

**THE
WORD IN**

Song

**Hymn of the
Day Studies for**

EASTER

THREE-YEAR LECTIONARY





THE
LUTHERAN CHURCH
Missouri Synod

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Awake, My Heart, with Gladness

Lutheran Service Book 467 | study by Carl C. Fickenscher II

Introduction

In the introduction to his sermon on Easter Sunday 1871, C.F.W. Walther announced: “On the festival of Easter, every Christian, yes, every human being is jubilant. ... Yes, my friends, today we must all employ this proud, defiant, heroic epic against sin, death, and hell. We must only mock sins today, only ridicule death, and just laugh at hell. Today every Christian should consider ridiculous whatever causes the least doubt of the forgiveness of his sins, of his standing in grace, of his righteousness before God, and of his salvation” (Joel R. Baseley, trans., *Festive Sounds* [Dearborn, MI: Mark V Publications, 2008], 128).

Yet, interestingly, the entire point of the sermon that follows is to comfort hearers who aren’t positively giddy on

Easter, who fear they might not be true believers, because ... they still fear. And fret. And stress in the sufferings of life. That’s still a reality, isn’t it! Even in this new age of the resurrection, we still take hard knocks, and they still get us down.

Is it really possible to laugh at sin and death and all the troubles they bring? Paul Gerhardt in “Awake, My Heart, with Gladness” calls us to do just that.

- What do you think? At first blush, are you on board with Gerhardt?
- Do you wake up on Easter sunrise ready to lead cheers for Jesus’ rising? If so, how so? If not, why not?

Exploring the Scriptures

John’s account of the resurrection, the Gospel lesson appointed for Easter Sunrise, is by far the most intimate of the four evangelists’ narratives. Read John 20:1–18, and notice the emotions.

- Describe Mary Magdalene’s roller coaster (vv. 1–2, 11–18). Can you sense the exclamation points on almost everything she says?
- How about for Peter and John (vv. 3–10)? Are they ready to laugh this Easter day?

Even after seeing the empty tomb, Peter, John and Mary don’t understand the significance of what has happened (v. 9). With a bit more time to process — and thorough instruction by Christ and His Spirit — Paul grasps what Jesus’ resurrection has accomplished. Read 1 Cor. 15:20–26, 54–57 and Col. 2:15.

- Notice the words “enemies,” “victory,” “disarmed,” “triumphing.” What sort of event do they bring to mind?
- In what ways is Jesus’ resurrection like a battle won? Over what or whom has He triumphed?

Paul develops this image of the resurrection as victory in battle more fully in Rom. 8:32–39.

- How bloody is the battle — including the collateral damage? Have you yourself ever been a casualty of this struggle? In what ways? Have you felt like laughing afterward?
- What words, though, does Paul use here to describe our victory (v. 37)? How is our victory a result of the resurrection of Jesus? (Consider vv. 38–39. Would that be possible if not for Easter?)

Exploring the Hymn

Background

We probably wouldn’t expect Paul Gerhardt (1607–76) to be given to excessive joviality. In fact, we might picture him not smiling much at all. His wife died after just 13 years of marriage. Only one of their five children survived. For many years, he was without a pastoral call. Today’s hymn was written during the Thirty Years’ War (1618–48), a religious conflict between Catholic and Protestant rulers.

Romans 8:35 could well have been a description of this war in Europe. Read it again. Nearly a third of Germany’s population perished in the violence and in the rioting, famine and plagues that resulted.

“Awake, My Heart, with Gladness” first appeared in publication in 1648, the year the war ended. But the war did not end in victory for the Lutheran princes. While the Peace of Westphalia did assure the survival of religious freedom, it was hardly occasion to celebrate.

Text

It did not arise from personal experience or recent history, but Gerhardt nevertheless crafted a jubilant celebration of victory in the resurrection of Jesus.

Stanza 1 takes us back to the first Easter, when Mary and the other women were up early.

- Read the stanza and picture again the gloomy pre-dawn procession to the tomb (John 20:1). Besides Jesus' death or the death of our loved ones, what else makes for such sadness at the cemetery? (Check lines 5 and 6.)
- It was, of course, more than the morning light that revived the women. Might "sun" be interpreted as "Sun"? (See Mal. 4:2.)

If you want to look for mocking laughter, stanza 2 tells where it could be found.

- Read the first two lines of the stanza. How do you imagine the cackling in hell? There's actually no passage of Scripture that describes the scene, but Walther, too, envisions it — and in even more detail — in his Easter hymn "He's Risen, He's Risen" (LSB 480:2). Read this also.
- What Scripture does let us see is the moment Satan's "boast is turned to gloom." Read 1 Peter 3:18–19. Jesus' proclamation in hell wasn't Gospel to the damned there. What, instead, became undeniable to the devil and his prisoners when Christ showed up with flesh and spirit reunited? What had "He who is strong to save" now done? (See Luke 11:21–22.)

Making the Connection

Even as Easter Christians, we're going to hurt and worry and weep. Satan is still out and about for a "little season." But he is now powerless.

In Closing

Was Walther just an old ivory tower theologian out of touch with real life? Was Gerhardt just whistling in the dark? None of us will always fully avail ourselves of this new reality: Jesus alive means we may laugh every foe to scorn!

- Don't just whistle in the dark; sing or read aloud together *LSB 467*.

Now read stanzas 3–5. The sight of Jesus alive "gladdens" because not just the devil, but "no foe" stands anymore to take away our hope.

- Remember all those enemies Paul listed in Rom. 8:38–39? Which of Satan's henchmen does Gerhardt now name in stanzas 4–5? Where is their victory, their sting (1 Cor. 15:54–57)?
- But here's where we might ask if Gerhardt goes over the top. Even with all those foes down, can you say "nothing ever saddens," "sin I laugh to scorn," no cares, no troubles, "misfortune now is play"?

For such remarkable claims, one has to go back to the beginning of stanza 3: "What peace it [Jesus' resurrection] doth impart!"

- Read the next installment of John's Easter story: John 20:19–23. What did Jesus' peace mean to the disciples? (Think about what they'd done for Jesus in His hour of crisis. And now He's back?!!)
- What does peace mean to us? Consider this: "Peace" announces that the sin which made us God's enemies has been removed. We're back together with God. And if we're reconciled with the God who's all-loving, all-powerful and all-wise, then what do we know we'll always have? What will we ever lack? Say that again. Given all that, does anything need to trouble us? Need our joy ever give way to gloom? Can we laugh at sin?

Best of all, of course, if we are reconciled to God by Jesus' death and resurrection, we know we can "cling forever" to Christ. "My Lord will leave me never." Savor stanzas 6–7, and read Rev. 2:10.

- Discuss how, when we feel troubled or afraid, we can draw upon "Jesus risen!" to cast aside our concerns.

Prayer

Almighty God, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. We humbly pray that we may live before You in righteousness and purity forever; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Easter Sunrise).

Christ Jesus Lay in Death's Strong Bands

Lutheran Service Book 458 | study by Larry A. Peters

Introduction

Could it be that this hymn is more valued in theory than in usage? It was Luther's favorite of all his hymn texts, but it is not quite a favorite among Lutherans. That is too bad. We are poorer for not singing this hymn as often as we might. It was probably based on the hymn that follows it in *LSB*, "Christ Is Arisen."

- When was the last time you sang this hymn?
- Would you agree that this is a classic Easter text?
- Compare this to the hymn upon which it is loosely based. How might we call it an improvement?
- Is the number seven significant to this hymn?

Exploring the Scriptures

Two Scripture texts are pivotal to this hymn. One is Ex. 12:7–14, about the Passover lamb. Look at Exodus and compare the Passover lamb to Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

- Does the blood of this lamb anticipate the blood of Christ that cleanses us from all sin?
- Luther returns to this imagery in the final stanza. How is the Lord's Supper the successor to and the fulfillment of the Passover? What does the Lord's Supper anticipate?

The other text deeply intertwined with Luther's hymn is the historic Epistle for Easter, 1 Cor. 5:6–8. This also focuses on Christ, our Passover lamb, who has removed the old leaven of sin and made us new.

- Is Christ a symbol of the Passover lamb, or is the Passover lamb a symbol of Christ?

- The great exchange of the old leaven of sin for the new life in Christ is a familiar theme of St. Paul. Note the contrast between enmity/malice and sincerity/truth. How is this brought about in our lives? How does repentance and forgiveness bring forth this new leaven in us?

Paul wrote to Timothy that Christ has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel (2 Tim. 1:10). Though it appeared that death and hell swallowed up Christ, He swallowed these up in His mighty duel. So, Paul can ask: Death, where is your sting? Grave, where is your victory? (1 Cor. 15:54–55).

- Is death done? Has it been defeated?
- So, what has death become? Is death now something through which we pass with Christ to our own joyful resurrection to eternal life? Do we believe this?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Martin Luther (1483–1546) published this in 1524 in his Erfurt *Enchiridia*, and it has been called one of the greatest of his hymns, second only to "A Mighty Fortress." Luther referred to this hymn often, and it was also a favorite of J.S. Bach, whose first Easter cantata was based upon all seven stanzas.

The best hymns are concise statements of our faith, literally like a sung catechism. Luther had great respect for the original on which this is based, but he saw how to improve upon it by drawing more fully upon the rich and profound scriptural texts that describe Christ and His saving work.

- Without singing the stanzas, read them as a catechetical text. How does Luther describe Christ's work to save us?

- Did you notice how many biblical references Luther compacted into each line? See how many you can find and source in Scripture.

Text

One of the characteristics of good hymnody is that it weaves a rich fabric of texts and imagery into one concise text. Note how Luther unfolds the Easter story.

- Stanza 1 begins with Christ in death's bands. Are these the linen burial bands or the prison bands that have held us? Or both?
- "Therefore" is no small word. Because of what Christ has done, we have cause to sing. What song does faith sing?
- "Loud songs of alleluia": Why do we put away the alleluia during Lent, and what does it mean to sing it again during the Easter season?

In the second stanza, Luther focuses on sin's terrible effects. We were ruined, unable to repair sin's damage or death, imprisoned and held captive. Note the contrast between the condition of the sons of man and the Son of Man (Christ). Read Heb. 2:17.

- How desperate is mankind for redemption?
- How did Christ fulfill all righteousness as well as suffer all punishment in our place?

The third stanza sets the stage for a great battle between Christ and our enemies of sin and death. Death wore the crown of victory until Christ took it. Now death is left empty and impotent.

- Note how vividly Luther describes Christ's victory. He who once wore the pallor of death now leaves death itself pale and wounded. Do we believe this? Do we live as though death has died?

The fourth stanza mirrors the wording of "Christians, to the Paschal Victim" (*LSB* 460). When life and death did battle, life won.

