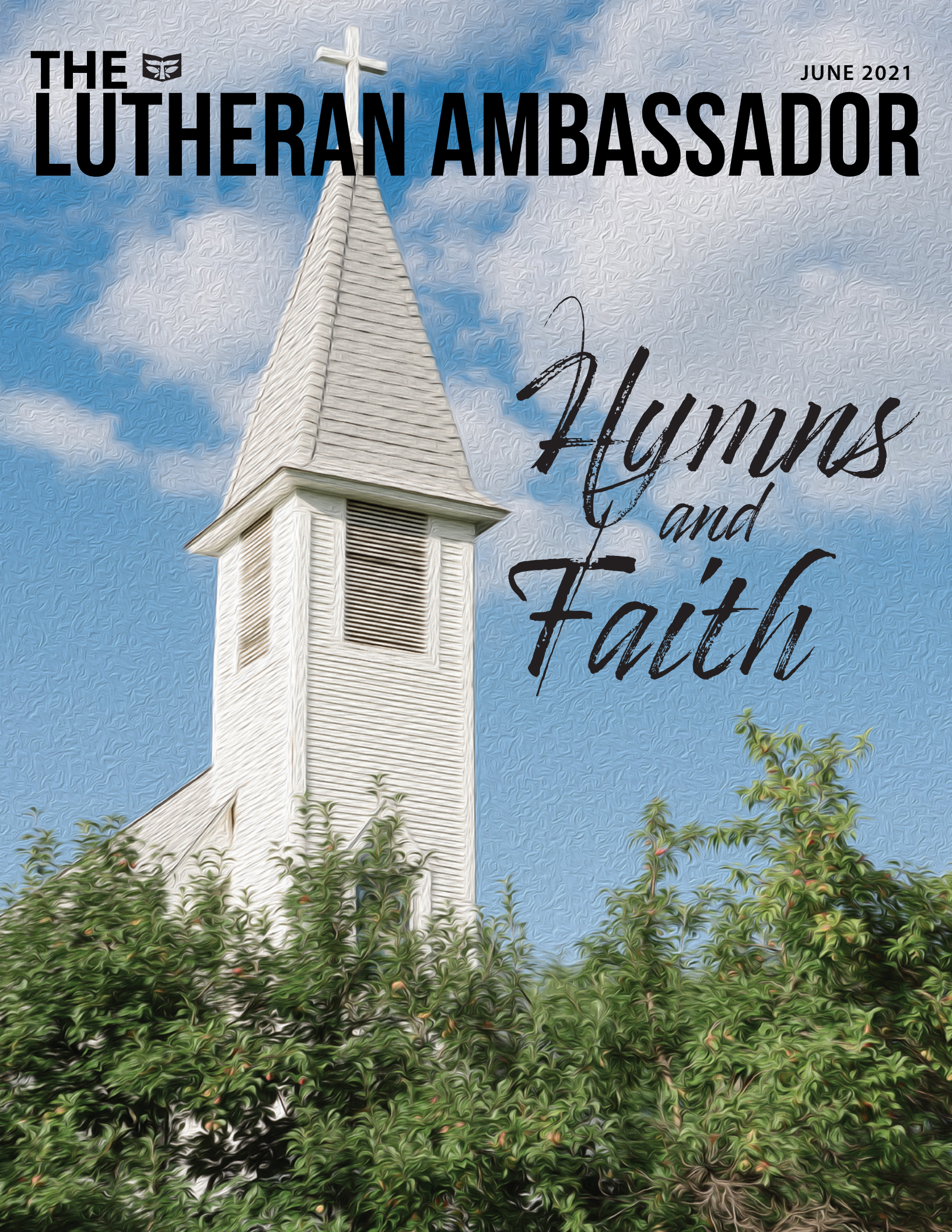


THE 

JUNE 2021

# LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

*Hymns  
and  
Faith*







## THE LUTHERAN AMBASSADOR

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### EDITOR

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rlee@aflc.org

### MANAGING EDITOR

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ruthg@aflc.org

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# THE BATTLE FOR CONTENTMENT

BY RACHEL MATTSON

**W**

hat calms your soul and gives you contentment? This is something I've pondered and fought for in every season of my life. It seems as if

discontentment can find its way into any situation! It can leave a perfectly good day in shambles as we compare our lives to others or wish for anything other than our own story.

My attitude toward contentment was radically changed when I read a book about counting the blessings of God. I was living in India at the time, and it stirred my heart to a gratefulness I had never known as I looked for the gifts of His grace in my everyday life. That's when I started my thankfulness journal.

Here are a few examples of my list during that time. I'm thankful for: new socks, clean drinking water, eating with my fingers, warm showers, cold juice, protection while being chased by monkeys, cold showers (if only to be thankful for the warm ones), a pillow on an overnight train, the smell of rain, warm blankets, monkeys *outside* my window, no electricity (creativity with flashlights), an air-conditioned bus, rice, and corn flakes.

Some of these things make me chuckle as I remember the stories that go with them, but more so, they remind me of the closeness of my dear Savior during this time. This adventure was one of the hardest seasons of my life because I was so far from my family and friends, and yet it was one of the most beautiful times because of the deep connection formed with my compassionate Father. He was all I had.

Keeping a journal of thankfulness helped me remember the truth about my life and the truth about who God is, not just who I made Him out to be. I experienced more contentment as I knew more of His truth. It was a battle of seeing God with my new spiritual eyes. It was a war of the flesh against the spirit. It was a fight for truth!

So yes, live a thankful life! But don't stop by just counting the blessings from God, count the ways you know and see who God is. "Seek the Lord while He may be found; call upon Him while He is near; let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; Let him return to the Lord, that He may have compassion on him, and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon" (Isaiah 55:6-7). He longs to show us Himself, His kindness and mercy, so that our hearts know His calming embrace and find contentment in Him.

A thankful attitude is a great habit to have, but I want my heart to be daily overcome by the lavish love of the gospel, of Christ's heart that is always full of love and compassion toward me no matter what I do or forget to do. His love and compassion are set on me and want to meet me in my lowest and darkest places. It's who He is: gentle and lowly in heart (Matthew 11:29).

*Mattson is a member of Our Saviour's Lutheran,  
Thief River Falls, Minn.*

Next to the Word of God, the noble art of music is the greatest treasure in the world.

—Martin Luther

Good hymns are an immense blessing to the Church. They train people for heaven, where praise is one of the principal occupations.

—J.C. Ryle

After the Bible the next most valuable book for a young Christian is a good hymnal.

—A.W. Tozer

[ There is not a situation in life where there isn't a hymn and a Scripture to meet the need. I'm thankful for the Word of God, and I praise Him for the privilege of still being able to memorize. ]

—Cliff Barrows


Hymns have been a powerful instrument of God to draw people closer to His Word and the saving riches therein.

—Billy Graham

Hymns are companions for life travelers.

—Andy Griffith





# Hymns and Faith

THE POWER OF  
HYMNS IN THE  
CHRISTIAN LIFE



By Pastor Terry Culler

I once met a man who told me he was totally tone deaf. He said that music was, to him, nothing but noise. I felt really sorry for him because he was missing so very much beauty and joy in his life. Think what it would be like to never hear music as anything but an irritating intrusion into your day.

Most people love music and find it easy to remember tunes and words they heard many years ago. That is why “oldies” radio stations are so popular. Even if they play a song we have not heard for years, the words will still come back to us—although the lyrics might be relatively meaningless, like many of the songs of my long ago youth.

I wish I could say that I always loved hymns, but that would be untrue. When I was a teenager, I generally found them boring and seldom paid much attention to what they had to teach me. It is surprising, then, that sometimes in life when I have dealt with difficulties or felt happy over something, those old hymns from my childhood would pop into my head. They are not necessarily the hymns we sing in worship today, nor are they necessarily some of my favorite hymns, but they are there in the back of my mind and they still teach the gospel to me, even now when I am long removed from the church of my youth.

Martin Luther was not only a lover of music, but a gifted writer of hymns and the musical accompaniment. The German Mass he prepared for the new evangelical churches included hymnody by the congregation—something rarely used in the Medieval Catholic services. Luther believed that the recovery of hymnody was a teaching tool in which the power of the music and the words together would reinforce the teaching from the pulpit. Luther also urged parents to use hymns during their home devotions and encouraged the use of hymns in schools, as well.

When our children were young, my wife, Joan, and I would include some Christian songs in our devotions or time around the table. “Jesus Loves the Little Children,” “Rise and Shine,” and others were among those we sang together, as well as Christmas carols during Advent devotions. We also allowed the girls to choose the hymn for the day on occasion.

Once, as my wife was driving the girls somewhere, they were singing “I Am Jesus’ Little

Lamb.” Kate, our youngest, said, “Some kids don’t know they are Jesus’ little lamb.” She felt sorry for those other children because she knew something they did not know—something really important that everyone should know. That comment inspired my wife to begin a five-year practice of writing the vacation Bible school programs for our congregation. File folders and books would be piled up in our living room for weeks! That was a successful ministry that began with singing hymns as a family.

