

# May God Bestow on Us His Grace

Lutheran Service Book 823/824 | study by Thomas E. Lock

## Introduction

When Martin Luther (1483–1546) wrote in 1522, “recently many islands and lands have been discovered, to which the grace [of God] has not appeared for these 1500 years,” he wrote of the discovery of the Americas (AE 16:135n 7). The next year Luther wrote our hymn for today, “May God Bestow on Us His Grace,” a hymn of thanksgiving for the rich blessings of God. This paraphrase of Psalm 67 is also a hymn for missions; in fact, it was the first mission hymn of the Reformation.

## Exploring the Scriptures

Our hymn is a paraphrase of Psalm 67. Read Ps. 67:1–2.

- For what does the psalmist ask in verse 1? This verse reminds you of what part of the Divine Service?
- In verse 2, what was to be made known among all nations of the earth?

Read the Holy Gospel for Sexagesima (Luke 8:4–15), the parable of the sower. This sower spreads his seed on differing soils in hope that all the soils will bear fruitfully from his seed.

- In verses 5–8 Jesus described the results from the

All Christians, including those living in these discovered islands and lands of the Americas, can give thanks that they have been blessed with the bestowal of the Gospel, which converts and saves sinners.

- Of what types of grace was Luther writing in this hymn? Why was it important to ask for such bestowal of grace? Why is it important for you to ask for grace from God?
- How is the bestowal of God’s grace linked with Christian missions? How has — does — God’s grace come to these discovered islands and lands?

sowing of the seed on the differing soils. What were the four differing types of soil upon which the seed was sown? What happened to the seed on each type of soil?

- The disciples asked for an explanation of this parable. Jesus’ reply is given in verses 10–15. What is the seed that was sown? How do the differing soils describe hearers of the Gospel?
- The sower in this passage demonstrates recklessness by tossing the seed not only onto soil likely to bear abundantly, but also onto soils where he knows it will not come to fruition. Who is the sower? Why is He so reckless? Whose fault is it if the seed of the Gospel does not result ultimately in salvation — God’s, or the hearer’s?

## Exploring the Hymn

### Background

After Luther was declared an outlaw by Emperor Charles V in 1521 (meaning anyone could kill Luther without fear of punishment), Elector Frederick the Wise spirited Luther away to Wartburg Castle near Eisenach. Luther returned to Wittenberg in 1522 to restore order within the congregations. He also soon began writing hymns for the people to sing. Today’s hymn is one of the first in that outpouring of new hymns in German.

- Imagine that the government was seeking your death. You would most likely try to hide out somewhere. Is there *any* reason why you would return to your hometown? What would motivate that return? When you returned, would you then start writing things for public consumption? Why or why not?

When Luther first reformed the Divine Service in 1523, he still retained the Latin, while removing those portions of the service that smacked of self-righteousness. Luther emphasized the work of God in the service. For the Benediction, Luther recommended that either the Aaronic Blessing (Num. 6:24–26) or Ps. 67:6–7 be used. The Aaronic Blessing was given by the Lord so that His name would be put upon the children of Israel (v. 27). On the other hand, Ps. 67:6–7 refers to God blessing the nations.

- What are the similarities and differences between the Aaronic Blessing and Ps. 67:6–7? What are their strengths and weaknesses at the close of the service? Why do you think Lutherans have retained the Aaronic Benediction?

## Text

We have already discovered the recklessness of the sower, the one who casts the seed upon all nations and all people. In this first mission hymn of the Reformation, there are many references to the nations of the world.

- How many references to these nations can you find in this hymn?

Luther's understanding of right worship can be summed up with the German word, *Gottesdienst*, that is, Divine Service. In this Divine Service God first serves man, and then Christians return thanks and praise to God.

- Look at the first stanza. Which aspect of Divine Service is being described? How is God serving the people of the earth? What is the goal of that service?

Stanza 2 is the paraphrase of Ps. 67:3–4. The emphasis of the hymn text and of these verses from Psalm 67 is about praising God (the second aspect of Divine Service). The second half of stanza 2 includes these lines:

For Thou shalt judge the earth, O Lord, Nor suffer sin to flourish;  
Thy people's pasture is Thy Word Their souls to feed and nourish,  
In righteous paths to keep them.

- Why should the people praise God?
- Where has the judgment of the earth and its sinfulness taken place in Christ? When will the final judging of the earth and its sinfulness take place? If sin will not flourish, how was it removed and how will it be removed?
- What is the connection between Psalm 23 and the last three lines of this stanza?

Stanza 3 is a paraphrase of Ps. 67:5–7. It also includes a reference to the parable of the sower: “The land shall plentiful fruit bring forth, / Thy Word is rich in blessing.”

- Read a portion of the Old Testament Reading for Sexagesima, Is. 55:10–13. How are seed and the Word linked? What is the connection between this reading and the parable of the sower? Who converts the people? To whom, then, do the people give thanks?

## Making the Connection

Read Rom. 1:8. What does St. Paul say about the faith of the Roman Christians? How far had the knowledge of their faith gone even in the time of the apostles? (If time allows, see also Col. 1:3–6 and 1 Thess. 1:8.)

- If the Gospel has already gone to all the nations, does that mean that we no longer need to send out

missionaries or bear witness of Christ to those who do not believe in Him?

- For what blessings of God (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) do you give thanks? How can you show this thankfulness to God and to other people, both near and far away?

## In Closing

The Holy Spirit distributes the rich blessings of Christ in His Word, Holy Baptism, Holy Absolution and Holy Communion in the Church, even as we confess in the explanation to the Third Article of the Creed from the Small Catechism (*LSB*, 323).

- Read this explanation aloud together.
- Sing or read aloud *LSB* 823 or 824.

## Prayer

Almighty God, in Your kindness You cause the light of the Gospel to shine among us. By the working of Your Holy Spirit, help us to share the good news of Your salvation that all who hear it may rejoice in the gift of Your unending love; through Jesus Christ, Your Son, our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen (Collect for Mission Observance).