- "Holy Scripture plainly saith": Is this what Scripture plainly says? Is this the core and center of our Gospel proclamation? Read Luke 24:44–48. Should it be?

Making the Connection

Sometimes we think of an empty cross as a sign of the resurrection or a crucifix as a sign of Christ's death. The truth is that both crosses point to the same truth: to Jesus Christ crucified and risen. There is no other Gospel, and there is no Gospel apart from this truth. Luther does not merely focus on the empty tomb, but upon the cosmic battle for us and our salvation that Christ fought. He was faithful unto death so that we might wear His crown of life.

Passover embodied this hope of deliverance from enemies and redemption of slaves. Easter and the Eucharist now embody this hope for us. Here we see the Paschal Lamb who was slain. Here we are covered by the blood of the

In Closing

Seven is a number that brings to mind the idea of completeness. In seven stanzas of seven lines, each with seven syllables, Luther lays before us Christ's completed work of redemption as our cause for hope, our source of joy and our witness in song. It is a magnificent text that effortlessly ties together so many things we often leave separate or disjointed. Let us keep the feast to which the Lord invites us!

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 458.

- Christ's death swallowed up death. This is the promise of Is. 25:8 fulfilled in Christ. Though our eyes do not yet see this clearly, we see it by _____. This is the tension in which we live — eyes and faith.

The fifth stanza shows how the Passover is fulfilled in Christ. See how the final stanza carries the same idea.

- How is Easter the fulfillment of Passover? How is Holy Communion our Christian Passover?
- Note how the tree of the cross and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil are contrasted. As the Preface for Good Friday says, "the serpent who overcame by the tree of the garden might likewise by the tree of the cross be overcome." Is this why we have a cross/crucifix ever before us?

The sixth stanza ties the Old Testament idea of keeping the feast to our Easter festival. Christ is the Sun of Righteousness who warms our hearts and shines with the brightness of eternal day to end sin's night.

- How does the Church Year help us to keep Christ and His death and resurrection ever before us?

covenant. Here we feast upon Christ's flesh and blood. Here Christ imparts to us the fruits of His death and resurrection. We keep the faith by keeping the festival, sharing the story of our redemption, and rejoicing in what Christ has accomplished for us.

- Does this hymn now sing differently because you have mined the depths of its words and witness?
- Can you see why Luther called it his favorite hymn text? Could it become a favorite of yours?
- Does this hymn explain the character of Lutheran hymnody that puts Christ and His story front and center?

Prayer

Almighty God the Father, through Your only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, You have overcome death and opened the gate of everlasting life to us. Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of our Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by Your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Easter Day).

Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia

Lutheran Service Book 463 | study by Richard J. Serina Jr.

Introduction

“Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!”

This is the way many of our congregations open the Easter season. As the pastor begins the service, he announces that Christ is risen, and the congregation responds with joy that He is indeed risen. But what difference does it make?

In the Hymn of the Day for use on either Easter Evening or Easter Monday, we sing of the significance surrounding

our Lord’s resurrection, and precisely why it should bring us a joy that even death cannot destroy.

- What are the first images that come to mind when you think about Easter morning?
- How do those images relate to what we celebrate in the Easter season?

Exploring the Scriptures

The first Lutheran churches of the 16th century would celebrate Easter for as many as three and a half days: Easter Sunday, Easter Monday, Easter Tuesday and Easter Wednesday. The Gospel lesson for Easter Monday, when this hymn is appointed, is “The Road to Emmaus” (Luke 24:13–35).

The setting of this lesson is the day of the resurrection, and some of the Lord’s followers are on their way to a near-by town called Emmaus.

- According to verses 1 and 13, on what day of the week are the followers walking to Emmaus? What has just happened in Jerusalem?
- What were the followers talking about along the way? How does Jesus correct them in verses 25–26?

While they are walking, Jesus joins them, but they cannot recognize Him until their arrival in Emmaus. Then, a miraculous set of events unfolds.

- Why can’t the followers of Jesus recognize Him on the way to Emmaus?
- What event leads to the followers recognizing Him (vv. 30–31)? When is it in our worship that we see the Lord clearly, as those followers did when they recognized Him?
- As these followers looked back on the part of their journey when they did not recognize Jesus in verse 32, how did they realize their Jesus had been present with them?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Though no one knows with certainty the author of “Christ the Lord Is Risen Today; Alleluia,” we do know that it was sung with regularity as part of the Church’s Easter worship during the days surrounding the Reformation.

The hymn was actually used as part of Morning Prayer prior to the chief Easter Communion service. Though it sounds odd to our ears, the singing of the hymn ordinarily included two acolytes, representing the angels at the tomb, and three deacons, representing the three women that found the empty tomb. They would alternately sing the stanzas of the hymn, with the choir joining in the refrain of “Alleluia.”

Imagine the joy of an early Easter dawn: As the sun was starting to emerge from the dark outside the church, people huddled inside for warmth, when out of the darkness acolytes and deacons around the altar began singing about

the resurrection of Christ. Then, the pastor would join and begin the singing of the Te Deum.

- Why do we gather on Easter morning for a sunrise service before the light of day?
- What does this contrast between darkness and light have to do with Easter?
- How does Jesus overcome darkness in His resurrection?

This hymn captures all the joy of Easter morning, but the joy does not end on that Sunday. There is a reason the Church’s Easter season, and with it the proclamation of Christ’s resurrection, continues for 50 days until Pentecost. Easter is celebrated every Sunday, as a matter of fact, whenever we gather around Word and Sacrament. In our Sunday worship, we commemorate the resurrection of our Lord by coming together on the day of the week when He was raised

from the dead. In our worship, we make Christ's victory over death and the grave known to the whole world. Singing this hymn on Easter Evening or Easter Monday is simply a way of retelling that Easter story.

- What themes distinguish Easter hymns from other hymns? At what other services of the Church are Easter hymns appropriate?

Text

The first stanza of the hymn begins with an announcement of the Lord's resurrection; then it calls us to "hasten on [our] way" and to "offer praise with love replete." We lay our gifts at the feet of the "paschal victim." The word "paschal" refers to the Passover, and we believe that the Passover lamb was Jesus Christ Himself.

- Where are we hastening "on [our] way" when we sing this hymn: to the empty tomb, to worship or both?
- Who is the "paschal victim," and what makes Him a victim? Where do we find this paschal victim when we gather?

In stanza 2, we sing of what that Passover lamb has done on our behalf. Jesus is the Lamb who bled for us, His sheep. Jesus is the Sinless One who died in the stead of sinners. Now, the Jesus who subjected Himself to death has risen to life, never to die again. There is a great connection here again between the Passover lamb, whose blood was shed to protect the people of Israel from the angel of death, and the

Making the Connection

On Easter Sunday morning, we gather to proclaim the glory of the one who has suffered and died for our sins and who has risen from the dead, never to die again. What this means for us is that all those who were baptized into the death of Jesus Christ, as St. Paul says in Romans 6, will be raised with Him to everlasting life. This hymn is but an extension of our Easter joy that we share in the resurrection of Jesus Christ and will live forever with Him.

In Closing

We open the Easter season with the cry, "Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia!" This proclamation of Easter joy remains with you because it is your only confidence in the face of death. You cling to this crucified and risen Lord, you trust all His promises, and you know that He will raise you again from the grave just as He has conquered death in His own resurrection.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 463.

Lamb of God Himself, whose blood was shed upon the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

- What did the Israelites do with the Passover lamb in Exodus 12? How is Jesus our Passover lamb?
- Where is the blood of Jesus applied to us?
- How is the angel of death disarmed against us?
- Where is it that Christians celebrate their Passover feast?

The imagery of stanza 3 gives us the same picture of a Lord who has done battle with death and emerged victorious. Jesus is the "victim undefiled" who has reconciled sinners to God through His death. How did He do so? Through a "strange and awesome strife" that occurred when Jesus brought "death and life" into contention with each other.

- Where did Jesus bring death and life into contention with each other?
- Why did Jesus not deserve death? Why did Jesus endure death anyway?
- What has the death of Jesus accomplished? What does His resurrection mean for our future beyond the grave?

Stanza 4 draws our attention back to the worship of Easter Sunday. We gather to sing the praises of Him who died for the salvation of the world. He has risen from the dead and now demands our "grateful homage." The one who suffered death for the forgiveness of our sins has risen from the dead, never to face death again.

- We face death every year between Easters. How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ strengthen you when death happens to your loved ones?
- Where do we find the paschal victim, the Lamb of God, the Sinless One who dies for sinners, when we gather together? How is our feast at the table a celebration of Christ's resurrection?

Prayer

O God, in the paschal feast You restore all creation. Continue to send Your heavenly gifts upon Your people that they may walk in perfect freedom and receive 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 Easter Evening/Easter Monday).

Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won

Lutheran Service Book 490 | study by Richard J. Serina Jr.

Introduction

No one looks forward to funerals. Most of us don't like to attend funerals or think about funerals or even plan our own funerals. The reason we don't like funerals is that they represent death, grief and loss to us. But the Lord seeks to give us hope in the midst of such funerals, to turn our mourning into joy, to rearrange our thoughts and reorder our feelings about death. He does this by reminding us of the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ, and what that death and resurrection means for our lives.

Exploring the Scriptures

The Gospel lesson for Easter Tuesday is Luke 24:31–49. This is one of several lessons — including Luke 24:1–35, John 20:19–31 and John 21:1–14 — in which Jesus appears to His disciples after the resurrection. In each case, the disciples have a mixture of doubt and fear, yet Jesus seeks to give them proof of His risen flesh so that they may believe.

- What causes the disciples to doubt the resurrection of Jesus? What other explanations could they offer to explain the empty tomb?
- What examples do you find in contemporary culture that attempt to deny or reinterpret the resurrection?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Christian Fürchtegott Gellert (1715–69) was a respected professor of theology and philosophy during a period when many began to oppose traditional Christian beliefs. Professor Gellert specialized in teaching the reasons for Christian morality — why we do what we do as believers. However, those who opposed traditional Christian doctrine believed that our beliefs should have no relationship to how we practice our faith, that what we believe and what we do are completely separate and have nothing to do with each other.

- What problem can you find with those who separate doctrine and morality, faith and practice? Do the Scriptures separate the two?

This is the theme of our hymn for Easter Tuesday, “Jesus Lives! The Victory's Won.” We sing and hear in our hymn the very message of Easter: that our deaths and resurrections are now changed through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

- How do you feel the morning of a funeral or when you walk into the nave and take your seat to begin a funeral service? Why do we feel this way?
- What does the message of Easter say about Jesus' death and resurrection? What hope does that give us?

