

Sunday, August 8, 2022

Grace and peace be to you from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen

Our last hymn today is “How Great Thou Art.” It is one of those hymns we could put in the “Oldies” file and for good reason. It is a great hymn of faith that has been a favorite for many, many years. And it seems to speak to the overarching theme of all of our lessons for today.

“O Lord my God, when I in awesome wonder consider all the works thy hand hath made, I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, thy power throughout the universe displayed.

When through the woods and forest glades I wander, I hear the birds sing sweetly in the trees; when I look down from lofty mountain grandeur and hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze...

But when I think that God, his Son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in, that on the cross my burden gladly bearing he bled and died to take away my sin.

When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation, and take me home, what joy shall fill my heart! Then I shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim, ‘My God, how great thou art.’”

We meet Abraham and Sarah in our first lesson, and they appear in our second lesson from Hebrews as well.

Abraham and Sarah are examples for us of listening to and following the word of the Lord. They are fallible human beings as well. As we read about how they acted at times, we wonder why the Lord put up with some of their actions. But then we rethink and are very glad God acts the way God does with Abraham and Sarah and us.

The bottom line is that Abraham was faithful, and he trusted his faithful, laughable God, who simply makes outrageous promises. As we read all about Abraham and Sarah, we find that they are, in a true sense, the epitome of faith.

They left their home not knowing where they were to go, how to get there, what they would find, or whether they would be welcomed. Following a vision, they went out, trusting that God would fulfill the promise of a homeland.

Specifically, today we find Abraham upset because he doesn’t have a proper descendant. We know that Sarah is beyond the age of childbearing. Yet we know that she is told by a visitor that she will have a child. And now, sometime later we hear God tell Abraham that he shall indeed have a son who will be his proper heir. And even beyond that promise God tells Abraham that his descendants will be as numerous as the stars in the sky. And the crazy thing is this – Abraham believed the Lord God. And the Lord saw Abraham as a righteous person.

It's not a stretch for us to believe that Abraham might have thought – “Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art!”

The writer of the book of Hebrews references Abraham as he writes about faith and faithfulness of God for his people and the faith of those who follow the Lord God. He reminds them that their hope and trust in God's promise allows them to face an unknown future and to receive the promise of God.

Again, the writer of Hebrews talks about all the followers of the Lord God who have died in the past, who have died in the faith. He says "they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore, God is not ashamed to be called their God; indeed, he has prepared a city for them."

And it is not unreasonable to think that those faithful followers who heard these words would have joined together and proclaimed: "Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art!"

It is simply impossible for us to miss Jesus' message for us today. He really does wear his heart on his sleeve. Every fear of abandonment and any thought of a punitive God evaporate in the warmth of his words: "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." It is almost impossible to hear this good news without feeling the tenderness of his heart. Such is God's love for us. We might well respond by repeating, almost praying – "Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art!"

Jesus does not hesitate to speak of God in such a familiar way, inviting each of us to imagine that our infinite God enjoys blessing us, giving us gifts to lighten our load and illumine our hearts. And, of course, it is no mere trifle that God gives us. No indeed. The Holy One delights to give us the kingdom, gratis. Free. No cost. Again, we might join our voices and shout – "Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art!"

As we live many centuries after Luke, we don't live each day expecting the world to come to an end. But we can be certain that God's rule already appears amid the mess of our broken yet beloved world.

After talking about current events, and there are so very many today, we can easily conclude that our world is a mess; that it is hurting; that is broken; that we need to somehow press the "reset" button.

We pray and will continue to pray for peace in our world, for example, lifting up Ukraine and the senseless war that continues.

We individually pray for healing and understanding. We pray for a new reformation that will bring many to faith and follow Christ.

We lament as we see extreme heat and wildfires, and climate change that threatens our very existence. And as we see the resolve to tackle this problem continue to be kicked down the road.

We make strides with regard to all sorts of prejudices and then we see that as we've taken two steps forward, we've also taken one step backward.

We can get pretty jaundiced about the future and sense that all is lost.

But God's rule appears in the midst of a broken and beloved world.

As followers of our Lord, we know that God's kingdom appears wherever we find love and beauty, in all that is light and goodness, and in every act of care and compassion. It is a gracious space of unlimited welcome where our hearts release their anxious striving and defensiveness, where healing replaces hate, where death holds no fear, where exuberance fills spaces once occupied by guilt and shame, and where love is in the air we breathe.

The kingdom appears every time love rules the moment. That is because love is the breath of the One who has been breathing life into our world since time began.

Even when we feel lost and meaningless, even when the world is riddled with pain, even when hope fails and despair tempts, even then in the midst of the mess, God is pleased to reveal the kingdom of everlasting love, freely and joyfully given.

We know Abraham's journey was tough. And life was never easy in the land God promised. But we can rightfully suppose God was just as happy to keep the promise of a homeland for Abraham as God is to give us the kingdom of God's eternal love.

"Then sings my soul, my Savior God to thee, how great thou art!"

Thanks be to God. Amen