/or redeemer (which is contrary to the Christian faith) by the people and Church of Speratus' time? Which statements in stanza 1 make Christ's role in the Church abundantly clear?
- What is the stance of stanza 2 toward those who would seek to purify themselves by monastic living? Describe in your own words the burden of the Law to sinners (particularly those who believe they must do good works to get to heaven). Is there certainty of salvation in this?
- Read Rom. 3:10–20. How does this text shed light on stanzas 2–4?

Stanza 5 is a significant turning point in the text of the hymn, setting the stage for the Christian to sing the remaining stanzas with confidence and certainty.

- Who is the focus of stanzas 2–4? Who is absent in stanzas 2–4 and introduced as the focal point in stanza 5?
- With this introduction, how is the direction of the hymn changed? The spirit of its tune? Christian certainty?

The remaining stanzas (6–10) reintroduce the Church to familiar terms.

- Read again the text of Eph. 2:8–10. What ancient and yet radically new theology is presented here?
- Consider the following terms in the remaining stanzas: Atonement, baptized, ransom, the cross, trust, peace,

justify. How does “saved by grace through faith in Christ” theology change their substance? (For example, Baptism as taught in the Roman Catholic Church removes only original sin. Actual sin remains.)

- Look for and discuss other words.

The hymn ends with a Trinitarian conclusion.

- Consider the First through Third Articles of the Apostles’ Creed and their meanings in the Small Catechism (*LSB*, 322–23). In his explanations, how does Luther make clear God’s redemptive plan in Christ?
- Read John 14:8–11, 23–28, and 15:26. How do these texts reflect upon not only stanza 10 but the entire hymn?

Making the Connection

Reflect on the parable in Matt. 20:1–16. Perhaps we often grumble to the Lord as the workers grumbled to the landowner.

- Why is it this way for us?
- Read Luke 15:3–7. What do these words reveal to us about others? About ourselves?

In Closing

“Salvation unto Us Has Come” seeks to reveal a right understanding of God’s Law, and it refreshes and strengthens the sin- and guilt-wearied heart with the Gospel. Ultimately, it reveals that this Gospel message truly is “foolishness” and a “stumbling block” as it flies in the face of the human understanding that “you get what you deserve.”

By Christ’s life, death and resurrection we are spared from what we deserve. In fact, the Innocent pays for the guilty, and the guilty are declared free. By the power of the Holy Spirit through the Gospel, faith and the merits of Christ’s innocence are given to us. What a joyful declaration

of justification for the believing heart, a heart now strengthened to cling to the Lord and not to self.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 555.

Prayer

Lord God, heavenly Father, since we cannot stand before You relying on anything we have done, help us trust in Your abiding grace and live according to Your Word; 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 Proper 20A).

For All the Saints

Lutheran Service Book 677 | study by Shawn L. Kumm

Introduction

“Saints alive!” someone exclaimed in surprise. Yes, indeed, saints alive. Saints alive here on earth; saints alive also in heaven. Certainly, the people of God believe that saints are alive!

All Saints’ Day, which falls on the first day of November, stirs up all kinds of thoughts, memories and ideas about saints.

- What are some common thoughts people have when they hear the word “saint?”

Turn to page xi in the front of *Lutheran Service Book*. Here is a list of the saints associated with the life of Christ and the time of the apostles.

- What do we learn about the lives of these saints from the letters “R” and “W” beside their names?

Now turn to pages xii–xiii. Here is a list of saints who span the beginning of time up to recent history.

- Scan through the lists on these two pages. Which names surprise you? Which names are unfamiliar?

Exploring the Scriptures

Hebrews 12:1–3 is the chief Scripture upon which this hymn is based, but before you read these verses, scan the New Testament list of saints in Hebrews 11.

- Which words are repeated throughout this chapter?

As is true of the people in the lists above, these saints also lived in a tension. That tension is described by the Latin phrase *simul iustus et peccator*, simultaneously justified (saint) and sinner.