- What about the resurrection of Jesus Christ is hard for us to accept or understand?

Read Luke 24:36–49. Beginning with verse 36, we find Jesus appearing to His disciples in much the same way as He did in John 21. He greets them with the words “Peace to you!” and then proceeds to dispel their disbelief in His risen body.

- In verse 37, how do the disciples respond to Christ's appearance? Why would they respond this way?
- How does Jesus go about convincing them that it was truly Him they saw? Where else does our Lord eat a meal with His disciples after His resurrection?

- What do the Scriptures say about those who profess belief but reject good works, for instance? What do the Scriptures say about those who practice good works but do not believe in Christ or the Gospel?

Gellert rejected the separation between faith and works, between doctrine and practice. So, when he picks up his pen to write a hymn about Easter and the resurrection, he wants us to know just how relevant the doctrine of the resurrection is to our faith and our lives. He leaves us a hymn dedicated to explaining precisely how the resurrection should inspire confidence in our hearts and joy even in the face of death.

- Do we consider the doctrine of the resurrection relevant for our lives? If so, how is it relevant?

Text

The hymn begins with a statement we would never think to make: “Death no longer can appall me.” Since Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and promises to raise our mortal bodies from the dirt just the same, we no longer fear death like those without faith. Rather, we have confidence in the face of death because we believe the Jesus who rose from the grave will raise us also.

- Are we frightened or “appalled” by death? What scares us about death?
- What does the resurrection of Jesus mean for our death?

Stanza 2 describes the victory that Jesus has won. We sing that Christ is no longer stuck in the tomb with His body left to decay, but He has indeed risen from that tomb, ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of the Father, where He rules over us in His Church and grants us all gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation.

- If Jesus Christ is now ruling in the heavens, what does that mean for our eternal destination?

Stanzas 3 and 4 reveal the clear difference that the resurrection of Jesus Christ makes for our lives today. Since Jesus has died for us, we should live “Pure in heart and act.” Since this Jesus has also proven that He will not leave us or

sever us from Himself, we trust that He will come to our defense when the devil attacks. Far from a “stale” doctrine or mere intellectual belief, the resurrection of Jesus proves His power over death, His love for fallen sinners, and His pledge to raise our bodies from the grave to live with Him forever.

- Jesus has died for our sins and risen to grant us eternal life. How should that change the way we approach our lives? If Jesus died and rose for us, then why would we take our sin lightly or disregard our faith?
- How often do you think about the death and resurrection of Jesus when you are confronted with sin? What encouragement to avoid sin does that death and resurrection of our Lord give you?

Stanza 5 brings us back to the theme of this hymn: our confidence in the face of death. Here a stunning scene is painted of a Christian on his or her deathbed. When we pass through death’s “gloomy portal,” we calm our “trembling breath” and, “as fails each sense,” our faith cries out: “Jesus is my confidence!”

- When you think about the day of your death, what comes to mind?
- What about the resurrection of Jesus gives you confidence as death draws near? What testimony will you give your loved ones when they stand by your deathbed?

Making the Connection

We will all face death; this much is certain. Death, says St. Paul, is the penalty for sin (Rom. 6:23). Since all have sinned, all of us will die (Rom. 3:23). However, Jesus has endured death for our sakes and for our sins and has risen to grant us everlasting life free from sin, death and the devil. Since Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, we no longer look at death the same way. We do not fear death because death is not permanent for the Christian. Our bodies will not remain in the grave, for Jesus will return to raise our flesh and clothe us with incorruptibility, immortality and

imperishability forever. This is our confidence in the face of death.

- Think back on the days you lost loved ones to death or the days you buried them. How does the resurrection of Jesus Christ give you hope even in that loss? How would your grief be different if Jesus were not risen?
- How does the resurrection genuinely matter for you each day? What kind of change would it make in your life if you went about your business believing that Jesus will raise this body of yours from the grave?

In Closing

No one looks forward to a funeral, but we need not fear it either, just as we need not fear death. Rather, on account of our Lord’s resurrection and His promise to raise our bodies in the same way, we have confidence in the face of death. But our confidence only comes from knowing this crucified and risen Lord, who will ensure that our deaths are not final, and who will raise our bodies and grant to us a life without end.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 490.

Prayer

Almighty God, through the resurrection of Your Son, You have secured peace for our troubled consciences. Grant us this peace evermore that trusting in the merit of Your Son we may come at last to the perfect peace of heaven; 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 Easter Tuesday).

Long before the World Is Waking

Lutheran Service Book 485 | study by John T. Pless

Introduction

Easter does not erase frustration for Peter and the other disciples, who have spent the night fishing without success. Empty nets and empty stomachs are filled by the risen Lord who comes to them in the dim light of dawn. Where the Lord Jesus is dishing out His gifts there is always more, “grace upon grace” (John 1:16). This post-Easter fishing trip is no exception. The Lord shows Himself to be the God who satisfies the hungry with good things. Out of the bounty of the redemption won at Calvary, the resurrected Savior feeds His disciples before sending them to feed His lambs and sheep.

Exploring the Scriptures

Read John 21:1–17.

- Which disciples are with Simon Peter in this text?
- This episode brings to mind another “fishing trip” involving the disciples. See Luke 5:1–11. How is it similar? What is different?
- In John 21:3, Peter rather abruptly announces, “I am going fishing.” Is he intent on returning to his former vocation? Had he forgotten the Lord’s mandate in John 20:21?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926), an Anglican priest and hymn writer, grew up in a home marked by an appreciation of poetry. Studies at Cambridge, work as an editor of a popular Christian magazine, parish ministry, and service as bishop of Thetford provided impetus for writing hymn texts based on events in the life of Jesus and other biblical themes.

For several years, Dudley-Smith desired to write a hymn text reflective of John 21. While vacationing at Ruan Manor in Cornwall in August 1981, he made frequent trips to the beach at Poldhu Cove, which inspired him to write “Long before the World Is Waking.” The hymn was first published in 1983.

Text

Stanza 1 describes a coastal scene shrouded with early morning fog, perhaps etched on Dudley-Smith’s mind from his visits to the British coast. Whatever images

This 20th-century hymn based on John 21:1–17 tells the story of the Lord who came to His disciples on the shore of the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias) and still comes to us in Word and Sacrament to cast out our doubt, fill us with faith in His promises and free us to live in service to our neighbors.

- How does the hymn describe the setting for this post-resurrection appearance of Jesus?
- How does the hymn contrast the mood of the disciples with the words of Jesus?
- When do the disciples recognize that this early morning visitor is the Lord? How does Peter react?
- How many fish are caught? What is the significance of this number?
- John notes that this is the third time Jesus appeared to His disciples after His resurrection (John 21:14). Why are these appearances important? See Acts 1:3.
- What does Jesus do after breakfast? See John 21:15–17.

Dudley-Smith had in mind, he transposes them to the shores of Galilee, as weary disciples come to dawn with nothing to show for their nocturnal labor. The calm of dawn is broken by the voice of the Lord as He bids unsuccessful fisherman to cast their nets again.

Following the contours of the narrative from John 21, the hymn writer describes in stanza 2 the heaving of the disciples as they struggle to retrieve nets now laden with a plentiful catch. Dudley-Smith pictures John caught up in wonderment at the recognition of Jesus and Peter scrambling fully clothed into the water.

Stanza 3 describes a surf-side breakfast already prepared. This is not a meal of the disciples’ making. Jesus is the host who provides bread and fish for hungry disciples. The continuity of this meal with the meals Jesus hosted prior to His crucifixion is captured with the phrase, “As of old His friends to greet.” The risen Lord is none other than the Jesus who called these men to the life of discipleship in the first place.

Stanzas 4 and 5 transport us from the scene described in John 21 to the present with the confident proclamation, “Christ is risen!” His joyful announcement still sounds forth, dispelling the gloomy mists of “grief and sighing.” Stanza 4 recounts what Jesus’ resurrection removes: sins, sorrows, fear, failure, doubt and denials. All these “Full and free forgiveness find” in the word of the crucified and risen Christ.

Making the Connection

The resurrection of our Lord makes all the difference in the world. We are not left in sin and death, for He has died in our stead and risen from the grave; death has no dominion over Him. It was not the empty tomb but the appearances of the risen Lord that gave the disciples the assurance of the resurrection. In His coming to them, the Lord comforts and sustains them as His disciples:

Betrayal, denial, and weakness formed a searing burden of guilt upon the whole circle of disciples. Only the appearances of the Risen One precisely to these guilty disciples bridged the gap, and were already in themselves

In Closing

In these days of Easter, we rejoice in the Lord who was put to death for our sins and raised again for our justification. With His Gospel and Sacraments, He gives us the promise of the forgiveness of sins, and embedded in that absolution is our resurrection from the dead. He does not leave us alone in our sins, our doubts and our frustrations, but He comes with His word of peace to sustain us in faith and set us free for a life of love in the world.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 485.

- How are these sins evident in the lives of the disciples? See Luke 22:54–62.
- How does John 20:20 help us understand stanza 4?

Stanza 5 locates the singing congregation in the Divine Service where Christ Jesus still meets us, “Feeds and comforts, pardons still.” Not limited by time or space, the Lord is not confined to Galilee but gives Himself to us “All our days, on ev’ry shore.” He “is ours forevermore!”

an expression to the disciples of their being forgiven. (Walter Künneth, *The Theology of the Resurrection* [CPH, 1965], 89)

- How do these words from Künneth help us understand how comforting the appearance of Jesus was to Peter and the others? How does the hymn accent this?
- We are not like the disciples. We have not seen the Lord. Yet, how is their comfort given to us? See John 20:19–23.
- Read 1 Cor. 15:56. How is this text reflected in stanza 5?

Prayer

Almighty God, by the glorious resurrection of Your Son, Jesus Christ, You destroyed death and brought life and immortality to light. Grant that we who have been raised with Him may abide in His presence and rejoice in the hope of eternal glory; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Easter Wednesday).

O Sons and Daughters of the King

Lutheran Service Book 470/471 | study by Paul Gregory Alms

Introduction

When a mom or dad speaks, children listen. That is the expectation. When there are times of danger or discipline, a parent raises his voice and warns or scolds his child. The tone and volume of the parent's voice tells his son or daughter to pay attention. What a parent says is important for a child to hear.

But it is not only in situations of discipline or danger that a parent might cry out to his family. It also happens in moments of great joy. A mom wants to share her joy and calls her children to come and join her in her happiness. That is

what is going on in the hymn "O Sons and Daughters of the King." The Church is calling out to her children to rejoice. We, the sons and daughters of the King, are addressed by the Church to rejoice at the wonderful events of Easter. All the Church is called to hear and share in the joy of Christ's resurrection.

