

“Fathers, Faith, & Following in Footsteps”

B, Pentecost 4; Psalm 20

June 17, 2018; 10:00 am

Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, CO

Rev. Rebecca K. Poos

1) History of Hymns: “Children of the Heavenly Father”

(articles by C. Michael Hawn, professor of sacred music at Perkins School of Theology.)

Hymn by: Caroline V. Sandell-Berg; trans. by Ernst W. Olson

*Children of the heavenly Father
Safely in his bosom gather;
Nestling bird nor star in heaven
Such a refuge e'er was given.*

Scandinavian Christians have a rich heritage of congregational song and folk music. This heritage comes together in the beautiful hymn “Children of the Heavenly Father,” by one of the most beloved Swedish hymn writers, Caroline [Karolina] Wilhelmina Sandell-Berg (1832-1903).

Karolina Sandell was born in Fröderyd, Småland, Sweden, the daughter of a Lutheran minister who was influenced by 17th and 18th century pietism and the Moravians. She found her voice in the poetry of hymns, writing as many as 2000 hymns, 650 of which were published in three collections.

Per Harling, Swedish Lutheran minister and Sandell’s most recent biographer, notes that at “the age of 21 her first collection of poems was published (1853), followed by one more two years later. The collections had no author’s name though. She did not want to pride herself upon her writing.... Lina Sandell became Sweden’s first successful female head of a publishing house. She would never have called herself the head of it though, but rather what others called her: ‘Stiftelsens lilla piga,’ which means ‘The little maid of the Association.’”

“By the end of the 1840s and the beginning of the 50s Europe was... chang[ing].... “In the midst of these revolutionary and turbulent ... times a small and sick Lina Sandell sat in her favourite ash tree in the garden of the vicarage and wrote about the safety of the faithful crowd. Her first [version of the] text said nothing about children, only about the faithful crowd of Christians throughout history. The first verse started: ‘No one can be safer than the faithful little crowd.’ Probably she thought of the martyrs of the Christian story. Later an editor changed her text and put in the image of children. Thus it became a song about and for children.”

The English-language translator of our hymn, Ernst William Olson (1870-1958), was born in Sweden but came to the United States at an early age with his family. Olson made his translation in 1925 for this hymnal and, based on the mistaken notion of the hymn’s origins as a response to her father’s death, entitled it “A Hymn Born of a Broken Heart.” At least of one of the omitted stanzas can be read in light of the political situation described by Mr. Harling above:

*Praise the Lord in joyful numbers:
Your Protector never slumbers.
At the will of your Defender
Every foeman must surrender.*

Mr. Harling puts “Children of the Heavenly Father” in the context of contemporary Swedish life: “Today it is the baptism hymn in Sweden. Almost no baptism can take place without singing this hymn. At the same time it is quite astonishing that this hymn has become a baptism hymn, since it does not say anything about baptism. And the Swedish text is full of pictures and metaphors derived from the Biblical story, which almost nobody... knows anymore in the very secular [culture of] Sweden. But still it is sung and loved.”

2) History of Hymns: “My Hope Is Built”

"My Hope Is Built"
Edward Mote

*My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
but wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ the solid rock I stand,
all other ground is sinking sand.*

Edward Mote (1797-1874) falls into the rare category of hymn writers who grew up without religious training and whose parents were pub owners. He was apprenticed at a young age by his parents to a cabinetmaker, but found faith at age 15.

Living in Southwark near London, he established a successful cabinet-making enterprise and became a Baptist minister in 1852, at 55 years of age. He ministered for 21 years at Strict Baptist Church in Horsham, Sussex.

Singing hymns was of great interest to him. The master cabinetmaker became a prolific hymn writer, composing more than 100 hymns. He published his hymns with selections by others in 1836 in *Hymns of Praise, A New Selection of Gospel Hymns*. Hymnologists note that this is the first time the now common term "gospel hymn" appears.

"One morning it came into my mind as I went to labour, to write an hymn on the 'Gracious Experience of a Christian.' As I went up to Holborn I had the chorus,

*On Christ the solid Rock I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.*

"In the day I had four verses complete, and wrote them off.... On the Sabbath following... by the fireside *composed the last two verses...* Baptist hymnologist William Reynolds summarizes the

rest of the story: "The next Sunday [Mote] visited the home of some fellow church members where the wife was very ill. The husband informed Mote that it was their custom on the Lord's Day to sing a hymn, read the Bible, and pray together. Mote produced the new hymn from his pocket, and they sang ["The Solid Rock"] together for the first time."

