

Hymn Sing

7/24/2016

Today we make a joyful noise to the Lord. The following hymns are favorites of the congregation, with the history of each one.

Morning Has Broken

The hymn appeared first in the USA in the Presbyterian Hymnbook (1955), but it was not until Cat Stevens (now Yusuf Islam) sang it on his triple platinum album *Teaser and the Firecat* in 1971 that the song became well known and, as a result, has been included in most hymnals since that time. This is a rare, though not unique, example of a Christian hymn receiving acclaim through the popular media. UM Hymnal editor Carlton Young notes that the “text effectively links and expresses the creation stories in Genesis 1 and John 1, and reminds us that each new day is a gift from God.” The morning sings in the sounds of the blackbird—an echo of the “Word” or the voice of the Incarnation itself. The second stanza closes with a reference to God walking in Eden through the garden—“where his feet pass.” This is an echo of Genesis 3:8: “And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” There is, however, no hint in this idyllic account of the fall of humanity that follows in that verse. The final stanza personalizes this experience. “Mine is the sunlight! Mine is the morning.” We share in the freshness and possibility of the “one light Eden saw play.” Our response is to “Praise with elation” for “God’s re-creation of the new day.”

On Eagle’s Wings

Father Michael Joncas, a priest of the Archdiocese of St. Paul and Minneapolis, has composed more than 300 liturgical songs, but his name is widely known for the one that tops a list of favorites: “On Eagle’s Wings.” Since it was written in 1979, it has become a staple at Sunday services, funerals and memorial events as a reminder of God’s uplifting presence in times of sorrow. The song came about when he was visiting a friend at the major seminary in Washington. One evening, Father Joncas’ friend got word

that his father had suffered a fatal heart attack. Father Joncas wrote "On Eagle's Wings" in the days that followed and it was sung for the first time publicly at the friend's father's wake service. The song is based on Psalm 91, its lyrics drawing from the Scripture's descriptions of God's protection and providence. Lyrics include the lines "You need not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day," and "For to his angels he has given a command to guard you in all of your ways." Although there are no mentions of eagles in Psalm 91, the song's chorus uses the metaphor to depict God's high, secure places the verse describes. "And he will raise you up on eagle's wings, bear you on the breath of dawn, make you to shine like the sun, and hold you in the palm of his hand." The composer says, "I have been humbled by the number of times people have spoken or written to me about how God has used the song to bring them comfort and peace."

The Old Rugged Cross

George Bennard was born in Youngstown, Ohio in 1872, but his family moved to Iowa, where he accepted Christ as his savior at a revival meeting sponsored by the Salvation Army. George's coal-miner father died when George was sixteen. George had hoped to become an evangelist, but instead went to work as a coal-miner to support his mother and sisters. Some years later, Bennard moved to Chicago, married, and began an evangelistic ministry with the Salvation Army. Later still, he was ordained as an evangelist by the Methodist Church, and traveled through the northern states carrying out his ministry. In December, 1912, he was struggling with some sort of personal problem, which led him to reflect on Christ's suffering on the cross. He later wrote, "I saw the Christ of the cross as if I were seeing John 3:16 leave the printed page, take form, and act out the meaning of redemption."

Bennard had already composed a tune, and his reflections on the cross led him to pen words to go with the tune. "The Old Rugged Cross" was used at Billy Sunday evangelistic meetings. It became so well known that it was consistently ranked the number one favorite hymn for several decades.

Amazing Grace

John Newton wrote the words for this hymn from personal experience. He grew up without any particular religious conviction, but his life's path was formed by a variety of twists and coincidences that were often put into motion by his recalcitrant insubordination. He was forced into service in the Royal Navy, and after leaving the service, he became involved in the Atlantic slave trade. In 1748, a violent storm battered his vessel so severely that he called out to God for mercy, a moment that marked his spiritual conversion. He continued his slave trading career until 1754 or 1755, when he ended his seafaring altogether and began studying Christian theology. Ordained in the Church of England in 1764. "Amazing Grace" was written to illustrate a sermon on New Year's Day of 1773. It is unknown if there was any music accompanying the verses; it may have simply been chanted by the congregation. It has been associated with more than 20 melodies, but in 1835 it was joined to a tune named "New Britain" to which it is most frequently sung today. With the message that forgiveness and redemption are possible regardless of sins committed and that the soul can be delivered from despair through the mercy of God, "Amazing Grace" is one of the most recognizable songs in the English-speaking world.