The power of hymns can also bring comfort to us in times of turmoil, when we can even find it hard to pray. Some years ago, we knew a couple who had gone through many health issues. The husband once suffered a brain hemorrhage and was in a coma for a period of time. You can imagine how distraught his wife was, not knowing if her husband would live or if their children would grow up without a father. She told me that she would sing every hymn she could remember while sitting next to her husband’s hospital bed. The familiar music and the gospel lessons comforted her and witnessed true faith to those hospital employees who were involved in his care.

Music has a great impact on the lives of people all over the world. I am unaware of any culture, ancient or modern, that knew nothing of music. But we ought not forget as we ponder the use of music in our worship lives, that the notes are really the vehicle which carry the words of a hymn, as it were. It is the lyrics that edify, animate, encourage, and prepare us for eternity. “A Mighty Fortress” is musically powerful, but it is the lyrics that inspire us. The tune of “Rock of Ages” is, at least in my opinion, far less worthy than the words which teach us of our inability to contribute anything to our salvation and yet share the gospel promise that Christ has done it all for us.

When people claim that hymns are obsolete or too old fashioned for today’s world, I feel a sense of sadness because they are missing the teaching that comes with those hymns. There are reasons why words written hundreds or even a thousand years ago still teach and move us. Using them in the family will help us retain what God has inspired for His Church.

*Culler serves St. Paul’s Evangelical Free Lutheran, Leitersburg, Md.*







It's hard to narrow down a favorite out of the hundreds of delightful hymns, both new and old. This one is not only a favorite but also provides a function too-often missing in our worship services—a hymn directed to the third member of the Trinity. The Holy Spirit is one part of the Trinity that we neglect to address in prayer and often misunderstand.

This hymn helps not only give us a solid prayer to the Holy Spirit, but reminds us of what the work of the Spirit is. And, as is the case with nearly every song by modern hymn writers Keith and Kristyn Getty and Stuart Townend, the hymn has an easy melody to pick up and sing quickly.

Holy Spirit, living Breath of God,  
Breathe new life into my willing soul.  
Bring the presence of the risen Lord  
To renew my heart and make me whole.  
Cause Your Word to come alive in me;  
Give me faith for what I cannot see;  
Give me passion for Your purity.  
Holy Spirit, breathe new life in me.

“Cause Your Word to come alive in me; give me faith for what I cannot see.” Those two phrases alone clearly describe the role of the Holy Spirit—to point us back to God’s Word and to strengthen and sustain our faith.

Holy Spirit, come abide within;  
May Your joy be seen in all I do—  
Love enough to cover ev’ry sin  
In each thought and deed and attitude,

Kindness to the greatest and the least,  
Gentleness that sows the path of peace.  
Turn my striving into works of grace.  
Breath of God, show Christ in all I do.

“Turn my strivings into works of grace” always gives me pause whenever I sing it. What a beautiful request that reminds us that our strivings can get us nowhere but God’s grace is what is most important. The Holy Spirit works to point us back to Jesus and His work, back to the solid foundation of God’s Word.

Holy Spirit, from creation’s birth,  
Giving life to all that God has made,  
Show Your power once again on earth;  
Cause Your church to hunger for Your ways.  
Let the fragrance of our prayers arise.  
Lead us on the road of sacrifice  
That in unity the face of Christ  
Will be clear for all the world to see.

This last stanza uses only 13 words to declare an important doctrinal truth, that God’s triune nature has existed from the beginning (Genesis 1:2). The rest of the stanza gives an important opportunity for the church to pray to the Spirit that we would hunger for Jesus anew. I love that this hymn carefully shows that the Holy Spirit points us back to Jesus in every way and is not some nebulous or arbitrary force that could be mistaken for our own feelings or whims.

*Egan is the worship leader at Living Word Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D.*

BY RYAN EGAN

# Holy Spirit Living Breath of God





Imparting wisdom is a common occurrence whenever anyone has a birthday in my classroom. After a rousing rendition of a special birthday song, the question is inevitably asked, “Now that you’ve passed through another portal in time, what pearls of wisdom can you share with the rest of us?” Yes, this was a question my dad faithfully asked.

With a summer birthday, I give my words of wisdom on the penultimate day of school. Max Lucado’s *With You All the Way* sums up what I believe these future middle schoolers need to hear most years. This picture book weaves through allegorical prose the importance of having Someone “with you all the way” in life. Three knights vie for the hand of the King’s daughter. The challenge? They are tasked with traveling through the Hemlock forest to the King’s palace. But each is allowed to bring a companion with them. One knight chooses wisely. The others select foolishly. They head off into the world following the wrong thing or the wrong person. Jesus, the faithful companion, is the only one who knows the way because He is the Way! (John 14:6) It is my prayer that my students eventually choose Jesus to be with them all the way.

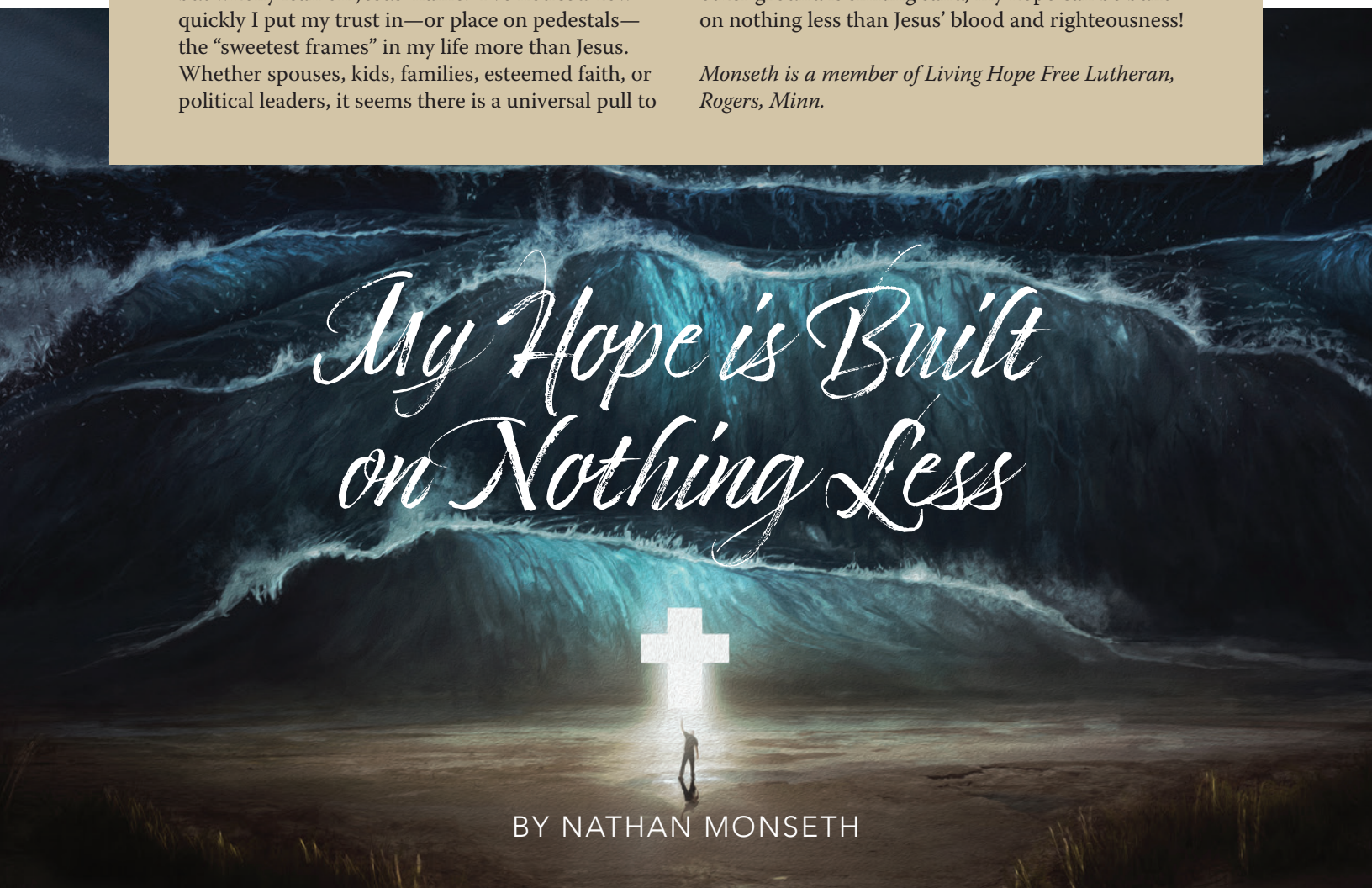
This end-of-the-year read-aloud story parallels a favorite hymn. “My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less” has several key lines that encourage me often. The first is, “I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus’ name.” I’ve noticed how quickly I put my trust in—or place on pedestals—the “sweetest frames” in my life more than Jesus. Whether spouses, kids, families, esteemed faith, or political leaders, it seems there is a universal pull to

elevate these frames—or structures—above our trust and allegiance to the Lord. Yes, God gifts us with spouses, family, friends, and influences that bless and form our lives, yet He beckons us to seek Him first (Matthew 6:33), trusting God and His Word above any other.