- Have you ever thought of yourself as a son or daughter of the King? Who is that King? When do we become His children? How does that relate to Easter?

Exploring the Scriptures

The Scripture texts that form the basis for this hymn are the resurrection stories in Mark 16 and John 20. In fact, the hymn is a rather straightforward rendering of the stories in these Gospels, especially the portions in Mark 16:5-7 and John 20:19-29. It is almost like a sung Bible study. The hymn text presents the stories and their meaning simply and directly.

Stanza 1 introduces the hymn by addressing the worshiping congregation directly as "sons and daughters of the King." The concluding stanza returns to this address by inviting the congregation to raise hearts and voices to God. In between these first and last stanzas, the stories from Mark and John are told. Read Mark 16:5-7.

- Whom do the women see when they enter the tomb? While there is said to be a "young man," it is clear he is an angel. What is his message?
- What does he say about Jesus?
- While Jesus is not in the tomb, where does the angel say the disciples will be able to find Him?

- How does Mark 14:28 help us to understand where Jesus will meet the disciples?
- Where does the risen Jesus promise to meet us today?

Read John 20:19-28. There are two Sundays mentioned here. The first is Easter Sunday itself. The next is a week later.

- The text says on that first night the disciples were afraid. What were the first words out of Jesus' mouth when He came to them in that room? How would that have comforted the disciples?
- How does Thomas react when the disciples tell him that Christ has risen? Are we ever like Thomas? How? Why?
- What does Jesus do to remove Thomas's doubts?
- What blessing does Jesus give to those who believe without seeing? Are we included in that blessing? How?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Although this hymn is attributed to Jean Tisserand (d. 1494), a popular French Franciscan preacher of the 17th century, it is doubtful that he was the author. The roots of the hymn text stretch back to the early 1500s, when a Latin poem was published under the title "A Joyous Chant for the Time of Easter." That poem was translated into French sometime in the 17th century and used in liturgical settings in France. It was used there on Easter evening in the Roman Catholic Mass.

The English text is from the pen of John Mason Neale (1818-66), a hymn writer and translator whose work is reflected in 22 of the hymns in *Lutheran Service Book*. Neale was an Anglican priest in England who wrote and translated many hymns. There are many English translations of this hymn, but his has become the standard English text.

- Notice how this hymn originated in 16th-century Latin, became popular in Catholic France, was translated by an Englishman and now is sung by American Lutherans

in the 21st century. What does this tell you about the Church's hymnody? Is it a strength or a weakness that our hymns have such varied origins?

Text

Stanzas 2 and 3 of the hymn focus on Mark 16:5–7. The two stanzas condense and tell the story of the women going to the tomb to look for Jesus. They encounter an angel who announces that Jesus has risen and that He will go and meet the disciples in Galilee. There is in this short story surprise and promise.

- How are the women surprised by the angel's announcement? What had they expected to find?
- What promise does the angel make?

Making the Connection

This hymn text is a strong recitation of the story of Christ's resurrection and His appearances to the women and to the disciples in the Upper Room. The challenge for us is to find ourselves in the story. After all, the hymn addresses us and calls us to sing and rejoice.

There are several points where we can "jump right in" and see ourselves in this hymn.

- "Galilee" (st. 3): Christ promises to meet His followers in Galilee. Where is our Galilee? Where does our risen Lord promise to meet us?

In Closing

We are sons and daughters of the King. Through Baptism into His death and resurrection, Christ has made us to be children of our heavenly Father. He comes among us and dispels our fear as He did that very first Easter morning. With His word of peace and His presence among us, we are enabled to confess Him as "Lord and God" as Thomas did. So, we can follow the hymn's directive and raise to God "laud and jubilee and praise" (st. 9)!

- Read aloud or sing together *LSB* 470 or 471.

Stanzas 4–8 recount the appearance of Jesus in the Upper Room as told in John 20. It is a literal and close telling of the story in poetic form.

- Read stanza 4 and try to imagine yourself in that Upper Room. What change in emotion might have occurred when Christ appeared and spoke?
- Why do you think Thomas doubted the apostles' proclamation? Was he wrong to want to see Jesus' wounds?

Notice how Jesus' wounds have become a source of rejoicing and faith. The terrible scene of crucifixion has now become, after the resurrection, the source of faith and joy for believers.

- How does Thomas react when he sees Jesus' hands and feet and side?
- What does he say about Jesus?

- "Fear" (st. 4): The apostles were afraid before Christ appeared. What fears do we have? How does our sin and this sinful world isolate us? When do we hear "Peace be with you" (st. 4) from Jesus? How is our worship experience similar to the Upper Room experience of the disciples?
- "They who have not seen" (st. 8): We are those who have not seen! How does God bring us to faith? How does the word of the apostles that Thomas doubted bring us to faith?

Prayer

Almighty God, grant that we who have celebrated the Lord's resurrection may by Your grace confess in our life and conversation that Jesus is Lord and God; through the same Jesus Christ, Your Son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Second Sunday of Easter).

With High Delight Let Us Unite

Lutheran Service Book 483 | study by Larry A. Peters

Introduction

One of the characteristics of good hymnody is the rich use of imagery. In today's hymn, we have jarring and powerful phrases to describe the most jarring and powerful truth of Christianity: Jesus Christ, the true Son of God in human flesh, died to kill death and rose to bestow eternal life.

Pick out some of the most compelling phrases of this hymn. Guess when this text was written.

Exploring the Scriptures

Writing to the Corinthian church, St. Paul insists that the whole faith rests upon the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. This is hardly hyperbole. The prophets spoke in promise of the day God would reign over all His enemies. Read over Is. 52:7–10.

- What is the cause of the great joy?
- See how the prophet ties together the comfort of the Lord, His redemption of Jerusalem, how He has laid bare His holy arm and revealed His salvation to all the ends of the earth. How does Jesus' resurrection do all of this?

St. Paul contends that Christ died, was buried, was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, and showed Himself to more than 500 witnesses. First Corinthians 15:20–23 insists that our hope is inseparably tied to the fact of Christ's resurrection.

- If Christ is not raised, what is left? (See vv. 17–18.)
- If Christ is raised, what has not changed? (See vv. 22 and 26.)

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Georg Vetter (1536–99) was a priest of the Unity of Brethren who composed this hymn sometime in the mid-1500s. It first appeared in a hymnal of the Bohemian Brethren in 1566. It was forgotten until Martin Franzmann (1907–76) translated it and it appeared in *Worship Supplement 1969*. Originally 13 stanzas, we have the first two and the final stanza.

This is an exuberant example of a well-written hymn translated to preserve the vitality and richness of its original text. Even without the missing 10 stanzas, the hymn compels God's people to witness in song the Christ who set us free, subduing all our enemies and bestowing upon us His victory over death and the grave.

- Were you surprised?
- Did you expect such stirring phrases in an old hymn?
- This hymn was translated from the German by a hymn writer known for his own poetic skill. Does this surprise you, or does it seem appropriate?

- In contrast to the way some speak of a friendly or natural death, St. Paul insists death is the final enemy that must be overcome. Has the way many have come to speak of death reduced the importance and the joy of Christ's resurrection and our own joyful resurrection in Him?

Hebrews 2:14–15 insists that Christ became incarnate so that through death He might destroy the power of death. "His death has been death's undoing" (st. 2). This is the Gospel. This is what we proclaim to a world still captive to sin and its death.

- We sing it in the Alleluia and Verse of Divine Service, Setting One (*LSB*, p. 156): "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life." How does this characterize the message we tell the world?
- Is there any joy or consolation that does not come from Christ's death to end death and His life that bestows everlasting life?

- Read through the text as we have it and imagine the missing stanzas. What other themes might you have included in a hymn of praise to the risen and ascended Christ?

- How difficult is the job of the translator to preserve the poetic structure of the text, the rhyme scheme of the hymn and the richness of imagery?

Text

Notice how in stanza 1 the hymn not only says *what* we should sing, but *how*: "With high delight." Also in stanza 1, the singers are described as "Ye pure in heart."

- Who are the pure in heart? How are we made pure in heart? Read Ps. 51:10–12. What is the duty of the pure in heart? Read Ps. 51:13.
- Note the economy of words employed by the text. In but a few words, “Is ris’n and sends / To all earth’s ends,” the hymn encompasses the Great Commission of Matt. 28:18–20 and Mark 16:15. What is the “Good news to save ev’ry nation”?

The second stanza reads like the Creed. We sing of Jesus as “True God.” How does the resurrection of Jesus connect to His claims to be God incarnate? The stanza is brimming with words that jump right off the page. Christ “burst” from death, subduing all things, leaving the tattered remains of death behind.

- What does it mean that “His death has been death’s undoing”?
- Notice the quotation marks around “And yours shall be / Like victory / O’er death and grave.” The hymn makes Jesus’ resurrection the prototype of our own. How does this make Easter also about us?

Making the Connection

It is often said that what the Church fails to preach and to sing, she will forget to believe. The translator of this hymn, Martin Franzmann, made the same point by saying, “Theology must sing.” Though Easter is a season of the Church Year, the queen of seasons, it is also the ground and hope of our own resurrection and eternal life. We are constantly reminded that Christ is author and pioneer, Alpha and Omega, who has gone before that we might follow.

In this respect, we are like the children of Israel, bound for the Promised Land that only God can give, but not quite there yet. It is too easy for us to look backward and for our journey to become an aimless wandering in the wilderness. The resurrection of our Lord, Jesus Christ, aims us toward the future beyond imagination that Christ has prepared for

In Closing

Easter joy is inexpressible but not unsingable, and the richest imagery of the poet helps us sing our hope before the world.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 483.

- Read Col. 1:15–20, especially verse 18. Jesus is firstborn of creation and the “firstborn from the dead.” Does this change how you see the Easter message?
- “His life for us” is the constant theme of this stanza and of Scripture itself. Is there any hope apart from Christ?

The third stanza exhorts, “Let praises ring; / Give thanks, and bring / To Christ our Lord adoration.” This is then our duty as well as our privilege and our delight.

- Look at the location of our hope. “So shall His love / Give us above” What does this mean? Is our hope in a better or easier today, or is it in the eternal tomorrow Christ has prepared for us?
- First Corinthians 13:9–10 speaks of what we now know only in part but shall then know fully. How is this echoed in the last lines of this hymn?
- “All joy and full consolation.” In Rev. 7:13–17, we see our heavenly consolation and joy. Imagine the scarred and wounded hand of Christ wiping away the tears from our eyes. How does Easter point us to this victory? How does the character of Christian life shape us for this eternal victory?

those who love Him. It also reminds us that the message we share with the world is this Gospel — Jesus Christ crucified for our sins, dead and buried to end death’s reign, and risen to bestow upon us and all believers eternal life.

