

What was I thinking?

for Sunday, October 4, 2020

Read the fine print

I've heard Alice Parker, the great leader of hymn singing, advises those leading hymns to "read the fine print." In other words, look at the bottom or top of the page in the hymnal to see what kind of hymn it is, who wrote it, when it was written, etc. Is it a Lutheran chorale, a metrical psalm tune, an American folk tune, a spiritual? There are many possibilities. Not all hymns are created equal.

In the first of these articles, I wrote about hymn tunes having names, often having to do with places where they originated or the people who composed the tunes. In the case of *Morning Has Broken*, the tune was named after the Scottish village Bunessan, the birthplace of the woman who wrote *Child in a Manger*, the first text published with the tune, and because the tune probably came from the same region.

It's easy to assume that all hymns were written a long ago by composers and poets no longer living. I'm happy to report that even under the umbrella of "traditional" church music, many great hymns and other works of sacred music have been and are still being written by living composers and poets.

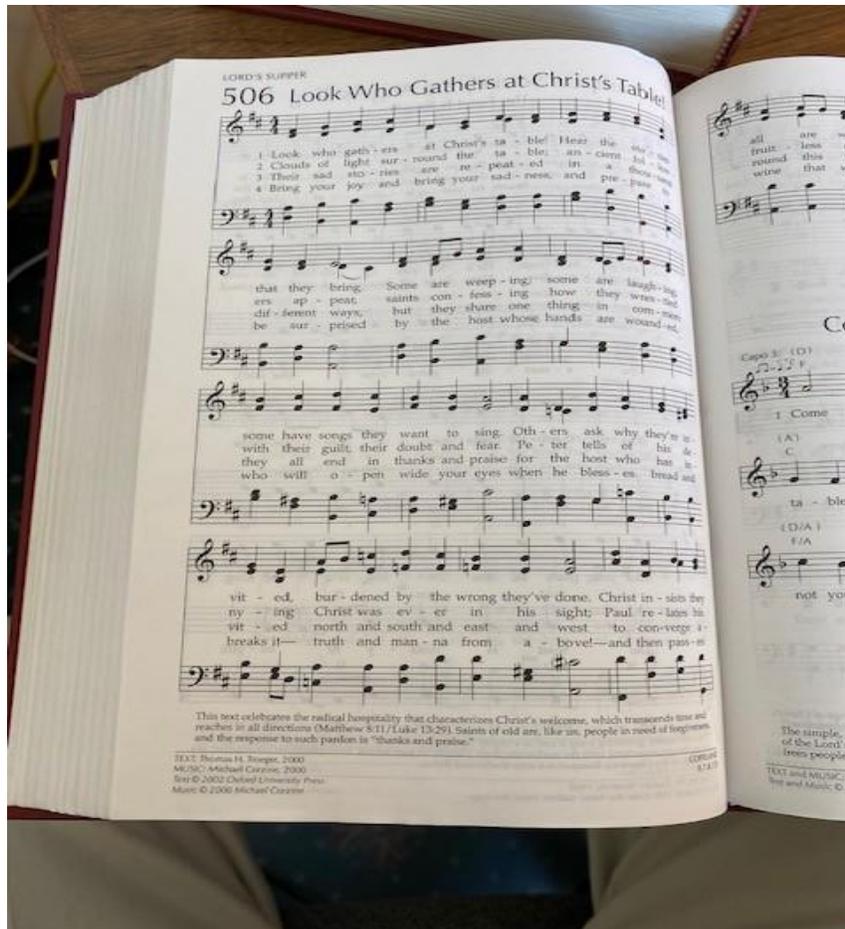
When I was as student at Florida State, I practiced a few times at St. John's Episcopal Church in Tallahassee. It was probably in hymnology class when this was brought to my attention, but there is a hymn the 1982 Episcopal Hymnal with a tune named *Call Street*. (The Episcopalians put their hymn tunes in italics.) Call Street sounded familiar. The name of the person who wrote the tune was Roy Henry Johnson. Dr. Johnson was a professor at Florida State and the Organist/Choirmaster at St. John's, which is on, you guessed it, Call Street in Tallahassee. It all made sense.

scend and right-eous fruits a - bound.
heart to bring forth fruits of love.
fold the fruits of peace and (joy.) joy

Alternative tune: *Walden*, 589.
Words: John Cawood (1775-1852), alt.
Music: *Call Street*, Roy Henry Johnson (b. 1933)

The image shows a page from a hymnal. At the top, there is a vocal line on a single staff with lyrics underneath. The lyrics are: "scend and right-eous fruits a - bound. heart to bring forth fruits of love. fold the fruits of peace and (joy.) joy". Above the vocal line, there are markings "1-2" and "Final". Below the vocal line is a piano accompaniment consisting of two staves (treble and bass clef). The music is in a key with one flat (B-flat major or D minor) and a 4/4 time signature. The piano part features a steady accompaniment with eighth and sixteenth notes. At the bottom of the page, there is a section of text providing information about an alternative tune and the source of the words and music.

