

What was I thinking?

October 24, 2021



Love

As you might have noticed, I did not write a column for the last two Sundays. The Covid bug found its way into our household and put us in quarantine for a while. But we're all well now and getting back to normal. Since I'm still playing "catch up," I'll keep this one short, but I wanted to write something.

When I started this series of articles, one of my intentions was to give you a glimpse into how I plan music for our worship. As I've explained before, planning for a service is not simply a matter of thumbing through the hymnal and picking my favorites. I start with scripture and then go to a number of worship planning resources that suggest hymns, anthems, organ music, etc. But I always read the scripture first.

Sometimes it's easy. Obvious hymns and other music come to mind, and I start my list. Other times I'm scratching my head and it's "go fish." When that happens, I go back to the beginning, to scripture. We're using something called the Narrative Lectionary, and there are planning resources specifically for that, including a list of suggested hymns. For this coming Sunday, one of the hymns suggested was *Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*. It's a favorite text of mine and probably yours too. It was written by Charles Wesley, who I learned in school was in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for writing more hymns than anyone else. I don't know if that record still stands, but I wouldn't be surprised if it does. In our hymnal, it's set to the wonderful Welsh hymn tune HYFRYDOL, which means "delightful." That tune is also a favorite of many.



Charles Wesley

My arm didn't have to be twisted to put that hymn down for Sunday, but to be honest, at first, I didn't get the connection to the scriptures. We will be reading the story of God calling David from 1 Samuel. As you may know or will hear tomorrow, David was not the most likely candidate for king of Israel. God sent Samuel to find the new king. God told Samuel not to judge by outward appearances. "The Lord looks on the heart."

As we know, David became king, but David was not perfect. Another scripture appointed for this Sunday is Psalm 51, which will not be read, but sung by the choir in the anthem *Create in Me a Clean Heart, O God* by Carl F. Mueller. Psalm 51 was, as far as we know, written by David. If you don't know the story behind that, look it up. The anthem version the choir will sing includes these phrases:

Create in me a clean heart, O God;
and renew a right spirit within me.

and

Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation.

David did some terrible things, but he turned to God for forgiveness and restoration. David didn't give up and God didn't give up on David. David was a work in progress. "The Lord looks on the heart."

We've been living in troubling times these last couple of years. It hasn't always brought out the best in us. We are troubled people. I was thinking about that when I looked at the words of Charles Wesley.

Breathe, O breathe thy loving Spirit into every troubled breast.
Let us all in thee inherit, let us find the promised rest;
take away the love of sinning; Alpha and Omega be;
end of faith, as its beginning, set our hearts at liberty.

That's not so far from "Create in me a clean heart" and "Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation."

This past week I was talking to someone about our troubling times and our troubling behavior. She told me about a book she was reading about an English cathedral, and the struggles and conflicts within it. Not too surprising. The church is far from perfect. She told me the archbishop in the book said the only thing that matters or makes a difference is love.

God loves us in a way we can never understand. None of us are perfect. Hopefully none of us have had someone killed and taken their spouse to be our own like David did. But even as imperfect as David was, God saw something good in his heart. David was a work in progress. Psalm 51 and the story behind it give us a glimpse of David's horrible mistakes, but we know that's not the end of the story.

Like David, we're a work in progress. That's where the last stanza of Charles Wesley's hymn comes in:

Finish, then, thy new creation; pure and spotless let us be;
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee;
let us see thy great salvation perfectly restored in thee;
changed from glory into glory, till in heaven we take our place,
till we cast our crowns before thee, lost in wonder, love, and praise.

God be with you till we meet again.

John