Just a Closer Walk with Thee

"Just a Closer Walk With Thee" is a traditional gospel song and while the precise author of "Just A Closer Walk With Thee" is unknown, circumstantial evidence suggest it dates back to southern African-American churches of the 19th century. As is the case with many hymns, knowing where a song came from, while interesting and helpful at times, is not as important as the witness of the hymn itself in the lives of those who sing it. Such is the case of this venerable song. The first witness may be found in the testimonial nature of the text. The anonymous composer feels "weak" and lives in a world of "wrong." The only way to be "satisfied" is by invoking Jesus who is "strong" and by walking closely beside him. It is the daily close walk with Christ that leads one to become more Christ-like. As James 4:8 notes, "Come close to God, and God will come close to you. Wash your hands, you sinners; purify your hearts, for your loyalty is divided between God and the world." (New Living Translation) In the second stanza, the singer seems to be despondent in

a “world of toil and snares.” The first rhetorical question posed is, “If I falter, Lord, who cares?” A second question—“Who with me my burden bears?”—receives a welcome response, “None but thee.” The third stanza leads us where many gospel songs take us—to heaven. The one with whom we walk in life will “guide me gently, safely o’er to thy shore.”

In the Garden

C. Austin Miles (1868-1946) was a pharmacist turned hymn writer and church music director. He was also an amateur photographer. One day in March, 1912, while in his dark room waiting for film to develop, Miles had a profound spiritual experience in which he saw an incredible vision of Mary Magdalene visiting the empty tomb. He saw her leave the tomb and walk into a garden where she met the Master and heard Him speak her name. When Miles came to himself his nerves were vibrating and his muscles tense; the words to a new song were filling his mind and heart. He quickly wrote out the lyrics to and later that evening composed the musical score. The song was published that same year and it too became a theme song of the Billy Sunday evangelistic crusades. In The Garden continues to be a favorite of hymn lovers who treasure that quiet 'garden time' with their Savior.

Lord of the Dance

Written by English songwriter Sydney Carter in 1963, he borrowed the tune from the American Shaker song "Simple Gifts". The hymn is widely performed in English-speaking congregations and assemblies. The hymn was used in the UK early January 1972 for the first time in schools, and was a major success. It follows the idea of a traditional English carol, "Tomorrow Shall Be My Dancing Day" which tells the gospel story in the first person voice of Jesus of Nazareth with the device of portraying Jesus' life and mission as a dance. Carter was inspired partly by Jesus and was partly intending simply to give tribute to Shaker music. He later stated, "I did not think the churches would like it at all. I thought many people would find it pretty far flown, probably heretical and anyway dubiously Christian. But in fact people did sing it and, unknown to me, it touched a chord ... Anyway, it's the sort of Christianity I

believe in. I see Christ as the incarnation of the piper who is calling us. He dances that shape and pattern which is at the heart of our reality."

Thy Word

Christian singer Amy Grant and Christian singer-songwriter Michael W Smith wrote this song. It is a worshipful hymn based on Psalm 119 v 105. The song was recorded at Caribou Ranch recording studio high in the Rocky Mountains. Michael originally came up with the song's melody and some words for the chorus straight from David's Psalm about being a light into my path. Amy fell in love with his demo, but as Michael had no idea what the verses were supposed to say, he gave it to her and told her she could finish the tune. "So later that night she starts walking back to her cabin," Michael told us. "And you have to understand Caribou Ranch is an 8,000 acre ranch and it's very dark, and you're in the middle of nowhere. And she got lost. There's bears and all that sort of thing. You've got to really know where you're going. It's obviously a compound with all these cabins and stuff." "She finally saw a lamp and started walking towards that light, didn't realize that that was her cabin," he continued. "And she walked into that little cabin and sat down with a notebook and pen and wrote the verses to 'Thy Word.'"

How Great Thou Art

Carl Gustaf Boberg (1859-1940), was a Swedish pastor, editor, and member of the Swedish parliament. He was enjoying a nice walk when a thunderstorm suddenly appeared out of no where. A severe wind began to blow. After the storm was over, he looked out over the clear bay. He then heard a church bell in the distance. And the words to How Great Thou Art begin to form in his heart -- O Lord, my God, When I in awesome wonder, consider all the worlds Thy hands hath made. . . Can you imagine what Boberg felt as he formed these words? There was such calmness after the fierce storm he could only utter those words of peace. The poem was published in 1891. How Great

Thou Art was translated by Stuart K. Hine, a English missionary to the Ukraine – who later wrote a 4th stanza and set it to music. The song became well known through being sung by George Beverly Shea at Billy Graham Crusades. This caused the hymn to receive new attention in Sweden and America and be published in several songbooks. Today millions across the world continue to sing this beautiful song. Giving God all praise, glory, and honor for who He is -- the Creator of this universe.

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This simple but profound call to praise and worship anchors the image of God as shepherd with God as creator. We belong to God, God does not belong to us.

Psalm 100

New Revised Standard Version:

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;
we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.