

# Let Me Be Thine Forever

Lutheran Service Book 689 | study by Richard J. Serina Jr.

## Introduction

We all know the old cliché that children don't come with manuals. Well, neither do baptizands or confirmands. All Christian parents worry that their children will neglect faith and worship. The teenage years are the most excruciating, as these children we have held in our arms and taught to speak and sent off to school suddenly take great liberties with their newfound independence. Parents worry, and with good reason.

But God has not called us to force our children to remain in the Gospel. What He has called us to do is educate them in their faith and model that faith for them in our own lives,

around the dinner table and at the bedside and, of course, on Sunday mornings when we attend the Divine Service.

The Reformation-era hymn, "Let Me Be Thine Forever," is the prayer of the Christian that God would by His mercy and grace keep us in His fold. It also serves as an encouragement to us that our faith is strengthened by attending to Word and Sacrament.

- What practices did your parents instill in you when it comes to public or private devotion? What practices did you start in your own family?
- What are some challenges facing our children that tempt them to abandon the faith?

## Exploring the Scriptures

The Gospel lesson for the Sunday is Matt. 9:9–13. In this passage, Jesus calls Matthew to follow Him as His disciple. Matthew was known as a tax collector, and tax collectors were considered traitors of the Jewish faith because they worked for the Roman government. They were also notorious for collecting more than was required so that they could "skim off the top" and take some for themselves. This obviously would lead to questions about why Jesus might choose such "sinners" as His disciples, but a criticism like that misses the point of the Gospel altogether. Read Matt. 9:9–13.

- Did Jesus choose Matthew because he "deserved" to be His disciple? Why did Jesus choose Matthew, even though he was considered wicked by many others? Why does He choose us?

- Why does Jesus refer to the sinners and tax collectors as "sick"? Whom does He refer to as "well" or "righteous"? Does He really mean that some are not in need of salvation and others are?
- How does calling sinners show God's mercy? What lesson does Jesus give us about acknowledging our own sin in this reading?

This Gospel lesson reminds us of the mercy God has shown His people in Jesus Christ. We are all sinners saved by His mercy through the grace poured out upon us at Holy Baptism. He has made us His children, and now we are about the business of learning His Word and receiving His gifts, specifically the Sacrament of the Altar.

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

During the days of the Reformation, when this hymn was composed, one of the chief challenges facing Lutheran churches was the education of the faithful in this grace they had received. While visiting many of the congregations throughout Germany, Martin Luther was aghast to see not only children but also parents who did not know the Ten Commandments, the Apostles' Creed, even the Lord's Prayer. Many did not understand or value their Baptisms and the gift of the Lord's Supper. So, Luther wrote both the Small and Large Catechisms for the purpose of instructing children in the faith, specifically to help parents teach that faith to their own children.

- How has the Small Catechism continued to shape your family and private devotions? How do you use the Small Catechism to explore the Scriptures with your family or to answer theological questions as they arise?

Another controversy of the Reformation relating to this hymn's background involved the rite of confirmation. Lutherans do not believe that the rite of confirmation is a Sacrament that bestows the Holy Spirit, as the Spirit is given at Baptism. Instead, the rite of confirmation is an opportunity for children to confess their faith as learned through the study of the Catechism. This time of instruction gives them an opportunity to learn and grow in the faith

they received at the font, so that they might come to the Sacrament prepared to receive the blessings offered there.

- What do you remember of your catechetical instruction leading to confirmation? How did your parents prepare you for that process at home? How have you in turn prepared the children in your family?

### Text

The text of this hymn addresses the way the persons of the Holy Trinity are involved with our growth in faith and knowledge as Christians, a growth that is not restricted to a two-year window during youth catechesis, but is part of our daily spiritual disciplines. The first stanza addresses our faith in God the Father as the sustainer of our faith. It is this God who does not forsake His children, but keeps them close through His Word and enables them to remain steadfast in faith and worship.

- Where has God given you access to Him? How does He strengthen your faith through the Means of Grace? What do we risk by neglecting the Means of Grace?

The second stanza calls our attention to Jesus Christ, our Savior. It is this Jesus who reveals the light and life from

## Making the Connection

Christian faith is not something we create or sustain on our own. Rather, faith is the work of God Himself, and He alone can sustain us in that faith, doing so through Word and Sacrament. Where we find Word and Sacrament, there we have access to God through Jesus Christ, there we have the forgiveness of our sins and there we have the protection and strengthening our faith requires to withstand the attacks of the devil. This is what our children need. They do not need entertainment or excitement; they need the Gospel that comes to them through Word and Sacrament. Our children need to live, breathe, receive and cling to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For there the God who created

## In Closing

God does not abandon us or leave us on our own. He is at work in our lives, sustaining, forgiving and sanctifying us in the faith through Word and Sacrament. Christian faith does not depend upon the reason of our minds or the strength of our hands. It is God's gracious gift, and He alone preserves that faith through the Means of Grace we find in the Word and at the altar.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 689.

God, who consoles us with His Gospel, who makes us His own to live with Him forever and who has purchased us through His "blood and bitter pain" upon the cross, that we might obtain eternal life from His hand.

- How does the language here reflect what the Small Catechism says about the Second Article of the Creed?
- How does Jesus console us in this life? What promises does He make that console us in the midst of a world infected with sin, death and the devil?

The third and final stanza concludes with a prayer to the Holy Spirit. The hymn tells us that it is the Holy Spirit who helps us cling to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, enables us to confess this Jesus as Lord, and blesses us with Christian faith even at death. All of this the Holy Spirit does through the Means of Grace, where He "calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies" us by creating and strengthening faith in our hearts (*LSB*, p. 323).

- How does the Holy Spirit work in our lives? How can we be certain that it is the Holy Spirit working and not something else? Where do we find that Spirit?

them calls them through His Son, and there the Son who redeemed them forgives their sins and there the Spirit who creates faith in their hearts strengthens that faith through the Means of Grace.

- How have you instilled the value of Word and Sacrament in the lives of your children, your spouse or your family? What kind of an example have you given them of worship in your own life?
- How does worship strengthen your faith so that you might remain strong against the devil's attacks?

### Prayer

Almighty and most merciful God, You sent Your Son, Jesus Christ, to seek and to save the lost. Graciously open our ears and our hearts to hear His call and to follow Him by faith that we may feast with Him forever in His kingdom; through the same Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Proper 5A).