“Support me in the whelming flood” is the second phrase that resonates in my mind. As a public school teacher, this year has been extremely challenging. But with Covid-19 restrictions in a classroom of 31 fourth and fifth graders five days a week, many new layers of responsibility have been added to my plate. Overwhelmed? No. As a follower of Jesus, don’t you think “whelmed” is a much better word to use? We may submerge momentarily in life, but we’re never drowned or defeated completely. II Corinthians 4:17 reads, “For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

Finally, “Dressed in His righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne” is the greatest line of hope. Jesus paid it all! Why would I choose anything or anyone else in which to put my hope? If my eyes are focused on “the sweetest frames” or my mind is overwhelmed because I’m working alone or with the wrong support, there will be problems. “For our sake, He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God” (II Corinthians 5:21). Since all other ground is sinking sand, my hope can be built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness!

*Monseth is a member of Living Hope Free Lutheran, Rogers, Minn.*



# *My Hope is Built on Nothing Less*

BY NATHAN MONSETH



The hymn, “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” was authored by Robert Robinson in 1758. After hearing the great preacher George Whitefield, Robinson repented, leaving a life of drinking and gangs to become a Methodist minister (*Then Sings My Soul*, by Robert J. Morgan).

Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,  
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
call for songs of loudest praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet  
Sung by flaming tongues above;  
Praise the mount—I’m fixed upon it—  
Mount of Thy redeeming love.  
(*Great Hymns of the Faith*, 17)

God, the Master Musician, “tunes my heart to sing” and teaches me the songs of heaven. As a violinist, I know that unless my violin’s strings are in tune, the harmonics do not resonate. God wants to gently tune my heart until it reverberates in perfect harmony with Him. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if God could teach us His “melodious sonnet” of perfect praise? Perhaps it would be the song God sang after restoring Israel in Zephaniah 3:17 when He “rejoiced over them with singing.”

Here I raise my Ebenezer,  
Hither by thy help I come;  
And I hope, by Thy good pleasure  
Safely to arrive at home.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
Wand’ring from the fold of God;  
He, to rescue me from danger,  
Interposed His precious blood.  
(*Ambassador Hymnal*, 187)

“Here I raise my Ebenezer” references I Samuel 7:12, where Samuel erected a stone and called it “Ebenezer” or “thus far the Lord has helped us,” following God’s miraculous military victory for the Israelites. Jesus continues to be our great helper. He “interposed his precious blood” and provided my ultimate Ebenezer at the cross.

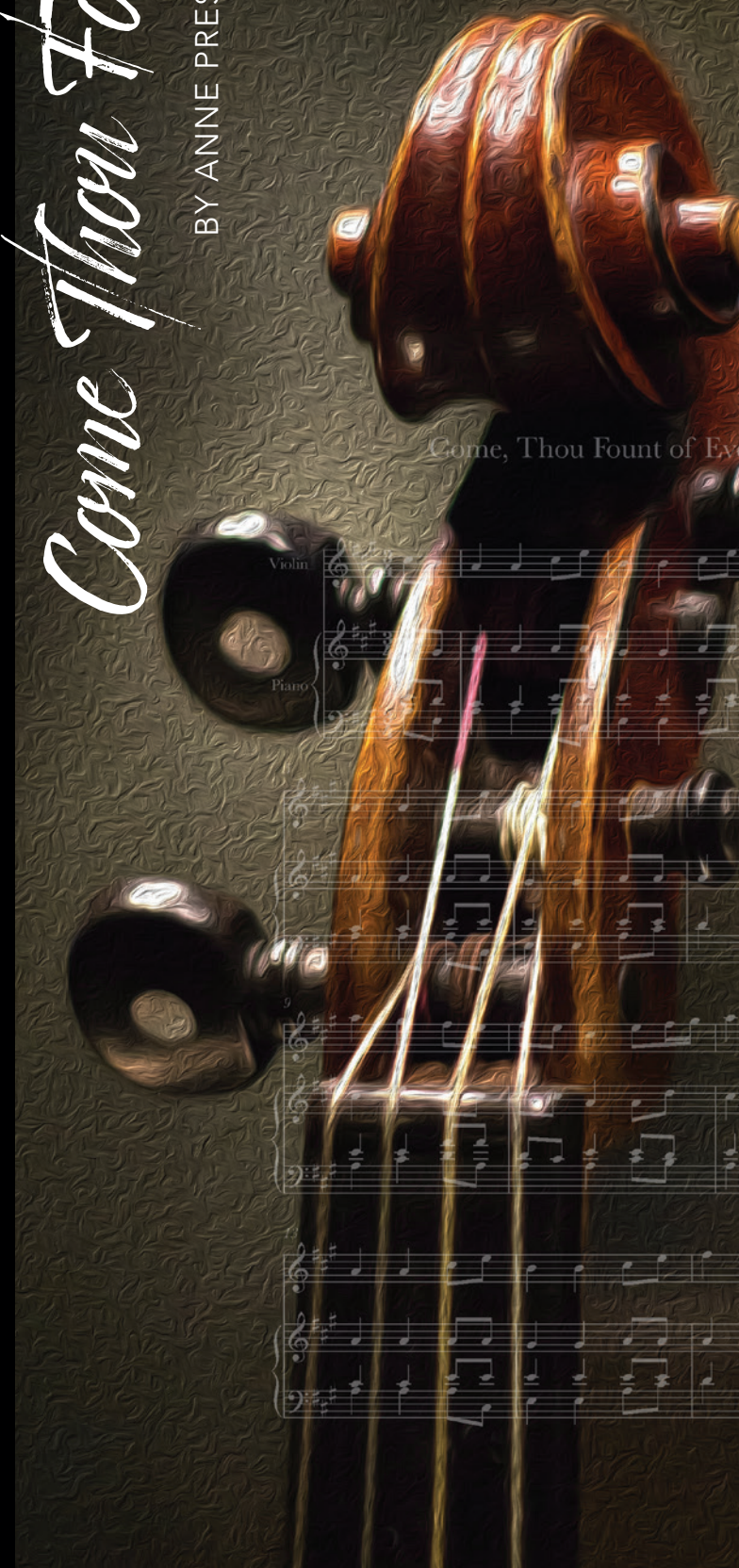
O to grace how great a debtor,  
Daily I’m constrained to be;  
Let that grace now like a fetter,  
Bind my wand’ring heart to Thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
Prone to leave the God I love;  
Here’s my heart, O take and seal it,  
Seal it for Thy courts above.

The third stanza pulls at my heart. I am often overcome by emotion when singing the words “prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.” The catechism perfectly expresses my heart’s wanderings. Do I fear, love and trust God above all things? Is God dearer to me than all else? Do I find true joy in Him and gladly submit to His will in all things? The answer is a resounding “NO!” In spite of this, Jesus loves and forgives me. Take my heart and seal it for Thy courts above.

*Presteng is a member of Bethel Free Lutheran, Grafton, N.D.*

# Come Thou Fount

BY ANNE PRESTENG





BY LOIS FORDE

*"And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high and how deep His love is" (Ephesians 3:18).*

Samuel Trevor Francis (1834-1925) wrote the text of one of my favorite hymns, "O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus" (AH, 579), after experiencing a dark, depressing, and lonely night. He was on a bridge in London, thinking of ending his life by jumping into the rushing water below, when he felt God's words of love speak to him.

O the deep, deep love of Jesus—  
Vast, unmeasured, boundless, free!  
Rolling as a mighty ocean,  
In its fullness over me,  
Underneath me, all around me,  
Is the current of Thy love—  
Leading onward, leading homeward,  
To my glorious rest above.

Comparing God's love to the vastness of the ocean is imagery I understand. This land-locked North Dakota girl married a commercial fisherman and spent two summers 500 miles out in the Pacific Ocean on a 60-foot boat. The mighty ocean, deep, vast, unmeasured, boundless, rolling, underneath me, all around me was my reality, with no land or even another boat in sight for a month. Like the ocean, God's love is all encompassing, beyond what we can see or imagine.

I appreciate that this hymn is doctrinally sound and is an example of how the songs we sing can teach great truths of God's Word. To know God loves us individually, by name, that He has a personal interest in each one of us, and a plan for every detail of our lives is astounding. More profoundly, because of this deep, deep love, God sent His Son to die on the cross to atone for our sins—"died to call them all His own," as Francis wrote. In most situations, in order to be loved, we believe we must demonstrate that we're lovable, that we are worthy of being loved. Not so with God! His love for us is "boundless, free," and thankfully doesn't depend on our worthiness or merit.

Although songs written in minor keys most often sound sad and forlorn, this beautifully written music, with its lilting meter, gives a sense of longing as we contemplate God's love that is "leading onward, leading homeward, To my glorious rest above." The final phrase, "And it lifts me up to glory, For it lifts me up to Thee" is, indeed, triumphant! May our response to God's deep love be to "spread His praise from shore to shore!"