*Dr. Young comments on the revised product: "[This hymn's] compelling topic—the parable about the security of building a house on rock, as opposed to sand (Matthew 7:24-27)—and subsequent redaction and setting to a simple, repetitious, foot-stomping tune have merged to form a hymn of faith that over the generations has proved useful and comforting to many in their daily spiritual journey." The "foot-stomping" tune was composed by American gospel song composer, William Bradbury (1816-1868), a fellow Baptist, for Mote's text in 1863 and appeared during the American Civil War in Bradbury's *Devotional Hymn and Tune Book* (1864).*

3) History of Hymns: "Eternal Father, Strong to Save"

"Eternal Father, Strong to Save"

William Whiting

(Jean Ferguson: "My father served in the Navy. He was a PK – a preacher's kid" and one comment someone made about this hymn was that God's love and protection were for all, not just American Christians. As a rebellious "PK" I think my Dad would have thought the same. I've seen him fight for a black family's right to live in a prejudiced neighborhood. I think that he too had faith that God loved and protected all.")

Eternal Father, strong to save,

*whose arm has bound the restless wave,
who bid the mighty ocean deep
its own appointed limits keep:
O hear us when we call to thee for those in peril on the sea.*

England is a seafaring nation, and the ways of the sea lie deep in the psyche of the British people.

England's reputation as a naval power was sealed in 1588, when under the reign of Queen Elizabeth I the English defeated the Spanish armada. During the 17th century, the riches of India were brought to England via the sea under the auspices of the British East India Company, established in 1601.

In the 18th century, Captain James Cook—a British explorer, navigator and cartographer—mapped Newfoundland and took three voyages to the Pacific Ocean, making the first European contact with Australia and the Hawaiian Islands. Cook was also the first sea captain to sail around New Zealand.

The great English missionary expansion of the 19th century was made possible by sea passage, while explorers, merchants and the navy built and sustained the British Empire by sea.

Given this history, it's no wonder that the great naval hymn "Eternal Father, Strong to Save" came from the pen of an Englishman, William Whiting (1825-1878).

Whiting, educated at the Winchester Training Institute, became the master of the Winchester College Choristers' School in 1842. He held the position until his death.

Church musician Morgan Simmons notes: "Active in civic and church matters, Whiting was honorary secretary to the Winchester-Hursley branch of the English Church Union, an organization that supported the Catholic wing of the Church of England."

The hymn first appeared in the famous *Hymns Ancient and*

Modern in 1861. Mr. Simmons notes that the "compilers of that influential collection, however, made rather extensive revisions to the hymn written by William Whiting the year before."

Indeed there have been many modifications and additions to this hymn, known as the hymn for the Royal Navy as well as the United States Navy and the U.S. Marine Corps. Branches of military service have added their own stanzas.

In 1961, a stanza by J.E. Volonte was written for **astronauts**:

*Eternal Father, King of Birth,
who didst create the Heaven and Earth,
and bid the planets and the Sun
their own appointed orbits run;
O hear us when we seek
Thy grace for those who soar through outer space.*

Whiting's text is inseparable from the stirring tune MELITA, composed for the hymn in 1861 by John Bacchus Dykes (1823-1876). Dykes, an Anglican priest and church musician, composed several of the tunes we have in *The UM Hymnal*, including NICEA ("Holy, holy, holy") and ST. AGNUS ("Jesus, the very thought of thee"). "Melita" is an archaic term for Malta, an ancient seafaring nation and the site of St. Paul's shipwreck recorded in Acts 27-28.

Hymnologist J.R. Watson points out the Trinitarian structure of the stanzas and the echoing of Psalm 107:23-30, beginning with "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the LORD, and his wonders in the deep" (KJV).

This iconic hymn has often appeared in state ceremonies. Presidents Franklin Roosevelt, John F. Kennedy, Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and Gerald Ford had the hymn sung at their funerals.

"Eternal Father, Strong to Save" has also appeared in several

films, including *The Right Stuff* and *The Perfect Storm*.

For many people, especially those who have served in the armed forces, this hymn embodies memories of their service, their patriotism and their hopes.