- How does this hymn ground us in this Easter faith and direct us toward our own Easter hope?
- It is too easy for us to be content with a spiritual victory alone. God has given us much more — the hope for a resurrection of the body/flesh and the full renewal of our lost lives. To the world this may seem like a fairy-tale hope. Think of Thomas and his doubts in John 20:24–29. Is this hope real? Why can we trust Jesus? What is our resurrection hope?

Prayer

O God, through the humiliation of Your Son You raised up the fallen world. Grant to Your faithful people, rescued from the peril of everlasting death, perpetual gladness and eternal joys; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter).

The King of Love My Shepherd Is

Lutheran Service Book 709 | study by Marion Lars Hendrickson

Introduction

Whom do you trust? What are the voices that call you? A mother calls to her children to get ready for bed. A teacher calls students to come in from the playground to get ready for class. A police officer commands, “Stop!” A doctor says to a patient, “We must talk.” A young man on bended knee asks his beloved, “Will you marry me?” We hear and trust many voices.

Yet, there are other voices that call. The voice of advertising says, “You cannot live without this product.” The voice

of temptation says, “You owe it to yourself.” The devil asks, “Did God really say...?” We hear and doubt many voices.

Jesus said, “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life” (John 10:27–28).

- How do you decide whether or not to trust what someone says?
- Is it possible to ever fully trust anyone?

Exploring the Scriptures

Read Ps. 23:1. This verse states the theme of the entire psalm: “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.”

- What is the comfort in this confession of trust?
- What challenges in your own life put this confession of trust to the test?

Read Ps. 23:2–3.

- What four actions does the shepherd undertake?
- Give examples of His actions from your own life.

Read Ps. 23:4.

- According to this verse, is suffering a given in life?

Read John 10:11–18. Jesus calls Himself the Good Shepherd and says, “I lay down my life for the sheep” (v. 15).

- In what ways does Jesus fulfill the trust expressed in Ps. 23:4?

The shepherd’s rod was a short club used as a weapon to defend the flock from predators. The staff was a long stick for guiding the flock and retrieving strays.

- How is the cross of Jesus both a rod to protect the flock of the Good Shepherd and also the staff that sustains the flock?

Read Ps. 23:5–6. The scene changes from the open fields to a setting of hospitality.

- As sheep of the Good Shepherd’s flock, what table does He set for us?
- What is the “goodness and mercy” from that table that follows us all the days of our lives?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Henry W. Baker (1821–77) was an Anglican priest of the high church tradition who served a parish in Herefordshire, England. Even today this county is a popular tourist destination for sightseers in search of the “real” England of unspoiled, green and rolling countryside. This scenic domain was coupled with Baker’s own rich vision of the Christian life, a life thoroughly shaped by the Gospel and Sacraments within the living traditions of the ancient Church. Baker was a strong advocate of the views expressed within the Oxford Movement.

This rich resource of images and allusions drawn from the Church and from the land found deep expression in Baker’s hymn paraphrase of Psalm 23. Although Baker

asked John Dykes to compose a tune, different from the Irish melody in *LSB*, the wedding of text and tune (whether Dykes’ tune or “St. Columba”) wraps the singer in the atmosphere of the psalm, a decidedly idyllic atmosphere that breathes the air of the English shire and the Irish glen.

- Name two or three other hymns in which both text and tune are so wedded together as to be inseparable.
- Like Martin Luther, Baker held that music could “preach” the text. What does this mean?

This hymn paraphrase of Psalm 23 is set to the tune of the Irish folk melody “St. Columba.”

- How does the Celtic melody color the images of this text?

- What is gained by the text with the musical associations of this melody? Is anything lost?

Text

Stanza 1 quickly reveals that “trust” is not an abstract feeling. It is grounded on a firm foundation. “I am His / And He is mine forever.”

- What specific actions has Jesus taken toward us that we may have the confident trust to sing, “I am His / And He is mine”?

In stanza 2, the text proclaims, “Where streams of living water flow, / My ransomed soul He leadeth.”

- In what ways is the phrase “streams of living water” an allusion to Holy Baptism? To the Holy Spirit?
- From what you have learned about Holy Baptism from the Small Catechism, how does our Good Shepherd “lead us” by this Sacrament?

This second stanza closes with the words, “With food celestial feedeth.” This image is tied together with the “transport of delight” flowing “From Thy pure chalice” in stanza 5.

- Can this be an allusion to the Lord’s Supper? Why or why not?
- Explain what it means that by the bread and cup of the Sacrament, “I am [Christ’s] / And He is mine.”

Making the Connection

“Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise...!” Not every person has lived in an agrarian setting where sheep are common. Some who sing this hymn may always have lived in an urban setting, having no personal familiarity with the image of a shepherd and a flock of sheep.

In Closing

After the Christian has been following his Good Shepherd for a long time, a voice may ask, “Have you lacked for anything?” The answer given by faith is “Nothing.”

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 709.

- In what ways does the participation in Christ’s body and blood nourish our trust in Him?

The poet, Henry Baker, had the words of stanza 3 on his lips as he died in 1877. In this he echoed Martin Luther’s dying words, “We are beggars; this is true.” Regardless of our condition, “in love” Christ seeks us. Stanza 4 goes on to show the full extent of Christ’s love.

- Find phrases throughout the hymn text that show that Christ’s love is an active love.
- What is the height of Christ’s love? What action of His love is alluded to in stanza 4?
- In the mystery of the crucifixion, Jesus Himself cries out, “Why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46). What effect does this cry have on our trust in Christ? What effect does it have on our trust in God’s goodness and mercy?

The closing two stanzas sing of a life of trust that flows from Christ’s cross in the new life that is revealed in His resurrection.

- Do you read any allusions to Easter in this hymn text? If so, what words suggest this?
- It is the resurrection of Jesus that reveals the basis of our trust in singing, “Thy goodness faileth never” (st. 6). In what ways is our trust in Christ tested and strengthened when the promise of Easter is hidden under the experiences of Christ’s cross that we share?

- What elements of the text transcend the pastoral imagery of Psalm 23?

- What do you think it is about Psalm 23 that makes this psalm so immensely popular in so many human settings?

Prayer

Almighty God, merciful Father, since You have wakened from death the Shepherd of Your sheep, grant us Your Holy Spirit that when we hear the voice of our Shepherd we may know Him who calls us each by name and follow where He leads; 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 the Fourth Sunday of Easter in the Three-Year Lectionary).

O God of Light

Lutheran Service Book 836 | study by Paul Robert Sauer

Introduction

St. Mark is perhaps best remembered as the God-inspired author of the Gospel that bears his name. But the Scriptures present a picture of this same John Mark as one who also faltered at times in the face of great decision. Tradition tells us that St. Mark writes autobiographically about the young man who drops his linen cloth and flees from the Garden of Gethsemane during Jesus' darkest hour (Mark 14:51–52).

Likewise, St. Mark lets St. Paul down on one of his missionary journeys by withdrawing from him at Pamphylia. This in turn led to a parting of ways between St. Paul and St. Mark's cousin, Barnabas.

Exploring the Scriptures

In today's Epistle, 2 Tim. 4:5–18, St. Paul provides a list of individuals who were working both with him and against him in the spread of the Gospel. Read 2 Tim. 4:14–18.

- What is Paul's reaction to Alexander, who did him great harm? Who will "repay him according to his deeds"? Is this different from the reaction he had for Mark, who had betrayed him at Pamphylia? Why?
- Who stands by Paul when all else desert him? Does he hold it against those who deserted him? Is desertion the same as opposition? Is doubt in the life of the believer the same as opposition?

The so-called "longer ending" of Mark serves as the Gospel text for today. Read Mark 16:14–20.

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Sarah Ellen Taylor (1883–1954) was born to a British lay preacher. At age 9, she traveled with him to the United States when he became the pastor of a Methodist Church in Rhode Island. Taylor would later become a teacher of English, Latin and history. The original title for this hymn was "The Divine Gift."

- What is the "gift" which "O God of Light" extols?
- What makes it "Divine"?

"O God of Light" was written in 1952 and submitted to a competition held by the Hymn Society of America for their

And yet John Mark, by God's grace, stops his faltering and becomes the instrument by which God records one of the four Gospels; he even reconciles with St. Paul, who begged Timothy to bring Mark to him in prison in Rome because "he is very useful to me for ministry" (2 Tim. 4:11).

- Who are saints? Are they perfect? What makes them saints?
- Does knowing about the weaknesses of "saints" diminish their prestige in your eyes, or does it make them more inspiring for what, by God's grace, they overcame?

- How does this ending parallel the life of St. Mark? What does that tell us about the kind of people that God can use to "proclaim the gospel to the whole creation" (v. 15)?

- Who ultimately "[confirms] the message" (v. 20) of those who proclaim?

The Old Testament lesson for today speaks about the beauty and power of the messengers of God. Read Is. 52:7–10.

- What is the response of both the "watchmen" (v. 8) and the "waste places of Jerusalem" (v. 9) upon hearing the good news?
- Although it is a messenger who brings the good news and "publishes salvation" (v. 7), who does Isaiah credit with salvation?

collection of Ten New Hymns on the Bible, which sought to express the spiritual significance of the Bible. Out of the 550 hymns submitted, it was one of 10 selected for inclusion.

- If you were to write a hymn extolling the spiritual significance of the Bible, what would you highlight?
- What are the most important messages of "The Divine Gift"? What is the purpose of "The Divine Gift"?

Text

This hymn begins with the praise of God, who enlightens His people with His Word.

- Why is “Word” capitalized in stanza 1? (Read John 1:14.) Is it different from the “words” (not capitalized) which are “still revealing” in stanza 3?
- What is the relationship between the “Word of God” and the “word(s) of God”?

There is a constancy to the “God of Light.” Throughout time, God is not content to allow His people to live in darkness. Read 1 Peter 1:10–12.

- What is the message of a prophet? How can you tell if a prophet is from God?
- Is the success of the prophet dependent upon himself? Read Ezek. 2:2–5.

The third stanza proclaims that the words of God are “Undimmed by time” and are “still revealing.” Read John 1:1–3.

Making the Connection

Stanza 2 sings about “saints, apostles, prophets, sages” who “wrote with eager or reluctant pen.”

- What does this stanza say about the power of the message of God? Is there such a thing as a “reluctant saint”?
- How might this speak to those times when we don’t “feel” like praying or going to church?

In Closing

The Word of God (Jesus) has spoken through the ages through the words of God (the Scriptures). God continues to speak to all nations, races and tongues by the power of His Holy Spirit, who gives people understanding as it comes to us through the Scriptures. It is a power that emboldened men like St. Mark to proclaim the Gospel. It is a power that emboldens people like you, whether you are “eager or reluctant,” to share the Gospel so that others may know the justice and grace of a God who will one day gather us all together to sing with one great anthem blending before the throne of God.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 836.

