

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.

- 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?

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.)

- 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?

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.

- 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

- 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?

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.

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).