I am not afraid of storms,
for I am learning how to sail my ship.

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

4) History of Hymns: “Dear Lord and Father of Mankind”

"Dear Lord and Father of Mankind"
John Greenleaf Whittier

*Dear Lord and Father of mankind,
Forgive our foolish ways;
Reclothe us in our rightful mind,
In purer lives thy service find,
In deeper reverence, praise.*

This hymn’s origin is a **paradox**. John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) worshipped in the tradition of the Society of Friends, also known as Quakers. Traditionally, Quakers have **not sung in worship**, but value silence, waiting for the “still, small voice” of God.

According to accounts Whittier had been reading in Max Müller’s *The Sacred Books of the East* about the use of **soma**, a plant found in northwest India. Soma was used to prepare an *intoxicating drug that was ingested in religious rituals, resulting in a state of frenzy*.

This hymn began as a part of a long narrative poem, “The Brewing of Soma,” published in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1872. The poem describes Vedic priests going into the forest, brewing a drink from honey and milk, and drinking themselves into a frenzy. Whittier was critical of those who believed they might

find God through unbridled ecstasy, such as the hysterical camp meetings and revivals common in his day.

Whittier’s response was a 17-stanza poem, of which stanzas 12-17 have been excised to form the hymn as found in many hymnals. The preceding stanza sets the context for our hymn:

*And yet the past comes round again, And new doth old fulfill;
In sensual transports wild as vain We brew in many a Christian fane
The heathen Soma still!*

Stanza one then begins, “Dear Lord, and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways....”—a complete antithesis to the “transports wild” in the preceding verse. Rather than frenzy, true praise is expressed in “deeper reverence.”

Whittier then continues with biblical examples of simplicity and serenity. Stanza two alludes to the “simple trust” of the disciples who heard the “gracious calling” of Christ. Like them, we should rise “without a word” and follow the Master.

Stanza three has one of the most beautiful phrases in 19th-century Romantic poetry. The context is that of “Sabbath rest” by the sea with the “calm of hills above.” It was in this serene setting that Christ came to pray in “the silence of eternity, interpreted by love!”

The fourth stanza maintains the sense of tranquility: “Drop thy still dews of quietness,/till all our strivings cease.” In this stanza the poet employs the device of onomatopoeia by choosing words throughout with an “s” sound—“dews,” “quietness,” “strivings,” “cease” and so on. The skill of the poet is evident in a tour de force of sibilant sounds evoking serenity.

The final stanza evokes images of breathing and calm, closing with a magnificent antithesis: “Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,/ O still, small voice of calm.” Whittier was one of the most important of the 19th-century

American poets. The New Englander was a Quaker abolitionist, reared in a large farmhouse in the rural setting of Merrimac Valley at East Haverhill, Mass. The Whittier homestead remains a museum open to the public.

English hymnologist J.R. Watson summarizes well the contribution of this hymn: “It is the opposite end of the devotional spectrum from those hymns which encourage activity and energy; but everyone experiences the need for quiet meditation at some time, and this hymn encourages an almost mystical contemplation of the peace of God ‘which passes all understanding.’”

5) History of Hymns: “Because He Lives”

"Because He Lives"

Gloria and William J. Gaither

UM Hymnal editor Carlton Young says this gospel hymn “is one of the five most requested... to be included in this hymnal.”

Based on John 14:19c—“because I live, you also will live”—the hymn’s theme is effectively supported by a soaring melody in the refrain.

The words were written by two of the longest-lasting performing couples of Christian contemporary music, Gloria (b. 1942) and William J. (b. 1936) Gaither. “Because He Lives” was awarded the recognition of Gospel Song of the Year for 1974 by the Gospel Music Association and the American Society of Composers and Publishers (ASCAP).

The following background was provided to Carlton Young for the *Companion to The United Methodist Hymnal* (1993):

“‘Because he lives’ [1971] was written in the midst of social upheaval, threats of war, and betrayals of national and personal trust. It was into this world at such a time that we were bringing our third little baby. Assassinations, drug traffic, and war monopolized the headlines. It was in the midst of this kind of uncertainty that the assurance of the Lordship of the risen Christ

blew across our troubled minds like a cooling breeze in the parched desert. Holding our tiny son in our arms we were able to write:

‘How sweet to hold our newborn baby,
And feel the pride, and joy he gives;
But greater still the calm assurance,
this child can face uncertain day because He lives.’”