- Do the “words of God” change through time? Does the way that God speaks to His people change? Does the content of the message change?
- What does the third stanza of “O God of Light” say is the purpose of these “words of God”?

The hymn concludes with a picture of the family of God that is gathered from “all the world,” from “ev’ry land and race” and from “myriad tongues.” Read Rev. 21:22–25.

- Where does the final gathering of the children of God from all the nations throughout the world find its fulfillment? Who is at the center of the gathering?
- Can you think of another time in the Scriptures when “myriad tongues” gathered together and yet understood each other? (See Acts 2:5–11.) Who is the source of the gathering together of these diverse peoples?

The fourth stanza speaks of the summons of God being sent to “ev’ry land and race” with “myriad tongues.”

- How might you support the spread of the Gospel? As a church? As an individual?
- Are there “myriad tongues” in your community? How might you translate the Gospel to their life and culture? By your words? By your actions?

Prayer

Almighty God, You have enriched Your Church with the proclamation of the Gospel through the evangelist Mark. Grant that we may firmly believe these glad tidings and daily walk according to Your Word; through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for St. Mark, Evangelist).

At the Lamb's High Feast We Sing

Lutheran Service Book 633 | study by Richard J. Serina Jr.

Introduction

Do you remember the day of your Baptism? If you were baptized as an infant, then probably not. However, in the first few centuries of the Church, as it expanded through continuous missionary efforts, most new believers were adult converts. Whether Jew or Gentile, God-fearing believers or unbelieving pagans, they knew of a life before Jesus Christ. That also means they could see the stark contrast with life after Holy Baptism, a life awake to the mercy of God granted in those saving waters through the death and resurrection of Jesus.

This sense of new life in Christ is the theme of the ancient hymn “At the Lamb’s High Feast We Sing.” It shows the

intricate connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus on the one hand and our celebrations of Holy Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar and the Season of Easter on the other.

- If you were baptized as an infant, what was your earliest memory of Baptism? What images do you associate with that first memory?
- If you were baptized as an adult, what do you remember about that blessed day? What images do you associate with it?

Exploring the Scriptures

The biblical background of today’s hymn is the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. There are two parts to the Exodus: the Passover, which precedes the Exodus, and the Exodus, when the people of Israel escaped Pharaoh’s army through the Red Sea. The Passover is recorded in Ex. 12:1–32.

- What did Moses command the Israelites to do on the night of the Passover? What kind of a lamb is reserved for this Passover sacrifice (v. 5)? How does this lamb symbolize Jesus?
- How would this save them from the fate reserved for the Egyptians in verse 12?

Eventually, the army of Pharaoh caught up to the Israelites in Exodus 14, as they crossed the Red Sea.

- What did the Israelites say to Moses when they saw the army of Pharaoh draw near to them as they stood before

the Red Sea (vv. 11–12)? How did Moses respond (vv. 13–14)? What happened next?

- How did God protect His people through the waters of the Red Sea?

God’s deliverance of Israel from Egypt through the Passover and the Exodus prefigures the way He rescued us from sin, death and the devil through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. He gives us this victory in the waters of Holy Baptism and in the bread and wine of the Sacrament of the Altar.

- How is the death and resurrection of Jesus similar to the Passover?
- How is Holy Communion similar to the feast of the Passover?
- How is Holy Baptism similar to the crossing of the Red Sea waters by the Israelites?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

This ancient hymn was originally written to reflect the passage from death to life that all Christians receive at the font. How this occurred in the earliest days of the Church is slightly different from how we practice it now. Since the first converts to Christianity were adults, the Church provided an extensive period of instruction before receiving these catechumens into the shepherd’s flock through the waters of Holy Baptism. These Baptisms were reserved for one day of the year: Easter.

In the darkness before Easter dawn, the new converts would be led to the font, holding candles, where they would receive the Sacrament of Holy Baptism. After they emerged from those saving waters, they were clothed with a fresh white garment, representing their newfound purity through the righteousness of Christ. After Baptism, the new converts would enter into the assembly of believers as they celebrated together the Sacrament of Holy Communion in commemoration of the Lord’s resurrection.

- What similarities do you see between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ during Holy Week and our Baptism into Jesus Christ at the font?
- What similarities do you see between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ during Holy Week and our feasting upon His body and blood at the table?

Text

The first four stanzas of the hymn alternate between the subject of Holy Baptism and the subject of Holy Communion. Stanza 1 deals with the Church being “washed ... in the tide” that flows from the side of Jesus Christ, while stanza 3 sings of Christ’s “paschal blood” being poured out upon us as we pass “Through the wave that drowns the foe” like Israel.

- What is the “tide” that flows from the side of Jesus? How does this draw from the image of His death upon the cross? How are we washed in that tide?
- What is the “paschal blood,” and how is it poured upon us? Who is the “foe” drowned in this flood?

Stanzas 2 and 4 then refer to the Sacrament of the Altar. We sing of Christ as the “victim” of the Passover and the “priest” who offers not the blood of a lamb as a sacrifice, but His own blood in the wine of Communion. Likewise,

Making the Connection

Whenever we celebrate Holy Communion, we commemorate the paschal feast of Easter. In this Sacrament, both the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are symbolized. The bread and wine of the Sacrament do indeed give us a visual picture of the Lord’s death upon Golgotha. But He is not still dead in a tomb — He has risen again and is alive. When we bless those elements of bread and wine according to our Lord’s Words of Institution, we do not simply have a picture of Christ’s death. This Lord actually comes to us in His crucified and risen flesh, feeding us with that body and blood that hung upon the cross, was buried in a tomb, and

In Closing

Many among us cannot remember a day when we were not baptized. But that does not make the victory of Christ’s death and resurrection any less victorious or the forgiveness of Holy Baptism any less forgiving. Whenever we come to the table, Jesus impresses upon our hearts and minds His victory over death and the grave and strengthens our faith in the forgiveness He has granted us at the font. Beneath bread and wine, the crucified and risen Lord proclaims to us His death and promises us a share in His resurrection. We celebrate Easter, and with it our Baptism, each time we come to the table.

He gives us not the flesh of a lamb, but His own body at the feast of the Sacrament. Then, we sing of Christ’s body as the “manna from above” given to us here at the Communion feast.

- How are these stanzas speaking about Holy Communion? What does our Lord give us beneath the bread and wine of the Sacrament?

In the next three stanzas, we return to the paschal feast celebrated each Easter, when the earliest adult converts would receive Holy Baptism and come to the table for the first time. The Holy Triduum (the three days of Christ’s death, rest in the tomb and resurrection) represents the victory of Jesus over death and the grave, and so we celebrate that victory when we gather on Easter to receive His crucified and risen body and blood in the Sacrament.

- Stanza 5 speaks of Jesus as the “Mighty Victim from the sky.” What is meant by “from the sky”? How does that contrast with the powers that now lie “beneath” Christ?
- Stanza 7 sings of “Newborn souls in You to be.” How does this relate to the original context of our hymn? How are we all newborn souls on account of Holy Baptism? How does our celebration of Easter remind us of our new births in Christ?

rose again victoriously on the third day. By feeding upon His crucified and risen flesh, we receive the forgiveness purchased through His precious blood shed upon the cross and are granted a share in the eternal life He has promised us through His own resurrection.

- When you approach the table, what image comes to mind first: the death of Jesus or the resurrection of Jesus? Which one should come to mind?
- What does the crucified and risen Lord bring to you at His table? How should that shape what you believe about worship?

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 633.

Prayer

O God, You make the minds of Your faithful to be of one will. Grant that we may love what You have commanded and desire what You promise, that among the many changes of this world our hearts may be fixed where true joys are found; 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 of Easter).

Christ Be My Leader

Lutheran Service Book 861 | study by Allen D. Lunneberg

Introduction

Philip and James the Less are numbered among the 12 disciples of Jesus. May 1 was chosen as the day of their commemoration because it is the anniversary of the dedication of the church in Rome originally named for them but now called the Church of the 12 Apostles. As you will see, we know quite a lot about Philip but almost nothing about this James, son of Alphaeus. The hymn “Christ Be My Leader” was chosen as the Hymn of the Day because of its reference to and meditation on today’s Gospel, where Jesus says, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

With Philip and James, we remember all the apostles of the Lord as the foundation of the Church, “Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone” (Eph. 2:20). As members and representatives of Jesus ourselves, we reflect first on our faithful following of our Lord and then on our witness or testimony concerning the Savior.

- Why should we remember this apostle James when we know practically nothing about him?
- What is the most memorable story about Philip in Acts 8?
- According to the hymn, how is Jesus our cornerstone?

Exploring the Scriptures

Our hymn is based on John 14:1–14, the Gospel appointed for St. Philip and St. James, Apostles.

- When did this take place?
- How many chapters of John’s Gospel relate the entire narrative of that night?
- Thomas was confused. What was Jesus’ intended destination (v. 2)?
- Jesus says He is “the way.” The way to what?
- What does He mean by saying He is “the truth”?

- What is “the life” to which He refers?
- What was wrong with Philip’s request to “show us the Father” (v. 8)?
- According to John 1:4–5, what does it mean when the hymn says, “Darkness is daylight when Jesus is there”?
- In John 1:13–14, in what does the glory of Jesus consist?
- What else came when Jesus appeared, according to John 1:16–17?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

In *Lutheran Service Book*, we are blessed with 16 new hymn texts by Timothy Dudley-Smith (b. 1926). Only one appeared in *Lutheran Worship*, while six appeared in *Hymnal Supplement 98*. Only Martin Luther (27), Stephen P. Starke (27) and Paul Gerhardt (17) have more hymns included in our hymnal than Dudley-Smith.

- How many of his hymns are listed on page 999 of *LSB*?

The author/poet has written much about his craft of writing and producing poems and hymns. One seems never to be completely finished with a particular work. There are always many improvements possible. Interestingly, Dudley-Smith believed that once a work is *published*, one should never change it.

“Christ Be My Leader” was among his earliest hymns, written in 1961. He says the theme of the hymn is “youth” and “Christian living.”

- Have you ever written a poem or hymn?
- What is it, do you think, that qualifies a hymn to be included in a hymnal?

Text

What does it mean that Christ is your leader, your teacher and your Savior? Each stanza meditates on Jesus’ claim in today’s Gospel to be “the way” (st. 1), “the truth” (st. 2) and “the life” (st. 3). The author delves deeper into the meaning and uses alliteration as he refers to Christ as victor over three forces whose names begin with “d”:

- Jesus is “leader” in the “way” through “d.”
- Jesus is “teacher” of the “truth” in the face of all “d.”
- Jesus is “Savior” of “life” in the face of “d.”
- Read John 8:12 and 1:4–5. How many times is “darkness” mentioned in the hymn? What is that darkness?
- Read John 1:14 and 17. What is “truth”?