Fast forward quite a few years to a Worship & Music Conference at Montreat. We were singing a beautiful hymn from the new Presbyterian Hymnal called *Look Who Gathers at Christ's Table!*



Curious about this new (to me) hymn, I read the fine print. The text was by Thomas Troeger, 2000. But it was the tune that caught my attention. It's called COPELAND. That name was familiar. I looked at the composer of the tune and saw that it was Michael Corzine, my organ teacher when I was at Florida State. Dr. Corzine is Organist & Choirmaster at First Presbyterian Church in Tallahassee, and his Senior Pastor is Dr. Brant Copeland. The tune was named after the composer's pastor. (We organists are always working to stay on the good side of our pastors.)

vit - ed, bur - dened by the wron
 ny - ing Christ was ev - er in
 vit - ed north and south and eas
 breaks it— truth and man - na fro

This text celebrates the radical hospitality that character
 reaches in all directions (Matthew 8:11 / Luke 13:29). Sain
 and the response to such pardon is "thanks and praise."

TEXT: Thomas H. Troeger, 2000
 MUSIC: Michael Corzine, 2000
 Text © 2002 Oxford University Press
 Music © 2000 Michael Corzine

It's a small world. Or maybe it's not.

This Sunday, John Tsao will sing an arrangement of this hymn during the offertory. We will be joined by Dr. Jean Martin-Williams on horn.

Speaking of a small world, this Sunday is World Communion Sunday. I remember our last church staff planning retreat when we talked about the many ways we could celebrate this special day. Like too many other things, our big plans for World Communion were put aside.

As I was planning (or replanning) hymns and other music for this Sunday's service and for other communion Sundays since our season of "Quarantide" began, I started to feel sad. Most of our communion hymns are about gathering. Communion is supposed to be about gathering as a community and to partake in the Lord's Supper together. Think of the words of our communion hymns:

Let Us Break Bread Together
Lord, We Have Come at Your Own Invitation
We Come as Guests Invited

Draw Us in the Spirit's Tether

(the second stanza of which begins: "As disciples used to gather.")

And the last stanza of *I Come with Joy*:

"Together met, together bound, we'll go our different ways," but we haven't met together. We went our different ways back in March.

You get the point. We should be gathering for World Communion, but if we think about it, World Communion is about joining with people all over the world, celebrating communion "together." Merriam-Webster's first definition of "communion" is "an act or instance of sharing." We will be sharing World Communion in solidarity with people all over the world, wherever we may be.

I also noticed the last stanza of *I Come with Joy* continues after we go our separate ways: "and as his people in the world, we'll live and speak his praise, we'll live and speak his praise." We have work to do out in the world too.

Going back to *Look Who Gathers at Christ's Table!* I bragged a little about one of my teachers writing the tune, but the text is really wonderful. Notice who is gathering at the table:

Look who gathers at Christ's table! Hear the stories that they bring.
Some are weeping, some are laughing, some have songs they want to sing.
Others ask why they're invited, burdened by the wrong they've done.
Christ insists they all are welcome, there is room for everyone.

We are certainly living in a broken right now, and we are all going through a range of emotions. Some of us are weeping, some are laughing, some don't think they are worthy to come, but all are welcome.

Clouds of light surround the table; ancient followers appear.
Saints confessing how they wrestled with their guilt, their doubt, their fear.

The communion liturgy often includes these words: "Therefore we praise you, joining our voices with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, who forever sing this hymn to proclaim the glory of your Name." We aren't just communing with each other, we're joining with all the saints in heaven, who may be called "saints," but that doesn't mean they were perfect. They wrestled with guilt, doubt, and fear.

The final stanza tells us to bring our joy and bring our sadness. Wherever we are in life, we can come find a place at the table.

That's not a hymn we're singing together this year, though we have sung it as a hymn before. It will be sung as a solo this year, but I'm using this as an opportunity to let you hear the hymn again and get the tune in your heads so when we are back together, we can sing it well.

Other music this Sunday

Hymns:

All Who Hunger, Gather Gladly is also from the new Presbyterian Hymnal. It was written by a United Church of Canada minister who had attended a conference of the Hymn Society in Charleston in 1990. At this conference, she was first introduced to shape note tunes. She stayed in South Carolina for a vacation after the conference, and while walking on the beach she came up with this text to fit the shape note tune HOLY MANNA. You may know that as the tune for *Brethren, We Have Met to Worship*.

Be Known to Us in Breaking Bread is not based on the Last Supper, but instead on the meal at Emmaus. Two people were walking along the road, confused, and trying to make sense of current events (sound familiar?) when Jesus joined them. As they walked, he explained everything to them, but they didn't recognize him until shared the meal with them and said those familiar words.

For the Bread Which You Have Broken was written by a Presbyterian. The third stanza begins, "With the saints who now adore you seated at the heavenly board." There are those saints again. We are communing with each other and with all the saints. The final stanza of the hymn asks God to defend and keep watch over us, and "in the world to which you send us let your kingdom come, O Lord."

Instrumental music:

Our own Dr. Jean Martin-Williams will be joining us playing horn. (Yes, horn. Not French horn, just horn. If you don't believe me, ask Jean.) The prelude will be *Aria* by Belgian composer Flor Peeters. Jean will also join me in accompanying John Tsao in the solo. For the postlude, once again I put down "improvisation." What was I thinking? I don't know what I was thinking when I put it down, but this week, as I've practiced improvising on the beautiful tune COPELAND, that theme of the saints has been on my mind. We follow those saints who set examples for us, even with mistakes they made. In music, one way to depict "following" is by creating a canon (like a round); the tune begins in once voice, then a second voice comes in with the same tune and follows. It's not Sunday morning yet, so who knows. As one of my heroes used to say, "They don't call it improvisation for nothing."

“I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.”

God be with you till we meet again.

God bless,

John