*Forde is a member of Elim Lutheran, Lake Stevens, Wash.*


# O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

## O the Deep, Deep Love of Jesus

Thomas Trevor Francis  
Arranged by Brent Olstad







# My Jesus, I Love Thee

BY JERRY NELSON

All music was once new. Several times in the Psalms and in Isaiah, the writers mention singing a new song to the Lord. “Oh sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things ...” (Psalm 98:1a).

A new song is like a fresh testimony of what God has done in the songwriter’s life. How can he or she keep from writing about it? I’ve enjoyed looking back at when “My Jesus, I Love Thee” was first written, when it was a new song.

I can remember singing it as a child. It was my favorite song even then. It is a vertical song—a song to be sung directly to the Lord in contrast to a horizontal song where the text speaks primarily about God while describing who He is. It’s not a song where the focus is on what God has done for us. It’s much more intimate than that. It’s a prayer directly to God, a conversation directly with Him. In it, the song writer cries out to God using the words “My Jesus.” He seems to say that he has claimed Jesus as his own, and Jesus has claimed him. What a beautiful picture of love and devotion to the Lord.

The author of this song is not a famous name like Martin Luther, Charles Wesley, or more contemporary writers such as Chris Tomlin, the Gettys, or Andrew Peterson. Very little is known about him, except that he was a young man. Some historians think he was only 16 years old when he wrote the text. William Ralph Featherstone

penned the now-famous words not long after his conversion in 1864. The great theologian Dr. A.J. Gordon discovered the poem and set it to music. He then included it in his new hymnal.

When I was in junior high, I went to a father and son banquet at my home church. The main speaker asked all the fathers and sons to consider saying “I love you” to one another. He reminded us that life is short. He told us that we may not find the time in the future to say the words to each other. “Do it tonight,” he said. My dad and I both said, “I love you” that night, and I’m glad we did. After that, every time I got together with my dad, I told him I loved him. And I spoke those words to him just minutes before he died. Now, years later, my wife Terri and I have frequently told our kids and grandkids that we love them.

How much more important is it to tell God that we love Him? In Revelation, John writes to the church in Ephesus, telling them they have abandoned the love they had at first. And Jesus said the greatest commandment is to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul and mind” (Matthew 22:37).

Don’t plan on waiting until this life is over to tell God that you love Him. Pray it to Him now—or better yet, sing it to Him in a song.

*Nelson lives in Lino Lakes, Minn.*





# O Sacred Head Now Wounded

BY PASTOR J. CHRISTIAN ANDREWS

A Bible school teacher asked my class how “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded” might be appropriate for a funeral. At 18 years old, I had not thought much of this hymn, one of the oldest in our hymnary. The question made an impact on me, and now I lament that we may sing this hymn but once a year. Despite—or maybe aided by—its haunting melody, the beauty of what its lyrics teach us earns this hymn a special place in my heart.

The hymn begins by recognizing the reality of the crucifixion, and the Crucified is referred to simply as the sacred Head. It was His head onto which the crown of thorns was pressed, true, but this epithet infers so much more. In this hymn, I confess His divinity and His lordship, that He is the divine Head of the Church. I recognize the incarnation and humiliation of the Head when I sing that He gave up His glory and the bliss of His divinity by exchanging them for scorn, derision, and a gory death. The first stanza concludes, “I joy to call Thee mine,” pointing me to the purpose for our Lord’s suffering.

In the second stanza the reason for the exchange is made clear. The suffering my Lord endured was for sinners’ gain. My transgression was traded with His deadly pain. He took the place I deserve. The resulting response of faith is in the confession, “Lo, here I fall, my Savior!” All I have is sin, transgression, and death. The Savior, before whom I fall, offered Himself in exchange,

that He might extend favor and grace to me.

The attributed author, Bernard Clairvoux (1091-1153), did not write “reconciliation,” but he pointed to it with, “To thank Thee, dearest Friend.” The sacred Head’s dying sorrow and endless pity results in reconciliation. I can call Him my dearest Friend only because He restored the fellowship which was broken by my sin. He is also the keeper of the fellowship, as we confess in the *Small Catechism* explanation of the Third Article of the Apostle’s Creed that the Holy Spirit “keeps [me] with Jesus Christ in the one true faith.” My admission in faith is that my love for Him is also possible only by His keeping.

As is typical of so many good hymns, the final stanza draws me to the end of earthly life. My prayer is that as I die, the cross is ever more evident. I confess my need and recognize that only by relying on My Lord’s help can I be set free from that which condemns me. Then, at last, by the new faith He has given me, I name Him, Jesus. I know that because I believe, I can die safely.

The law and the gospel are so clearly expressed. The sacred Head was wounded and died to take my sin and death upon Himself. By His suffering He made me His best friend again. I know this grace now. I will die in grace, because I believe in the love of Jesus for me.

*Andrews serves Immanuel Lutheran Church,  
Springfield, Mo.*



BY EMILY HERSET

# Just As I Am

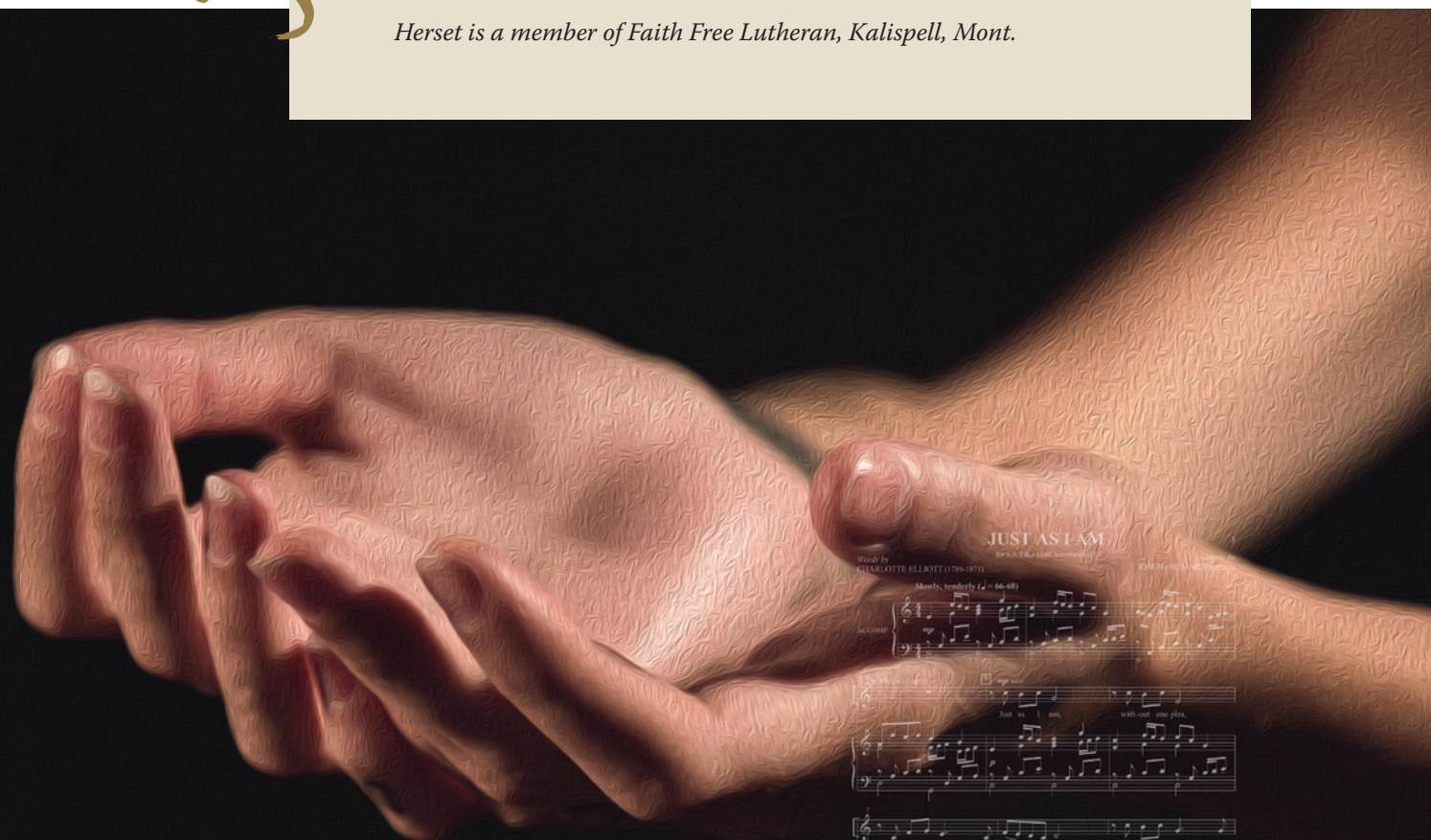
Singing worship songs has always been a regular part of my life, and I was grateful my family attended the contemporary service instead of the traditional so we didn't need to only sing hymns accompanied by the organ. When I attended the Free Lutheran Bible college in 2006, God transformed my life. One way He did that was teaching me to appreciate hymns. The combination of singing hymns weekly in chapel and discovering so much of their meaning through reading God's Word softened my heart and formed in me a love for hymns, and even the organ, with songs like "Just As I Am."

