Lord of All Hopefulness

***Lutheran Service Book* 738** | study by Paul Robert Sauer

Introduction

The Greek philosopher Heraclitus (535–475 B.C.) famously remarked, "You can't step into the same river twice." Or to put it in other terms, "Change seems to be the only thing that doesn't change."

Today's hymn addresses the changes that occur for the believer throughout the believer's day but also throughout life. And yet amidst the changes, one who is changeless in His love walks with the believer throughout the diversity of each day and, indeed, all of life's stages.

- How has your relationship with God changed throughout your life? Are there high points or low points? What, if anything, has stayed constant?
- Often our needs in life change as we pass through life's stages: childhood, adulthood, our last years. Does the way that God speaks to His people change to meet our changing needs? Does the content of God's message change?

Exploring the Scriptures

The Psalms, like much of our modern hymnody, often speak to both the physical and spiritual needs of the believer. Read Ps. 55:16–17.

- In verse 17, at what times of the day does the psalmist call on God? Is there ever a time when it is not appropriate to call on God?
- The author of Psalm 55 utters "complaint and moan." Is it appropriate to complain to God?

Honest need and honest frustration about life are common expressions of the psalmists. Read Ps. 55:22–23.

- Who sustains the righteous in times of trouble?
- In a world that often seems unfair, where does true righteousness and justice come from?

In the Epistle for today, Heb. 9:24–28, Jesus is described as a high priest who appears "in the presence of God on our behalf," to put away the sins of the people.

- How does verse 28 describe the Second Coming of Jesus? What does it mean to be "saved"?

In the Gospel for today, Mark 12:38–44, Jesus warns against those who devour widows' houses, and He describes a pious widow who gives all that she has in offering to God.

- What does it mean to bring an offering to God? Does offering to God only happen at church?
- Is offering merely the money we bring? In what ways can we "devour ourselves" (i.e., offer to God our whole selves)?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Jan Struther (1901–53) rose to prominence as a secular poet and the author of the novel *Mrs. Miniver*. In 1925, she was asked by an Anglican priest who lived next door to her and who knew of her fame as a budding young poet to compose hymn texts for a hymnal that would become *Songs of Praise* (1931). Despite being herself an agnostic, much of her fame today derives from her contribution to that hymn collection, of which "Lord of All Hopefulness" is the best-known hymn.

- Does knowing that Struther was an agnostic change your view of this hymn? Can God speak through non-believers? See Num. 23:5–12.

Text

This hymn uses the form of traditional Christian collect prayers to present four stanzas, each of which is a prayer for a period of the day — morning, noon, evening and end of day. While the words speak about an actual day, the imagery also speaks to the believer's journey through life — as a child, a young adult, an adult and at life's end — and the presence of God throughout those different periods.

- What kind of forms can prayer take? Does prayer have to be spoken or can it be sung?
- Do you pray using different forms? Do you have a favorite form for praying? What about it do you like?

Stanza 2 describes God as being "skilled at the plane and the lathe," a reference to Jesus being the adopted son of the carpenter Joseph. Read 2 Thess. 3:6–13.

- What does St. Paul say about work and idleness? Is busyness the same as work?
- What is your greatest temptation to idleness? Who, according to the closing petition of stanza 2, provides strength in our hearts for the day's work?

Stanza 3 speaks of a welcome home after the day's work. Read Luke 10:8–9.

- Is the hospitality that Christians extend to one another simply about being "nice"?
- Is it always possible to love unconditionally? What obstacles get in the way of our love? Where does stanza 3 say that our love for neighbor comes from?

The hymn concludes with an emphasis on "gentleness," "calm," "contentment," "balm" and a prayer for peace at the day's end and life's end as an antidote to the maladies of life's end. Even with the sure and certain hope of the resurrection, Christians oftentimes still struggle with death — the fear of the unknown, the fear of frailty and loneliness.

- Where do you go to hear the "voice" of God that provides contentment? Where do you go to experience the real "presence" of God that provides balm?
- What is real peace? Can peace be found even in the midst of trials of body, mind and spirit?

Making the Connection

This hymn prays for the gifts that God provides to His people throughout life's stages. Luther describes it this way in his explanation to the First Article of the Creed in the Small Catechism: "He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life" (*LSB*, p. 322).

- How does this hymn's description of God help to provide meaning to the ordinary tasks and moments of our everyday life?
- Does your heart always need the same thing, or are there times when it is in need of extra "bliss" or "strength" or "love" or "peace"?

In Closing

The Small Catechism provides both a prayer to begin the morning and a prayer to close the day. Time itself is consecrated to the God who watches over us and is present with us each moment of each day of our whole life. The Morning Prayer concludes with the direction: "Then go joyfully to your work, singing a hymn, like that of the Ten Commandments, or whatever your devotion may suggest." The Evening Prayer concludes: "Then go to sleep at once and in good cheer" (*LSB*, p. 327). Go in the joyful and cheerful knowledge that God Himself goes with us.

- Sing or read aloud together *LSB* 738.

Prayer

Pray together either the Morning Prayer or the Evening Prayer (*LSB*, p. 327).