Making the Connection

As we commemorate St. Philip and St. James the Less, we can take great comfort from their examples of faith. With them, we learn what it means to live by faith in Jesus as our only way to the Father, our only source of truth and wisdom, and our fountain of life both for now and for eternity.

Philip wasn't afraid to ask to see the Father. In reply, we have the great teaching that Jesus Himself is the only way to "see" God the Father (John 14:8-9).

- What did the Father's voice from heaven say about Jesus at His transfiguration (Matt. 17:5)?
- What did Philip do when he was first called to follow Jesus (John 1:43-48)?
- Why did "the Greeks" come to tell Philip that they wanted to see Jesus (John 12:21-22)?
- How did Philip proceed to tell the Ethiopian eunuch about Jesus (Acts 8:26-40)?

In Closing

Today we thank God for all the apostles and especially for Philip, who helps us discover that the way, the truth and the life of God are to be discovered, seen and believed only through God's Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord; and also for James the Less, whose humble service we do well to remember and imitate.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 861.

Prayer

Almighty God, Your Son revealed Himself to Philip and James and gave them the knowledge of everlasting life. Grant us perfectly to know Your Son, Jesus Christ, to be the way, the truth, and the life, and steadfastly to walk in

James, son of Alphaeus, not son of Zebedee, is mentioned only four times in the New Testament: in the lists of the apostles in Matt. 10:3; Mark 3:18; Luke 6:15; and Acts 1:13. He could be called the apostle of the humble or unknown Christian. Similarly, the apostle Paul emphasized the value and worth of every Christian when he wrote of the Church as a body, saying, "God has so composed the body ... that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. ... Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it" (1 Cor. 12:24-27).

- List various abilities, talents or "gifts" that Christians are given to serve God and one another in the body.
- What are some of your abilities or interests?

the way that leads to eternal life; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for St. Philip and St. James, Apostles).

Prayer

O God, You resist the proud and give grace to the humble. Grant us true humility after the likeness of Your only Son that we may never be arrogant and prideful and thus provoke Your wrath but in all lowliness be made partakers of the gifts of Your grace; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (For humility, *LSB*, p. 312).

Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice

Lutheran Service Book 556 | study by Carl C. Fickenscher II

Introduction

How does it feel listening to someone talk about himself or herself? Yeah, I know. It can get old fast. Somebody else's vacation pictures. Details of his surgery. Even personal testimony of what Jesus has done in her life. Borrrrrring! Or worse. Believe me — *I* know! I remember once when I had to listen to...

On the other hand, there are times when “I” and “me” and “my” are anything but dull — and not at all self-centered.

Exploring the Scriptures

The Season of Easter carries us from the joy of the resurrection morn, through those 40 days Jesus showed Himself alive to His disciples, toward the Ascension of Our Lord, and finally to Pentecost. Thus, the last couple of Sundays before Ascension Day develop two major motifs, both of which show up in our Hymn of the Day.

First, as we near Jesus' visible departure to heaven, it's a moment to look back on the events of our salvation He has now nearly completed. Psalm 66 invites us to hear about these great events. Read Ps. 66:16.

- One problem: Do we really want to hear the psalmist talk about what God has done for *his* soul?
- What do you hope the psalmist really means?

Now read Psalm 67. Notice especially verse 3.

- What could cause “all the peoples,” rather than just the psalmist, to praise God?
- Any hints you see in the psalm of what God has done for everyone?

Read Ps. 98:1-3.

- Think of the events of Jesus' time on earth. What are some of the “marvelous things” the psalmist might have

foreseen Jesus doing? Let's talk about that (yes, let us talk about that) as we study Martin Luther's “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice.”

- What is it about another person's personal story that may become tiresome for us?
- Can you think of examples of other peoples' first-person accounts that you found quite engaging?

foreseen Jesus doing? For whom did the psalmist see Him doing these?

The second major motif for these late Sundays of Easter is preparation for the coming of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel Readings for these Sundays all come from Jesus' last discourse to the disciples before His arrest. Read John 14:15-21; 15:9-17; 16:5-15; and 16:23-33.

- What activities of the Holy Spirit does Jesus promise?
- What special names does Jesus use for the Holy Spirit? If your group has different translations, compare how they render one of these names (14:16; 16:7). How does each different rendering express a unique blessing He brings? How precious will these blessings be in light of 16:32-33?

Now look again more closely at 16:13-15.

- What particular activity of the Spirit is described here? Does the Holy Spirit talk about Himself? About whom does He speak? See also John 15:26.
- What sorts of things does the Spirit say about Jesus? Consider, for example, John 15:13. How does He speak about Jesus today?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

“Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice” was probably the first hymn Luther wrote specifically for singing by a congregation in worship.

- What makes a truly *congregational* hymn, one to be sung together by dozens or hundreds of worshipers? Should a congregational hymn be one person talking about himself? Why not?

- The original title of “Dear Christians” was “A Christian hymn of Dr. Martin Luther, setting forth the unspeakable grace of God and the true faith.” Does that sound congregational? Why or why not?

Text

The congregational character of this hymn is immediately evident in stanza 1. Read it, and remember the psalms you studied a few minutes ago.

- How, apparently, will the hymn summon up the call of Ps. 67:3?
- Where do you see Ps. 98:1 paraphrased?

OK, but what about Ps. 66:16? Well, perhaps surprisingly, this hymn is all about what God has done for “*my* soul.” Read stanzas 2–3.

- How many uses of “I” and “me” and “my” can you count? Pool your knowledge of the life of Luther to discuss how well these stanzas fit his story.
- So, is this hymn all about Luther? If so, singing it could mean our congregations are idolizing him.
- Who else fits this description? Read Rom. 3:9–20. Read, too, something Luther wrote in the Small Catechism: “Which are these [sins we should confess]?” (*LSB*, p. 326). Whoever we are, whatever our station in life, we are this one sinner Luther describes!
- Is this what makes a first-person account compelling — that it in fact applies to every individual?

What, then, has God done for my soul — for *every* soul? Read stanza 4.

Making the Connection

So, Luther’s story is our story. More important, Christ’s story is our story.

- No need to talk about yourself out loud right now, but take a moment to talk to God silently about who you are and what you’ve done under the Ten Commandments, as Luther reminded in stanzas 2–3.

In Closing

Hearing someone else talk about himself can indeed be thrilling if his story is one in which we also see ourselves. A hymn is properly congregational if it vocalizes the experience of all the worshipers. Dear Christians, *one and all*, rejoice! And rejoice to sing! Because what Christ has done personally, individually, for Luther, He has done personally, individually, for you!

- Sing or read aloud together all 10 stanzas of *LSB* 556 — with joy!

- Imagine that! God had *me* in mind even before He created the world! See 2 Tim. 1:9. We can all say that!
- How precious am *I* to Him? What did He give for me?

Everything God has done for me is now laid out in stanzas 5–9. Read through the familiar story — but notice the very personal way it’s told.

- Where do you see each of these passages reflected in the stanzas: 2 Tim. 1:10; Gal. 4:4–5; Phil. 2:5–8; Ps. 46:1, 7, 11; John 15:13; 17:6, 10, 21; 2 Cor. 5:21; Rom. 3:24–28?
- Which words in these stanzas are especially sweet to you? Consider “compassion”; “my brother”; “A servant’s form, like mine”; “To lead the devil captive”; “close to Me”; “rock and castle”; “Your ransom I Myself will be”; “For I am yours, and you are Mine”; “The foe shall not divide us”; “for your good”; “My innocence shall bear your sin.” What others are special to you?
- Is this first-person story self-centered?

And now, like these Sundays of the Church Year, we reach the end of Christ’s story. Or do we? Read stanzas 9–10.

- Which of those functions of the Holy Spirit does the hymn recall? Remember John 16:13–14, 33. Of whom, again, does the Spirit speak?
- How does the Spirit see to it that Christ’s story continues? For whom is His personal story now?

- Then — and this you surely will want to do aloud together — talk about why all of us dear Christians can rejoice at hearing Christ tell again what He has done for us. As you discuss, consider silently what it means that the sins known only to you and God have been forgiven by Christ.

Prayer

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

Up through Endless Ranks of Angels

Lutheran Service Book 491 | study by Allen D. Lunneberg

Introduction

For 40 days after His resurrection, our Lord Jesus Christ appeared to His disciples. Then came the day of His ascension, when He would no longer be appearing and disappearing as He had. The disciples gradually learned that He was with them whether they could see Him or not.

It is possibly because the Ascension of Our Lord, the 40th day of Easter, always falls on a Thursday that, though this is a major festival, it has become more poorly attended through the years, if celebrated at all. Consider the number of Ascension hymns in our hymnals over past years:

The Lutheran Hymnal (1941), 12 hymns;
Service Book and Hymnal (1958), seven hymns;

Lutheran Book of Worship (1978), four hymns;
Lutheran Worship (1982), six hymns; and
Lutheran Service Book (2006), five hymns.

Still, the Ascension of Our Lord marks a major step forward in God's plan of salvation and, as such, needs to be preached, heard, believed and celebrated.

- Does your congregation celebrate this festival of Ascension Thursday? How is attendance compared to Sunday?
- How is the ascension a major step in God's plan of salvation?

Exploring the Scriptures

After His resurrection, Jesus appeared to His disciples at least the 11 times we have recorded in the New Testament. Compare His appearance to the disciples at Emmaus (Luke 24:13–32) and His final appearance at His ascension (Acts 1:3–9).

- How did Jesus leave the disciples at Emmaus?
- How was His departure at the ascension different?

On the Thursday of Holy Week in the Upper Room, Jesus prepared His disciples for their future ministry and summarized His entire mission.

- Which words in John 16:28 speak of Jesus' identity? His incarnation and birth? His ascension?
- Why is Jesus' ascension necessary, according to John 16:5–7?

There are two accounts of the ascension, both recorded by St. Luke: once at the end of his Gospel (Luke 24:44–53) and then in Acts 1:3–9. Read both accounts.

- What does Jesus say His disciples will be doing in the future, according to Luke 24:47?
- In Luke 24:48 and Acts 1:8, what word does Jesus use that describes the difference between an "apostle" and a "disciple"? According to Rom. 10:9, what is a more accurate word to describe what a disciple does?