This hymn has become one I love to sing. The repetition of the phrase "Just as I am ..." in the verses reminds me that I am welcomed to receive God's forgiveness and love without any special requirements. As I sing the words, "Thy blood was shed for me," I am filled with gratitude and a desire to come to Him, knowing that when He looks at me He sees me through the filter of Jesus.

Recently at Faith Church, in Kalispell, Mont., we started singing a new version of this classic hymn which adds a chorus by Travis Cottrell that says, "I come broken to be mended. I come wounded to be healed. I come desperate to be rescued. I come empty to be filled. I come guilty to be pardoned by the blood of Christ the Lamb. And I'm welcomed with open arms, Praise God, just as I am."

Reflecting on this hymn and this new chorus makes me think of the description in the Gospels of the curtain separating the Holy of Holies in the temple being torn in two after Jesus died on the cross. This beautiful picture shows us we can approach God, come confidently to Him, in an intimate and personal way. Jesus has paid the price for all the failures of my life, and your life, too. Isn't that amazing? What Christ did for us makes it possible to come to God just as we are, broken people in need of healing, guilty people in need of forgiveness. Praise God, just as I am!

*Herset is a member of Faith Free Lutheran, Kalispell, Mont.*



**JUST AS I AM**  
Words by CHARLOTTE ELLIOTT (1796-1871) Music by J. H. W. L. (1846-1888)

Slowly, tenderly (♩ = 66-68)

ACCOMP.

Just as I am, with-out one plus,  
but that Thy blood was shed for me, and that Thou bidd'st me  
come... to... Thee, O Lamb of God, I now come!

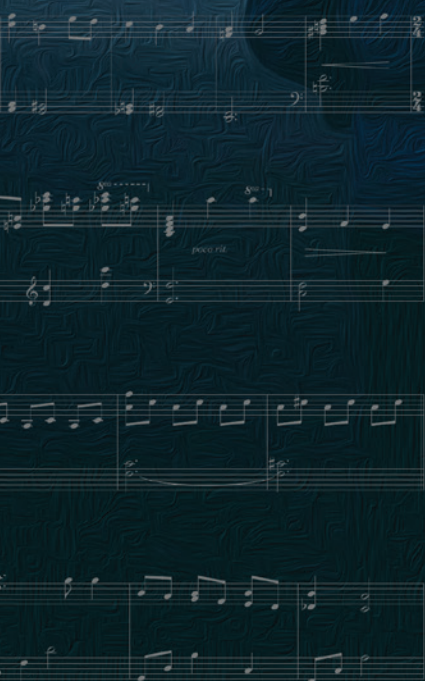


# Great Is Thy Faithfulness

BY NANCY LANGNESS

Great Is Thy Faithfulness

Words by Thomas O. Chisholm  
Music by William M. Runyan



*"The Lord's lovingkindness indeed never cease. For His compassions never fail. They are new every morning: Great is Thy faithfulness" (Lamentations 3:22-23).*

I memorized these verses in confirmation way back in the 1970s. Back then, I knew that God was good, I knew that He loved me, and I knew that if I lived the right way, He would bless me with a perfect life—you know, just because I was a nice and holy person. Every life situation and decision for every person was packed away neatly into either a right or a wrong box in my mind. Of course, I determined what was right and what was wrong.

Imagine my surprise when life took turns that I had not decreed. Things happened that were deeply painful, things over which I had no control. I remember being so very angry at God and letting Him know exactly what I thought. I even told Him, "I have lived my *entire life* for You! I have obeyed all the rules! And *this* is what I get? I don't deserve this! Know what? I don't even believe in You anymore, and I don't think You are even real!" (Notice the irony of yelling at someone who doesn't exist.)

But within a month, I realized that without the Lord to base my life on, my world was rocking in thin air, with nowhere to land. What a scary place to be. And in His mercy I heard a sermon about Jacob fighting with God. For a long time, God let the battle continue. But when He decided that it was over, all it took was a touch to Jacob's hip, and the battle came immediately to a halt. All that Jacob could do was to cling to His garment, and plead, "I will not let you go until You bless me!"

Like Jacob, I came crawling back to beg for His presence once again, only to discover that He had been faithful to me all along. I realized something: God is not bound by time. I know that He could have stopped this situation whenever He chose, but He chose to let it play out, which could only mean that He already knew the future and was working this—and many other—situations out for His glory and my benefit.

He was right. There have been many times of disappointment, hurt, and pain throughout these years, as anyone my age will attest. But every now and then, God pulls back the curtain to allow me to see why. He has turned every scar into an opportunity for ministry. Many times, the things that have been the most difficult to understand have been the conduit for His grace. And through it all, even though I'm quite sure He often slaps His forehead, rolls His eyes, and exclaims, "Oh, Nancy! When are you going to learn to trust Me?" He is the God who stays.

As time goes on, "Great Is Thy Faithfulness" has become ever more precious and more real and encouraging to my heart.

Great is Thy faithfulness, O God my Father!

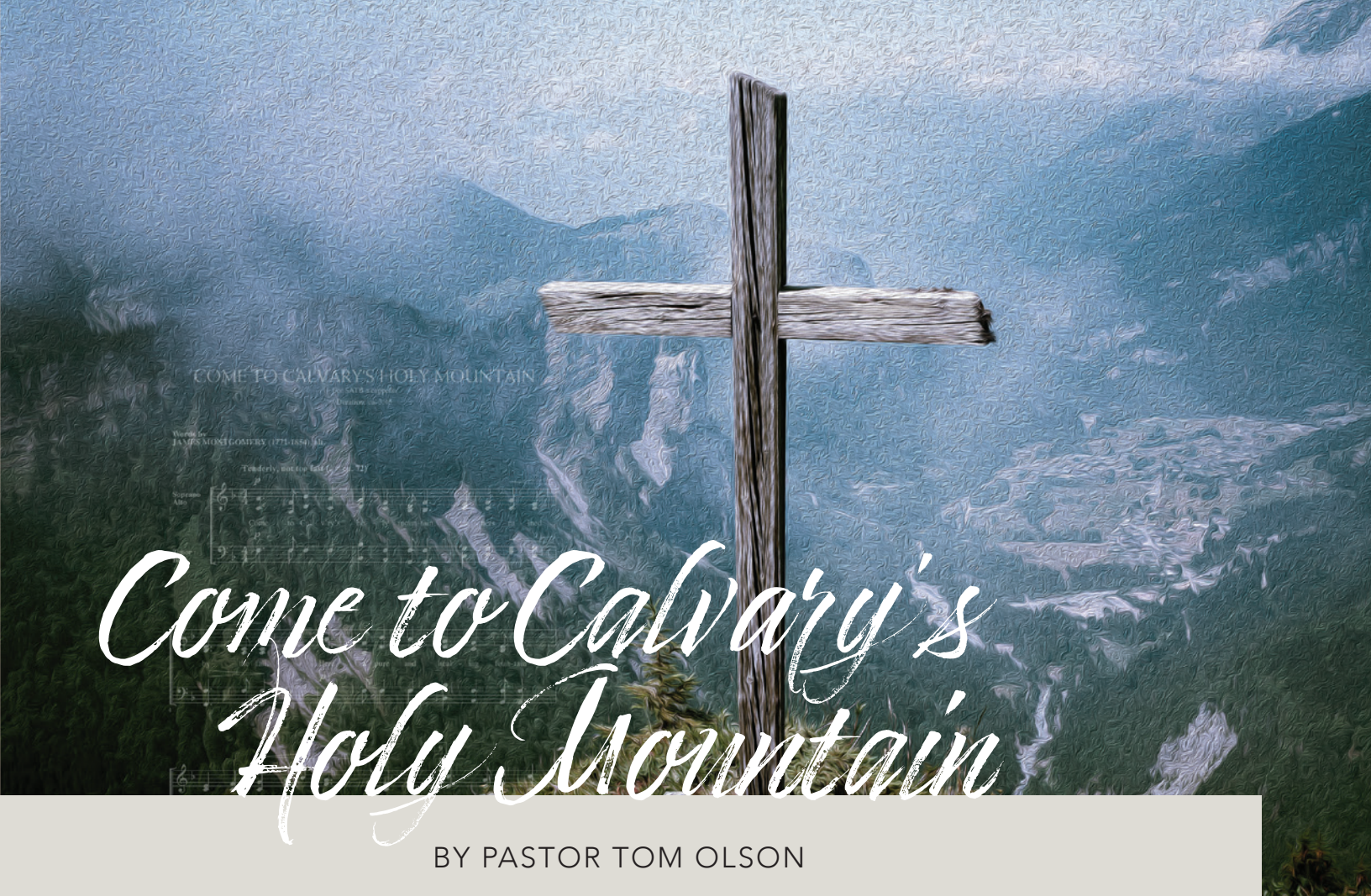
There is no shadow of turning with Thee;  
Thou changest not, Thy compassions they fail not:  
As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Great is Thy faithfulness! Great is Thy faithfulness!

Morning by morning new mercies I see;  
All I have needed Thy hand has provided—  
Great is Thy faithfulness, Lord, unto me!

