

Sermons at Union Congregational Church

Preached by The Reverend Gail L. Miller, Pastor

May 29, 2016

Second Sunday After Pentecost

Pentecost 2

Hymns Sermon

How Great Thou Art

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xX15hq2VxdQ>

1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

Its first source is a Swedish text by Carl G. Boberg, who wrote its nine stanzas one summer evening in 1885 after he had admired the beauty of nature and the sound of church bells.

From the Swedish it was translated to German, and then to Russian.

The Russian text came to the attention of Stuart Hine (b. London, 1899; d. 1989) when he and his wife were missionaries in the Ukraine; they often sang it together as a duet. He translated it to English and it was first published with its Swedish tune in 1949 in a Russian missions magazine. Because much of Boberg's original text was lost in the multiple translations, the English text in modern hymnals is usually credited to Hine.

The story of how it came to be published in America is interesting.

In the 1930's in Oklahoma, a young man named Vernon Spencer was recovering from a serious mining accident and began playing music at a local bar called the *Bucket of Blood*. He enjoyed the work so much that he hopped on a train to Hollywood, hoping to make it big. He changed his name to Tim Spencer, and joined *Roy Rogers and the Sons of the Pioneers* one of the most popular groups in America at the time.

Tim married a Christian woman named Velma, who prayed faithfully for him, especially while he was on the road. And he needed all the prayer he could get, for his lifestyle was epitomized by the title of one of his hits: "Cigarettes, Whiskey, and Wild Wild Women." Then one day in a hotel in Hazelton, Pennsylvania, Tim opened a letter from his wife. Included was a verse of Scripture. Picking up a nearby Gideon Bible, Tim read the passage and realized he needed a change in his life.

So he prayed, he gave his life to Jesus, and everything changed. His life was now under the Lordship of Christ. Tim Spencer later established a Gospel Music publishing company, *Manna Music*, and a few years later his college-age son, Hal, brought him a song from a student missionary conference. Tim contacted the author of the words, Stuart Hine, and published the song. It has since become one of the most beloved hymns of the twentieth century.

Just As I Am

Traditional Version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w2VrRk4pZHY>

Contemporary Version: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ljGRXhcf9U>

John 6:37

All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

At the age of 32, Charlotte Elliott (b. London, 1789; d. 1871) suffered a serious illness that left her an invalid for the rest of her life. Hymn writing provided a way for her to cope with her pain and depression – she wrote approximately 150 hymns, many of them reflecting her chronic pain and illness, but also revealing the faith that gave her perseverance and hope.

Still she suffered depression and feelings of helplessness throughout her life. Such was the case in 1836, when her brother was raising money for St. Marys, a college for the daughters of poor clergymen.

Charlotte wanted to have some little part in the project, but was unable because of her illness. As she wondered how she could help the cause, Charlotte decided to write a poem relevant to others who were physically limited. She remembered a conversation she had had with a great preacher fourteen years earlier. She was having a spiritual crisis and confessed to him that she did not know how to come to Christ. He told her, "Come to him just as you are."

So she wrote a poem based on that simple, but profound insight. Well the poem was published without Charlotte's name, and then years later, she was at her doctor's office and he (not knowing she was the author) handed her a little leaflet with the poem on it. She read her own poem as he told her that copies of her poem were being sold and the money given to St. Marys. Charlotte then realized that she had made a significant contribution to the building of the school.

Her brother, who had become a pastor said of *Just as I am*:
"In the course of a long ministry, I hope I have been permitted to see some fruit of my labours; but I feel far more has been done by a single hymn of my sister's."

Savior Like a Shepherd Lead Us

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuEgj3hp1iM>

Psalm 23

This hymn, attributed to Dorothy Thrupp, is not so much an assertion of our faith, but a prayer that stems **from** our faith. We know that God is our Shepherd. We know why we trust. And because we have that trust, we ask that God be faithful.

This hymn acknowledges our dependency and our emptiness, and asks that God would provide. Every verse of this hymn contains a promise from God, and a prayer we make because of that promise. It is a beautiful example of how we might live out our calling as followers of Christ.

Here's a story of the impact this hymn had on two men in the late 1800's.

One Christmas Eve, Ira D. Sankey was traveling by steamboat up the Delaware River. His friends asked him to sing and he chose this hymn. When he was finished, a man with a rough, weather-beaten face came up to him and asked, 'Did you ever serve in the Union Army?'

'Yes,' he replied, 'in the spring of 1860.'

'Can you remember if you were doing picket duty on a bright, moonlit night in 1862?'

'Yes,' answered Mr. Sankey, very much surprised.

'So did I,' said the stranger, 'but I was serving in the Confederate army. When I saw you standing at your post I said to myself: 'That fellow will never get away from here alive.' I raised my musket and took aim. I was standing in the shadow completely hidden, while the full light of the moon was falling upon you. At that instant, you raised your eyes to heaven and began to sing. I have always loved music, especially songs; and so I took my finger off the trigger.

'Let him sing his song to the end,' I said to myself. 'I can shoot him afterwards. He's my victim anyway, either now or when he's done.' But the song you sang then was the song you sang just now. I heard the words perfectly:

We are Thine, do Thou befriend us,
Be the guardian of our way.

Those words stirred up many for me. I began to think of my childhood and my God fearing mother. She had many, many times sung that song to me. But she died all too soon. When you had finished your song it was impossible for me to shoot you. I thought: 'The Lord who is able to save that man from certain death must surely be great and mighty' and my arm of its own accord dropped limp at my side.'

That's the power of the hymns we sing!

All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IR0I59Hqlak>

(I'm playing percussion in the orchestra on this arrangement!)

Revelation 7:11-12

All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, saying:

"Amen!

Praise and glory

and wisdom and thanks and honor

and power and strength

be to our God for ever and ever.

Amen!"

Here is another story of the power of the hymns we sing:

Rev. E. P. Scott was a missionary to India. One day he saw on the street, a man who was so strange looking that he asked around about him, learning that he belonged to a wild mountain tribe.

Mr. Scott prayed about it, and decided to visit the tribe, taking along his violin as he always did when he visited new people. As soon as he reached their mountain home, he encountered a savage group who were on a war expedition. They seized him, and pointed their spears right at his chest.

He quickly got out his violin, and began to play and sing in the native language, *All hail the power of Jesus' name!* He closed his eyes, expecting to die at any minute.

When he reached the third stanza, and nothing had happened, he opened his eyes, and was amazed to see that the spears had fallen from the hands of the savages, and big tears were in their eyes!

They invited Mr. Scott to their homes, and he spent two and a half years among them, teaching and showing what it looks like to follow Christ.

Sharing Christ - Changing Lives!

Amen!