What did the ascension of Jesus look like from heaven? Read Rev. 12:7–10. Consider the following commentary by Dr. Louis A. Brighton:

As a result of Christ's victory on the cross and his public vindication over the dragon at his ascension and exaltation, there was no longer any room in heaven for the accuser. The dragon had to be thrown out of heaven, for Christ's vicarious atonement and justification of the saints made Satan's accusations false ... Once Christ was elevated and enthroned, the slanderer was held in contempt of God's court and "was thrown out" (12:9), never again to appear before God's heavenly presence.... When did this war, this expulsion of the dragon and his evil host, take place? According to 12:5, it happened when the "Child was snatched up to God and to his throne," that is, at the ascension of Christ.

Apparently before Christ's victory and ascension, the devil could at will stand before God and bring accusations against God's saints.... But at Christ's enthronement at the right of God, Satan was forever banished from God's presence and his place in the heavenly court was taken from him.... This war in heaven in Rev 12:7 is not the original rebellion of the devil against God, which took place before the fall of Adam and the woman (Gen 3:1). *The war and expulsion described in Revelation 12 happened as a result of Christ's victory and elevation.* (*Revelation* [CPH, 1999], 335–6)

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Jaroslav J. Vajda (Vai-dah) (1919–2008) is the author of six hymns and translator of four more in *LSB*. This ascension text was commissioned by Augsburg Publishing House in 1973. He said he had attempted to gather the implications of our Lord's ascension to His followers, both those who originally witnessed the event and all since then who await His promised return. Those "implications" include the completion of Jesus' work of redemption, the new confidence of His joyous disciples, Christ's eternal intercession for us before the Father, His comfort and direction of believers as we await His return, and the faithful longing for our final deliverance in the resurrection. In our exploration of the Scriptures, we have noted, of course, even more "implications."

- List some of what you think are implications of Jesus' ascension, what it means or how it affects your faith and life.

Text

Originally, the author was requested to change the first word of the hymn from "up" to "there," in order "to avoid the three-tiered universe imagery," meaning the earth lying between heaven (up) and hell (down). This request appears to be of the spirit of the times, when science, philosophy and the historical-critical method of Bible interpretation questioned nearly everything in the Bible. Nevertheless, the Bible uses such imagery.

- What words are used in the following passages to describe earth, heaven and hell: Ps. 139:8; Gen. 15:5; Luke 24:51; and Acts 1:9?

Making the Connection

This hymn does more than just tell the story of Jesus' ascension. It describes the benefits and the hope available because Jesus is now living and reigning at the right hand of God.

In Closing

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 491.

Prayer

Almighty God, as Your only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, ascended into the heavens, so may we also ascend in heart and mind and continually dwell there with Him, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Ascension of Our Lord).

- We know of archangels, cherubim and seraphim. How does Col. 1:16 describe the "endless ranks of angels"?

The words of stanza 2 look to Jesus as our intercessor and advocate as a result of His victorious earthly ministry.

- How and for whom does Jesus intercede before the Father? See 1 John 2:1; Rom. 8:34; 1 Tim. 2:5; Heb. 4:14–16; and 7:25.

Stanza 3 is a prayer for guidance by the Holy Spirit (John 14:16–18; 16:13) through the Word of God (Matt. 28:20) and comfort in our trials until Christ returns to receive us to Himself (John 14:3).

- How is your life one of "wanton wandering"?
- In what ways does God guide and comfort us?

By the little triangle symbol, *LSB* suggests standing for stanza 4 as the three persons of the Holy Trinity are mentioned. While Trinitarian in form, however, the final stanza is more a confession of faith and expression of longing than it is a doxology or praise. It is the "eschatological" (last things) longing to finally arrive and be in the very physical presence of God.

- Which three words in this stanza describe the real, physical qualities of the day of our resurrection?
- To "breathe the Spirit's grace" recalls what detail from our creation in Gen. 2:7?
- To "see the Father's face" will reverse what former law, according to Ex. 33:20?
- To "feel the Son's embrace" will be possible because of what reality? See Luke 1:31 and Luke 24:40–43.

- How helpful is this hymn and the celebration of the ascension on the 40th day of Easter to the individual Christian?

Christ Is the World's Redeemer

Lutheran Service Book 539 | study by Christopher I. Thoma

Introduction

In the Christian Church, using the word “Redeemer” is as common as breathing. It happens a lot. Its usage comes quite naturally and often goes on around us without an examination of the life-sustaining details.

The process of inhaling and exhaling is actually very precise and purposeful. Breathing provides for cellular respiration. It takes in the beneficial gas oxygen and expels the toxic gas carbon dioxide, all the while utilizing the nose, the bronchioles, the lungs, the diaphragm, the alveoli and the like. There really is quite a lot happening when we breathe.

In the same way, there is a lot packed into the word “Redeemer,” and the hymn before us offers the opportunity

for us to hear and learn the wonderful details, giving us a memorable image of just what it means that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is the Redeemer of the world. This builds confidence that indeed full redemption has been won!

- What does it mean to “redeem” something?
- What kinds of things are redeemed, and why?
- The title of the hymn relates that the world has been redeemed. When the Lord redeemed the world, how much of it did He redeem, and from what did He redeem it?

Exploring the Scriptures

The Gospel Readings appointed for the Seventh Sunday of Easter in the Three-Year Lectionary are taken from John 17:1–26. In each of its parts, this text reveals the words of Jesus in prayer and the purity of assurance He has in the unfolding of the Father’s will for redemption. In the Three-Year Lectionary, the Gospel Reading is John 15:26–16:4. This reading carries the Lord’s words to the disciples on the night He was betrayed. Here it is that the Lord prepares them for the approaching struggles and calls for them to look to Him.

- The Time of Easter is that glorious time when the Church looks back upon the Lenten battle and is refreshed to know the certainty of salvation as seen and proven in the victory of the empty tomb and Christ’s ascension. Why is this hymn appropriate for the Season of Easter?
- Why is this hymn appointed for Easter 7, the Sunday immediately following Ascension Day, and not Easter 2 or 3?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

St. Columba (521–97), the author of this ancient hymn, is known in history as a man born of Irish royalty who later became a monk with a great passion for mission work. He established several monasteries throughout Ireland and Scotland as well as a school for missionary training on the Isle of Iona, Scotland. He is remembered for truly practicing what he preached by evangelizing within each of the Druid communities with which he came into contact.

The hymn itself, in tune and text, bears witness to the confidence and eagerness St. Columba had for spreading the good news of the Redeemer to the people around him. He was not fearful of rejection, but certain of the Lord’s once-and-for-all Gospel work to save the world. St. Columba uses colorful language to thoroughly describe the very real battleground of sin and death and the mighty dominion of Christ by His life, death and resurrection for sinful man.

- What is the tenor of the portrait painted by St. Columba in the hymn? Are the words carried by a tune that is somber? Joyful? Triumphant? Majestic?
- Scan the full text of the hymn. How do his choices of imagery reveal his familiarity with royalty? Persecution? Life-and-death issues of the day?

Text

It is easy to see that this hymn is written in a way that emphasizes the Redeemer as the one who must do battle to win back what is His. The price will be costly and the warfare great. The reader is carried along by this theme and prepared to see the details of the battle unfold in the Passion of Jesus, a passion which must include the shedding of His precious blood.

- Consider Is. 13:11 and John 15:18. How does God feel about the sinful world? How does the sinful world feel about God?

Stanza 1 marches into the field by speaking of purity, font, trust, hope, security, armor, soldiers, earth, sky, health, life and death. Consider each of these individually. Read Phil. 2:5–11; Acts 2:21–36; and Rom. 8:28–39.

- How is Christ connected to each in the hymn?
- Christ is called the “lover of the pure.” Read 1 John 1:7; 3:1–3; and Heb. 9:11–15. How does the word “pure” draw your attention to Holy Baptism?
- Read Rom. 6:3–11. What is happening in Holy Baptism, and how is it connected to Christ’s redemptive work?

Stanza 2 builds upon the foundation of stanza 1, directing the reader’s attention to the decisive moment in the battle, Christ’s lifting up on the cross, which secured the victory.

- Read Heb. 12:1–3 and Rev. 7:9–17. To whom is stanza 2 referring, and what is their role in the battle? In these texts, how are we brought back to Baptism?
- Of what event do the words “Who wave their palms in triumph” remind you? Where was that event leading?
- Read Heb. 12:18, 22–24. It is said that heaven and earth come together in the Divine Service. What are the implications of this? Where and in what context is this theology mentioned specifically in the Divine Service?

Making the Connection

This hymn is one of confident faith in the face of this world’s struggles. St. Columba, being the missionary that he was, most likely found himself in situations that brought about doubt and fear. Consider your own life and its difficulties and troubles. How might the following lines serve to stir the confidence of faith in Christ for you when the hour is dark?

- “The font of heav’nly wisdom, / Our trust and hope secure” (st. 1).

In Closing

Just as breathing is composed of many intricate particulars, so also does Jesus Christ accomplish all that is required of Him as the Redeemer, in order that we might be His redeemed people. His life, death and resurrection are the currency in the redeeming act. As the Redeemer, He buys us back, pays the ransom, purchases us from sin, death and the power of the devil. By the power of the Holy Spirit through faith in the Redeemer, we are strengthened to live our lives in this world. And we have the confidence to know that whether we live or whether we die, we are His. He loves us and proved it.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 539.

As stanza 3 unfolds, Christ’s redemptive actions on our behalf continue. Read 1 Peter 3:18–22.

- “Down through the realm of darkness / He strode in victory” is a poetic retelling of 1 Peter 3:19. What is the hymn’s confident interpretation of Christ’s reason for descending into hell?
- Almost immediately, the hymn turns to the resurrection and ascension of Christ. How are these connected to Baptism?

It may be surmised that this hymn is a lyrical summary of the redemption earned by Christ and articulated clearly by the three ecumenical creeds. (See the Second Article of the Creed and its meaning [*LSB*, p. 322]). Therefore, like the creeds, which are confessions of and in the name of the Triune God, this hymn rightly concludes with “Amen.”

- See the Conclusion to the Lord’s Prayer in Luther’s Small Catechism (*LSB*, p. 325). Why is it good to end the hymn with the word “Amen”?
- In your opinion, does the word “Amen” serve to build reverent timidity or holy confidence?

- “The armor of His soldiers” (st. 1).
- “Our health while we are living, / Our life when we shall die” (st. 1).
- “Christ has our host surrounded / With clouds of martyrs bright, / Who wave their palms in triumph / And fire us for the fight” (st. 2).

Prayer

O King of glory, Lord of hosts, uplifted in triumph far above all heavens, leave us not without consolation but send us the Spirit of truth whom You promised from the Father; for You live and reign with Him and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for the Seventh Sunday of Easter).

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

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?

- 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.

- 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).