*Langness is a member of Hope Free Lutheran, Ishpeming, Mich.*





BY PASTOR TOM OLSON

I began ministry at Faith Lutheran Church, Cordova, Alaska, in January of 1983 as an assistant to Norwegian Pastor Oscar Brown. The experience was exciting. It was my first time in Alaska and my first extended time away from home. I loved the breathtaking beauty of this fishing village. Cordova is at the base of Mt. Eyak, which overlooks the scenic Prince William Sound. The town has an idyllic harbor filled with fishing boats that catch the world-renowned salmon called the Copper River Red.

However, the reality of Alaskan ministry soon burst my adventurous bubble. On a daily basis, we dealt with rampant alcoholism and drug abuse. There was also backbreaking work, with pick and shovel, as we expanded our Sunday school space by digging a basement and laying cement blocks without any power tools. We fed the hungry, sobered up the drunks, and worked with drug addicts, thieves and illegal aliens who stayed with Oscar and me in the parsonage. We taught the sorely neglected children of alcoholics and conducted church services, Bible studies, and kids' meetings several times a week. I had no money, so Oscar's spartan diet of bread, freezer burnt salmon, and moose meat was what I had to endure.

Soon I was homesick, exhausted, and emotionally drained. I would plod down the long stairway from the parsonage to the storefront chapel, sit at the piano, and play hymns from the old *Concordia Hymnal* to console myself. One hymn that ministered to my soul time

and again was "Come to Calvary's Holy Mountain" (*Ambassador Hymnal*, 419). Something about the completely gracious invitation to come to Jesus in "poverty and meanness defiled ... from the leprosy of sin" was what I needed in that iniquity-ravaged town. Verse three also called to me, "Here the troubled, peace may find." The vileness of the world I was thrust into made me long for heaven and the assurance of verse four: "He that drinks shall live forever!"

The peaceful tune, written by Ludvig Lindeman (1812-1887), is distinctly Scandinavian, a favorite at my childhood Norwegian Lutheran church. It was often played and sung by my mother at our living room piano. The hymn would bring me home for a moment.

The text is by the Scottish Moravian hymn writer James Montgomery (1771-1854), who also wrote "Angels from the Realms of Glory." He is considered to be one of the best hymn writers and poets—right up there with Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts. Montgomery's words drip with the purest descriptions of God's grace, a hallmark of Moravian hymnody.

The demanding ministry in Cordova, some 38 years ago, is an important part of my spiritual formation. I can now smile as those memories come back to mind when I sing this beautiful hymn with its soul-healing lyrics.

*Olson serves Minnesota Valley Free Lutheran, Lakeville, Minn.*



**M**artin Luther's hymn "A Mighty Fortress is Our God" (*AH*, 141) is notably among the most well-known songs sung in Christian churches of many denominations. I appreciate its strong scriptural base as it paraphrases Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear ...." What a great message in these times of worldwide pandemic, political discord, mental anguish, and humanism.

The first verse reads:

A mighty fortress is our God,  
A bulwark never failing;  
Our helper He, amid the flood  
Of mortal ills prevailing.  
For still our ancient foe  
Doth seek to work us woe;  
His craft and pow'r are great,  
And armed with cruel hate,  
On earth is not his equal.

There are dozens of verses that describe God as our fortress: our protector, defender, refuge, and helper against Satan, our "ancient foe who seeks to work us woe." He is a powerful author of hate and the foe of truth. If we depend on our own strength against this crafty enemy, we will lose every time. It is only through Christ and the truth of God's Word, which He has willed to triumph through us, that He gives us victory.

Scripture goes hand in hand with the lyrics of this song penned by Luther during the Reformation. Luther declared true Christianity did not depend upon what one knows about God, but upon a right relationship with God, and that forgiveness is received through faith in His Word and the sacrificial death of Christ. His intention was to create music that was sincere, simple, and full of reverent outpourings of praise to God. Luther intended this hymn to be a model that would keep the Word of God alive in the hearts of people.

The popular effect of introducing these scriptural songs to the people of Germany was immediate among all classes of people. Many have declared that Luther did as much for the Reformation by his hymns as by his translation of the Bible into the common language. The stagnant ritualism of the Church was replaced with the singing of songs containing the clarity of the gospel.

As a worship leader in our church service, I believe it is more important than ever that the song lyrics we sing line up with the truths of the Bible and the doctrine of our church. As in Luther's time, music is still plays a major part in pointing us to the truth.

*Forde, Arlington, Wash., is a member of Elim Lutheran, Lake Stevens.*

BY LYLE FORDE

# *A Mighty Fortress*





**S**ome of my favorite moments while attending the FLY Convention have come while

standing in the crowd of teens, youth workers, pastors, and families as we praised God with the songs that open the evening sessions. Whether we are singing an old hymn set to a faster tempo, the latest praise song, or a song written especially for that convention, these moments gave me a glimpse of heaven: many voices raised as one. The teens represent congregations from throughout the country, or they are invited by friends. They unite to praise the Creator of the universe. It's something that I will miss this summer.

God has always used music to speak to me. Don't get me wrong, I love a good sermon or a deep lecture. But music has a way of breaking through with old truths in a way that spoken words often fail to do. I see the world using music to reach people, too, often in ways that I do not appreciate. Today's youths are bombarded with music that crosses the boundaries of appropriateness. Let's be real, some of the music

## WHAT DO YOU HEAR?

BY SHARON RYKHUS

that is played on the radio, or on our devices, makes me rush to turn it off. Teens are listening to all types of music.

And it's not just music that is bombarding our youths—or us, for that matter. We have access to a constant news stream, social media that doesn't portray reality truthfully, and loud opinions that compete for our attention and draw us in. Every day, we have an opportunity to immerse ourselves in a culture that is growing farther and farther from the godly principles that we sing about in our old, favorite hymns. Our teens do not always have the luxury of deciding what to hear. School lessons are chosen by people who may or may not acknowledge that God is who He is. Friends introduce kids to songs, TV shows, and ideas that may not be appropriate. News streams focus on the bad in the world, as opposed to positive things that are happening.

As parents, youth workers, pastors and caring adults, we need to be willing to engage today's youths where they are at, listening and discussing the lyrics, movies, and news stories that are prevalent in our culture. Being willing to listen to teens and discuss these topics with them

shows our kids that we know what the culture is teaching. And it helps us point them to Christ despite what they are hearing, even when it makes us uncomfortable.

As our teens join us in singing praise and worship songs at church—or hymns, or classic Sunday school songs—we can reinforce the truths that we want them know. “Yes, Jesus loves me.” “It is well with my soul.” These, and so many other examples point us directly to our Savior. I remember one of the songs that I learned as a little child, “Oh be careful, little ears, what you hear ... for the Father up above is looking down in love, oh be careful little ears, what you hear.” What a timeless lesson this teaches us. We can teach our teens to be discerning when it comes to what they read, listen to, and sing.

*Rykhus, a member of Abiding Savior Free Lutheran, Sioux Falls, S.D., has served two full five-year terms on the AFLC Youth Board, which includes serving as a liaison to the FLY Committee for multiple conventions.*





## FLBCS hosts graduation



Members of the 2020 and 2021 graduating classes of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary gathered on the Plymouth, Minn., campus on May 8 for commencement ceremonies. The event was held in the newly completed Student Life Center. Pictured (top) are members of both graduating classes of the Bible College. Above, members of the Concert Choir and Proclaim Choir sing during the graduation ceremony. At left, seminary graduate Patrick VandenBos (right) receives his diploma from Dr. Wade Mobley (center), president, and Pastor Todd Erickson, chairman of the Board of Trustees.



M

y niece sang the hymn *'Tis So Sweet to Trust in Jesus* at my parents' funeral. The lyrics

have a message of pure trust, hope, and assurance that God will be there until the end—the end of earthly life and the beginning of glory!

My mom, Oryen Benrud, was a music teacher before she married my dad, Marlin Benrud, and then directed church and community choirs until she was 86 years old, a record that I doubt I can break! She and my dad were true team players in life on the farm, at their business, and in their walks of faith. I am grateful for parents whose first purpose in life was to serve their Lord. I believe their lives together bore much fruit for the kingdom.

They loved the AFLC, and it was during the annual conference at the ARC that my mom fell and broke her arm. Of course, she pretended she was fine and they finished out the conference before even telling us of her fall. This injury ultimately led to other health issues and a steady decline in strength.

My mom was also a writer. For decades she enjoyed putting together the church newsletter, and she was always writing

# THE SWEETNESS OF TRUST

BY JAN STRAND

notes for future articles. I found a yellow legal pad that she was keeping notes on from that conference. I have no idea who was speaking while she was jotting these notes, but it must have seemed meaningful to her. She wrote:

"What is our purpose in life? Serving our Lord and Master! Bearing fruit for/in His Kingdom!

"Are we looking at life through our rear-view mirror? What would happen to the Lord's kingdom? Imagine yourself driving down the road. Where are your eyes focusing? Ahead, of course! We look ahead—farther down the road—we are alert to the side roads and what lies immediately ahead.

"What would happen if we looked only in the rear-view mirror? Probably we would hit something ahead of us or veer off the road. Forward progress would be difficult, even under ideal conditions of a wide road—no traffic and no side roads.