Stanza two, cited above, produced some confusion in the editing process.

It was not until Carlton Young researched the hymn for the *Companion* following *The UM Hymnal’s* publication that the context of stanza two was clarified. Dr. Young notes that “It appears that the asterisk [inserted for the first use of the pronoun in line 2], related to the footnote ‘Jesus,’ should be moved to ‘he’ [in the last line of the stanza].”

Bill Gaither began as a teacher of English, literature and journalism in 1959 in his hometown of Alexandria, La. His future bride, Gloria Sickal, taught French and English in the same high school.

They started to sing together and were married in 1962. By 1967, the couple left the teaching profession to become full-time recording and performing artists. Gloria Gaither has authored several books since 1971 including *Make Warm Noises*, *Rainbows Live at Easter*, *Because He Lives*, *Decisions: A Christian Approach to Making Right Choices* and *Let’s Make a Memory* (co-authored with Shirley Dobson).

In addition to a number of popular Christian musicals, the Gaithers co-edited the hymnal *Hymns for the Family of God* (1976) with the assistance of the late composer Fred Bock. That hymnal has been widely used, especially during the last quarter of the 20th century. Gaither Studios has helped many well-known contemporary Christian artists to produce their albums, including Ray Boltz,

Sandi Patty, The Cathedrals, The Talleys, Michael W. Smith, Rich Mullins, Lisa Bevill, Bob Carlisle, Sheila Walsh, the Brooklyn Tabernacle Choir, Tommy Sims, Jessy Dixon, Lynda Randle, Ernie Haase & Signature Sound, and the Gaither Vocal Band.

“Because He Lives” begins with the empty grave on Easter Sunday. Stanza two is about hope, even in uncertain days, because of the singular significance of the Resurrection event. Stanza three takes us to heaven where we will “see the lights of glory and... know [Jesus] reigns.”

This gospel song has undoubtedly offered hope for many people because of its connection between the Resurrection and a “life... worth the living.”

History of Hymns: “Faith of Our Fathers” honors English martyrs

“Faith of Our Fathers”

Frederick W. Faber

*Faith of our fathers, living still,
in spite of dungeon, fire, and sword;
O how our hearts beat high with joy
when e'er we hear that glorious word!
Faith of our fathers, holy faith!
We will be true to thee to death.*

Frederick Faber (1814-1863) grew up in a vicarage and seemed destined for priesthood in the Anglican Church.

Faber’s appointment to a parish in Elton, Huntingdonshire, in 1843 seemed to seal his destiny as an Anglican priest. But in that same year, he seceded to the Roman Catholic Church, one of several 19th-century Englishmen to make this ecclesial shift. Moving to London in 1849, he established the Oratorians, also known as Priests of the Congregation of St. Philip of Neri, with John Henry Newman, a priest and hymn writer who also followed the path from Canterbury to Rome.

As an Englishman, Faber also maintained a love for the

Authorized King James Bible, of which he said, “*It lives on in the ear like music that can never be forgotten, like the sound of church bells, which the convert hardly knows he can forget.*”

All of this paves the way for a better understanding of Faber’s most famous hymn, “Faith of Our Fathers,” which first appeared in *Jesus and Mary*. Among Faber’s interests were the **lives of the saints**. This is a hymn that acknowledges the legacy of Catholic martyrs in England who had died since the time of Henry VIII, who established the Church of England in the mid-16th century.

In order to make the hymn more acceptable to a wider non-Catholic constituency, some **alterations** were necessary. The second stanza now reads:

*Faith of our fathers, we will strive,
To win all nations unto thee. . . .*

This is a significant adaptation from Faber’s original stanza, which would not be acceptable to Protestants:

*Faith of our Fathers!
Mary’s prayers
Shall win our country back to thee.*

An 1853 alteration of the original by hymnal editors came closer, but does not meet the standards required today for inclusiveness—both in terms of gender and nationality:

*Faith of our Fathers!
Good men’s prayers
Shall win our country all to thee.*

An anonymous final stanza brings together “both friend and foe” in love as we preach God’s love in “kindly words and virtuous life.” The refrain was added later by James G. Walton (1821-1905) for use with the tune that is common in the United States, ST. CATHERINE.