- Choose two names from Hebrews 11 and discuss how each person was at the same time a sinner and a child of God.

Now read Heb. 12:1–3. The author of Hebrews sees us continuing in the same list of chapter 11.

- Who and what is the focus of faith?
- How is it the writer of Hebrews speaks as if your name is included in this list of believers?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

William Walsham How (1823–97) was born into a solicitor’s family and grew up in the historic market town of Shrewsbury, England. He spent his years of ministry in rural areas and the impoverished East End of London. In such challenging places How became known as the “children’s bishop.” This title of endearment reflected his great love and attention shown to an often-overlooked group of God’s kingdom. His published works include sermons, poetic verse and a still used volume on Holy Communion. How’s most well-known work, is the hymn “For All the Saints.”

- If you were to write a hymn about saints, what important points would you need to include? Which particular Bible passage would you want to use as the hymn’s foundation?

Originally this hymn was eleven stanzas long, but the three stanzas which reflected the ancient *Te Deum* are traditionally omitted. The remaining eight stanzas of “For All the Saints” give to the worshiper a well-developed theology of both the Church Triumphant, which is comprised of the

saints now gathered into heaven, and the Church Militant, the saints still fighting here on earth.

Text

Though at first glance this hymn seems to begin with the saints of God, careful observation shows the hymn writer rightly begins by addressing the first two stanzas to the Lord Jesus.

- What comfort do you look forward to in enjoying rest from your labors? See Rev. 21:1–4 for a fuller description of rest.
- In stanza 2 Jesus is called “captain.” Read 1 Tim. 6:12. What is the battle about? See Eph. 2:1–3 for a description of the enemy. Why is it necessary to have Jesus as your captain?

Stanzas 3 and 4 turn our focus from the saints who have gone before us to the saints here on earth and it is among the earthly saints that we are included.

- What caution do we need to keep when considering “the victor’s crown of gold”? Consider what Paul writes in 2 Tim. 2:1–5.
- Why do we “feebly struggle”? In what ways do you need help? Turn to Is. 35:3–4 and rejoice in God’s promises to you.

Stanza 5 speaks of the earthly fight of faith as “fierce” and “the warfare” as “long.”

- What makes you weary as you follow your captain, Jesus?

- What are the things of God that embolden and strengthen the saints here on earth? On what basis can St. Paul say what he does in 2 Tim. 4:7?

Stanzas 6–8 draw our eyes to the same rest that began the hymn. The setting of the sun on the lives of those who have died in Jesus is contrasted with the rising of the dead, the resurrection to come, all following the “King of Glory.” Finally, in stanza 8, the “countless host” of heaven are seen gathered around the Triune God.

- What is it about “the calm of paradise” (st. 6) that appeals to you most?

Making the Connection

Read the appointed Gospel for this day, Matt. 5:1–12. Here Jesus describes your baptismal life centered in His suffering, His death, His resurrection and His ascension.

- At which points does this hymn connect with the Beatitudes? In what ways do these both sing and speak of the same realities?

The important distinction is made that we do not pray *to* the saints nor do we pray *for* the saints, but we do *sing* with the saints and our prayers are joined with theirs. Especially on All Saints’ Day do we also *give thanks* for the saints. For examples see *LSB*, pages 250–251.

In Closing

“Our churches teach that the history of saints may be set before us so that we may follow the example of their faith and good works, according to our calling. ... [T]he Scriptures do not teach that we are to call on the saints or to ask the saints for help. Scripture sets before us the one Christ as the Mediator, Atoning Sacrifice, High Priest, and Intercessor [1 Timothy 2:5–6]” (AC XXI 1–2, p. 44).

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 677.

Prayer

Almighty and everlasting God, You knit together Your faithful people of all times and places into one holy communion, the mystical body of Your Son, Jesus Christ. Grant us so to follow Your blessed saints in all virtuous and godly living that, together with them, we may come to the unspeakable joys You have prepared for those who love You; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for All Saints’ Day).