"That is the way life is! We must be focusing on what is to come, not what has been. Our lives will be unproductive if we are looking back

recalling what is past and dwelling on incidents that really have no meaning."

In the last year, we have all been touched one way or another by the pandemic. We have all experienced dark days. I am sometimes challenged by those who want to lay blame for my parents' deaths on the situation of our day. As believers, we know that our days are numbered by our heavenly Father, so my parents' deaths within days of one another were not unplanned events by the Planner Himself. While it was awful and beautiful all the same time, it was His plan for them. Our family was blessed to have time with them in their last days. And we are blessed by the godly heritage they left us. I miss them greatly. I rejoice in knowing where they are, just one heartbeat away. I am encouraged to not look back but to simply and sweetly trust in an all-loving God who will be our guide to the end.

*Strand is a member of Emmanuel Lutheran, Kenyon, Minn.*



## FLY One-Night event now open for registration

Registration is open for FLY One-Night, a live online worship event for youth which will be held July 7. The livestream, which will be hosted on the FLY Convention website, will feature special guest speaker Eric Samuel Timm. Other speakers will include FLY Committee President Gideon Johnson, FLY Convention Coordinator Daniel Keinanen, and national Youth Director Jason Holt. The event, sponsored by the Free Lutheran Bible College, will be held on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Members of the classes of 2021 and 2022 may register to attend the event in person in the campus chapel. The event will begin at 7 p.m. and last until 8:30 p.m. Registration and more information can be found at [flyconvention.org/one\\_night](http://flyconvention.org/one_night).

## Districts to host Reawakening to the Mission conferences

Several AFLC districts will host *Reawakening to the Mission* conferences this fall, giving local districts a chance to meet with representatives from AFLC ministries. The events will feature presentations from several AFLC departments on topics of personal revival, Home Missions, evangelistic work, and church planting. A variety of departments will be represented, including but not limited to AFLC Home Missions, AFLC Evangelism and Discipleship, Youth, and World Missions.

Upcoming events in AFLC districts include:

- September 18 in Arlington, S.D.
- October 16 in Roseau, Minn.
- November 20 in Arlington, Wash.

## Acts 16 Connection events train laymen for service in congregations

AFLC Home Missions and the AFLC Coordinating Committee have teamed up to host a number of recent lay preaching workshops throughout the Midwest. Called the *Acts 16 Connection*, these events are designed to encourage lay people as they serve within AFLC congregations. Previous events were held in Plymouth, Minn., and Sioux Falls, S.D. The next event is scheduled for June 11 in Thief River Falls, Minn. Districts are encouraged to contact the AFLC president's office to consider hosting an event. For more information, send requests by email to [president@aflc.org](mailto:president@aflc.org).

## Pastors earn higher education degrees

Three AFLC pastors have recently completed doctoral programs. **Martin Horn** earned a Ph.D. in New Testament studies from Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, Kansas City. **Brent Olson** earned a Ph.D. in Old Testament exegetical theology from Concordia Seminary, St. Louis. **Jerry Moan** earned a D.Min. from Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Plymouth, Minn. Olson and Moan are FLBCS faculty members.

## AFLC Annual Conference

Online conference/meal registration closes June 1; electives offered featuring FLBCS instructors

The 2021 AFLC Annual Conference will be held June 16-19 on the campus of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary in Plymouth, Minn. The conference theme, "Prepare the Way of the Lord," comes from Isaiah 40:3.

Though online registration for the conference closed on June 1, walk-up registrations will be available. A single registration is \$35, and couple registration is \$60. Meals offered through the FLBCS cafeteria may not be purchased on arrival.

Off-campus housing arrangements have been made with the following hotels:

- Country Inn & Suites by Radisson, 210 Carlson Parkway, Plymouth • 763.473.3008 • \$102/night
- Cambria Hotel, 9655 Grove Circle North, Maple Grove • (952) 225-2685 • \$119/night
- Crown Plaza Minneapolis West, 3131 Campus Drive, Plymouth • 763.559.6600 • \$132 plus tax, or the prevailing rate, whichever is less

### Children and Youth

Families are welcome at the Annual Conference. Vacation Bible school will be led by two ministry teams from our Free Lutheran Bible College for children ages 4 through sixth grade. The time will include Bible lessons, music, crafts, and recreation during morning and afternoon sessions, and children will join their families for lunch and supper.

Childcare will be available for those younger than 4 during the morning and afternoon sessions. Children will join their families for lunch and supper. If you think you may use the service at some point, please register your child for accurate planning.

Students in 7th through 12th grade who register for the teen track will join together for worship, Bible study, and fellowship activities each morning and afternoon. Activities will include on- and off-campus opportunities with transportation provided by Bible College staff. Teen programming will provide a chance for students to grow in the Word while meeting students from other AFLC congregations. Note that students are encouraged to join their families for lunch and the evening services.

### Conference Electives

Added to the conference schedule this year is a series of lectures which will be presented by faculty of the Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary. The seven lectures will be offered during two blocks: 10:50 to 11:35 a.m. on Thursday, June 17, and on Saturday, June 19.

Thursday's lectures include: "Systematic Theology," by Dr. Nathan Olson; "Baal Xiphon," by Dr. Brent Olson; "What Can I Do to Encourage FLBC Attendance?" by Pastor Adam Osier; and "Music to Benefit the Congregation," by Andrew Hanson.

Friday's lectures include: "You Cannot, You Must," by Dr. Phil Haugen; "How Our Past Informs Our Future," by Pastor Robert Lee; and "Sverdrup, Living Out Orthodox Piety in America," by Pastor Phil Hooper.





# OUTREACH OPPORTUNITIES

BY PASTOR JONATHAN ABEL

*“... and this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come” (Matthew 24:14).*

**A**s we prepared for furlough, I looked through photos of the various ministries with which we have been involved. I was amazed at how many different programs we had, and how many people were touched. Besides the regular programs of Sunday school, Sunday night worship service, Saturday night youth meetings, and our midweek Bible studies, we also hosted programs in a local park, youth events at the senior citizen center, youth praise and worship nights, birthday parties

at church, women's social teas, game nights, country parties, kids' programs, etc. Each event was an opportunity to reach out with the gospel.

As I looked at these pictures, I was reminded of how good God has been to us. In fact, since we dedicated our church four years ago, we have filled the building many times with these special events. It made me think back to the other congregations that we had a part in planting and beginning the programming.

The local congregation has many functions, but the most important functions are to preach the Word of God, administer the sacraments, heal the brokenhearted, equip the saints for spiritual survival and warfare, and then send them out of the building's four walls to reach the lost. I love the church! To me it is like my extended family, and I can certainly understand the psalmist when he wrote, “I rejoiced with those who said to me, ‘Let us go to the house of the LORD’” (Psalm 122:1). God made us social creatures. He wants us to be together, to fellowship, to lift each other up, and to draw people into our family.

But the worldwide pandemic and the



government policies that followed shut many churches down and forced many into isolation. It became difficult for us to visit people and interact with one another. This led our congregation, like many churches, to find new ways to keep in touch with our parishioners and to create programs for outreach.

This was extremely hard for me because I am not media savvy. But our parishioners stepped up to the plate and soon they had us on social media. As others have experienced, we are reaching out far beyond our walls through Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and a weekly podcast. Though our church is now opened to a limited audience and our programming is also limited, we are looking forward to the days when we will meet in big groups. Until then, we will work to improve our outreach through social media.

What I have learned is that when the Church is oppressed, the gospel spreads around the world like wildfire. May we use this opportunity to reach all nations before Christ's return.

*Abel is an AFLC missionary serving in Maringá, Brazil.*



## PEOPLE &amp; PLACES

**Lance Morrison**, a 2021 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, has accepted a call to serve Our Savior's Lutheran, Dillon, Mont.

**Joe Dombrowski**, a 2021 graduate of the Free Lutheran Seminary, has accepted a call to serve United Lutheran, Manteca, Calif.

**Pastor Alan Arneson** was installed March 28 at Amery Free Lutheran, Amery, Wis., with Pastor Lyndon Korhonen, AFLC president, officiating.

**Pastor George Winston** has resigned from St. John's Lutheran, Newark, Ohio. He is currently not seeking a call and is waiting for God's direction.

**Pastor Gideon Johnson** has accepted a call to serve Hope Free Lutheran, Killdeer, N.D., an AFLC Home Missions church plant. Johnson, who has resigned from the Kenyon, Minn., parish (Hauge and Emmanuel Lutheran), will begin his new call on June 7.

**Pastor Herb Hoff** is serving as interim pastor of Bethany Lutheran, Astoria, Ore., through June.

**Pastor Ron Staudinger** retired from Tamarack Free Lutheran, Tamarack, Minn., on May 23. He and his wife, Nancy, will relocate to Goffstown, N.H., and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan.

**Pastor Marlin Harris** has announced his retirement after 40 years of ministry. He will resign at the end of June from True Vine Lutheran, Mora, Minn. He is also resigning as director of AFLC Institutional Chaplaincy.

## Register now for Summer Institute of Theology

The Free Lutheran Bible College and Seminary is inviting pastors and lay people to attend the Summer Institute of Theology Aug. 2-8 on their campus in Plymouth, Minn. Special guests Dr. Bryan Chapell and Dr. Zac Hicks will present lectures on this year's theme, "Christ-Centered Preaching and Worship." Pastor Gary Jorgenson and Dr. Nathan Olson will round out the teaching line up. Registration is open to the full week or part of the week. More information can be found at [flbc.edu/sit](http://flbc.edu/sit).



## FLS classes of 2020, 2021 walk at graduation

Members of the 2020 and 2021 graduating classes of the Free Lutheran Seminary walked during the commencement ceremony on May 8 on the Plymouth, Minn., campus. Graduates include Josh Johnson ('21), Joe Dombrowski ('21), Pastor David Handsaker ('20), Lance Morrison ('21), Kyle Smith ('21), Patrick VandenBos ('21), Pastor Andrew Kneeland ('20), Pastor Brian Lunn ('20), Pastor Brian Westerbos ('20), Pastor Kevin Hall ('20), and Michael Onstad ('21). Not in attendance from the class of 2020 were Ganzorig Enkhjargal, Pastor Micah Klemme, Pastor Bryce McMinn, Pastor Seth Moan, and Pastor Erin Tormanen.

## APRIL MEMORIALS

**Bible College**

Ruth Claus  
Lillian Broden  
Art Twedt  
Jerome Rice

**General Fund**

Millie Strand  
Phyllis Nikunen

**Home Missions**

Pastor Jerome  
Elness  
Helen Johnson

**Journey Missions**

Ron Dahl

**Parish Education**

Millie Strand

**Seminary**

Phyllis Nikunen  
Judith Fugleberg

**WMF**

Cynthia Erickson  
Helen Johnson  
Patti Broden  
Lillian Broden  
Betty Floan

**World Missions**

Kevin Tvinnereim

## AFLC BENEVOLENCES January 1-April 30, 2021

FUND	REC'D IN APRIL	TOTAL REC'D TO DATE	PRIOR YEAR-TO-DATE
General Fund	\$42,961	\$149,601	\$129,026
Evangelism	11,763	52,355	30,918
Youth Ministries	16,023	72,450	31,862
Parish Education	16,994	56,346	37,120
Seminary	33,880	108,664	101,380
Bible College	39,735	153,626	126,371
Home Missions	35,697	134,393	101,828
World Missions	36,980	173,630	123,948
Personal Support	68,138	326,040	244,578
<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>\$68,138</b>	<b>\$1,227,105</b>	<b>\$927,031</b>

For additional financial information for each department, go to [www.aflc.org/giving](http://www.aflc.org/giving)



# OUR HYMNS OF THE HEART

*"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God" (Colossians 3:16).*

**W**e're not sure now who suggested this theme for an issue of our church magazine, but it's a good one and it's been encouraging for both me and Ruth to get quick positive replies when we asked people to tell us about a favorite hymn and what it means to them. Hopefully my rambling words that follow may unearth

a memory or two, and perhaps lead to the creation of some new ones.

What's the first hymn that you remember? It is probably "The Old Rugged Cross" for me, and I recall singing it

at about age 4 or 5 over the telephone for my maternal grandmother since it was a favorite of hers.

Do you have a heart hymn to sing in times of temptation? Consider "O What Precious Balm and Healing" (*Ambassador Hymnal*, 82), especially verse two.

There's a book entitled *28 Hymns to Sing Before You Die* (Mulder and Roberts, Cascade Books, 2014), and the authors suggest that there are many ways life can end, but one of the best scripts is, "Exit singing." Our *Ambassador Hymnal* (AH) includes many appropriate hymns in the "Aspiration, Hope," "Death, Burial," and "Eternal Destiny" sections (#601-627), but I notice that there are many others with words in the last verses that speak of dying and the life to come.

A pastor will often learn of hymns that are close to the heart of older members. One lady had memorized the first verse of "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say" (AH, 558). This was her testimony, and she would recite it for me when we visited. Another

dear elderly saint always closed our prayer times by saying, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe."

I remember, too, a lady confined to her home who told me that she knew she would be dying soon ... because she heard the angels singing. "What were they singing?" I asked. "*Den Himmelske Lovsang*" ("The Heavenly Song of Praise"), she said. Lost in the English language, I learned later that this is a common funeral hymn in Madagascar, and a verse is still sung today during the funerals of former missionaries.

During my first years of ministry, I was introduced to "Behold the Host Arrayed in White" (AH, 264,) which was sung at almost every funeral with at least one verse in Norwegian.

My father-in-law never forgot a pastor who conducted evangelism services in his congregation. One evening a hymn entitled "I'm a Pilgrim, and I'm a Stranger" (*Concordia*, 348) was sung, and it touched his heart. "Of the city to which I'm going My Redeemer, My Redeemer is the light; There is no sorrow nor any sighing, Nor any sinning, nor any dying; Of that city to which I'm going My Redeemer, my Redeemer is the light." This was the hymn that our family chose to be sung at his funeral.

Some of you are familiar with a newer hymn, "I Was There to Hear Your Borne Cry" (*With One Voice*, 770) and the words of the last verse recently touched my heart:

In the middle ages of your life,  
Not too old, no longer young,  
I'll be there to guide you through  
the night,  
Complete what I've begun.  
When the evening gently closes in,

And you shut your weary eyes,  
I'll be there as I have always been  
With just one more surprise.

Occasionally a pastor might include in a Sunday service someone's heart hymn and be fortunate enough to be told of it afterwards. John Newton, author of "Amazing Grace," also composed other hymns, and someone told me after a worship service that "Approach, My Soul" (AH, 421) was her heart hymn, and it has become special to me, too. The last time I preached, someone told me that the closing hymn, "May the Mind of Christ My Savior" was her favorite.

My pastor during my high school years placed cards in the pews entitled "I Wish," offering worshipers a chance to suggest a favorite hymn, which is a good idea.

"The King of Love My Shepherd Is" (AH, 566) was sung when Gloria and I

*... she knew she would be dying soon because she heard the angels singing. "What were they singing?" I asked. ... "The Heavenly Song of Praise."*

were married and at our 50th anniversary celebration, and I expect it will be sung at our funerals someday, too. It's a paraphrase of the 23rd Psalm, and closes with the triumphant verse, "And so, through all the length of days, Thy goodness faileth never. Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise Within Thy house forever."



Pastor Robert Lee



*something to share*

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# WAITING FOR ANSWERED PRAYERS

BY GRACIA GILBERTSON

**T**raveling across the Cascade Mountains recently, my husband turned the radio to a country music station. Although country has never been a favorite genre of mine, I must admit the lyrics of some songs tell quite a story and cause moments of reflection. One such song is “Unanswered Prayers,” by Garth Brooks. The lyrics say, “Sometimes I thank God, for unanswered prayers, Remember when you’re talkin’ to the man upstairs, That just because He doesn’t answer doesn’t mean He don’t care, Some of God’s greatest gifts are unanswered prayers.”

I struggle with prayer at times, especially unanswered prayers. When you’ve been praying for a loved one to come to know Jesus, praying for freedom from addiction, praying for healing from an illness, praying for financial provision, praying for a family to be restored as a divorce seems imminent, or any number of things that deeply impact your life and those you love, it’s so easy to become disheartened and wonder if God is really listening, if He truly cares. I turn to Scriptures like I Peter 5:7, “Cast all your anxiety on Him, for He cares for you.” And Hebrews 4:16, “Let us come boldly to the

throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” And James 5:16b-17, “The prayer of righteous person has great power in its working. Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it would not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.”

Yet, there are also Scriptures that appear to promise much, but sometimes it seems as though God fails to deliver. Scriptures like Matthew 7:7-8, “Ask and it will be given you, seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.” And Matthew 21:22, “If you believe, you will receive whatever you ask for in prayer.”

You begin to question yourself, “Did I not really believe God would answer? Am I like the doubter in James 1:6-7? ‘But when he asks, he must believe and not doubt, because he who doubts is like a wave on the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. That man should not think he will receive anything from the Lord.’”

But then I am reminded of the father in Mark 9:24, “I do believe, help me overcome my unbelief.” The Lord knows how easily we

lose heart. Perhaps that’s why He answers some simple prayers relatively quickly. One evening I ran across the Instagram page of a former Young Life leader, and I prayed, “Lord, lay my son on his heart and have him reach out.” The next morning, I received a text from this leader, asking, “How can I pray for your family today?” What a joy to respond and tell him his text was an answer to my prayer!

Jesus told the story of the persistent widow in Luke 18 to encourage us to “always pray and not give up.” We have the examples of Abraham, Moses, David, and Joseph who waited many years for a promise from God to be fulfilled. We have the assurance of many verses that God hears our prayers, and “acts on behalf of those who wait for him” (Isaiah 46:4). I remember the words of Tim Keller, “God will either give us what we ask for or give us what we would have asked if we knew everything He knows.”

So, I pray on, trusting, however falteringly, that God knows, God cares, and in His timing, will answer.

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*Gilbertson lives in Leavenworth, Wash.*