



### **Song Notes (pun intended) for August 1**

#### **Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing**

Written for Pentecost by British Baptist pastor Robert Robinson (1735-1790), this text contains Biblical terms like "Ebenezer" (from 1Samuel 7:12), Hebrew for "a stone of help," set up to give thanks for God's assistance.

Perhaps all hymns are to some extent autobiographical in that they reveal something of the author's spiritual experience. Such is the case with Robert Robinson, who as a barber's apprentice, fell under the powerful influence of revivalist George Whitefield's preaching.

A favorite line in the last stanza, "Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love," is thought to be particularly autobiographical, referring to Robinson's early life, when his mother sent him to London to be an apprentice. It was during this time, according to hymnologist Kenneth Osbeck, that "he associated with a notorious gang of hoodlums and lived a unstable life," until he came under the influence of George Whitefield. After his conversion to Christianity, Robinson began writing hymns and preaching and pastoring, his longest tenure being at Stone Yard Baptist Church in Cambridge for 30 years.

The person who requested this said, "The 3<sup>rd</sup> verse rings true to me, because I, too, am 'prone to wander.' The song speaks to my daily need for God's grace. I want this hymn sung at my memorial service."

#### **Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine**

In the 1800s, hymn writing from women reached unprecedented heights. A small sampling of these Victorian-era hymnists includes Annie Sherwood Hawkes ("I Need Thee Every Hour"), Cecil Frances Alexander, ("All things bright and beautiful"), Catherine Winkworth, ("Praise to the Lord the Almighty"), Sarah Flower Adams ("Nearer, My God, to Thee"), Anna Laetitia Waring ("In Heavenly Love Abiding"), and Charlotte Elliott ("Just as I Am Without One Plea").

The most prolific and famous of all these women hymn writers was the American poet, Fanny Crosby, who wrote more than 8,000 hymns in her life. Many of these are among the most beloved hymns of any Christian denomination, including "Blessed Assurance," "Draw Me Nearer," "Safe in the Arms of Jesus," "All the Way My Savior Leads Me," "To God Be the Glory," "Jesus, Keep Me Near the Cross," and "I Am Thine, O Lord," to name only a few.

Blind from birth, Fanny Crosby was raised mostly by her Christian grandmother while her widowed mother struggled to provide for the family. After excelling in her studies at the New York Institute of the Blind, Crosby returned there as a teacher, and it was during that time that her poetry began to attract notice. Eventually she began writing hymns for publisher William Bradbury.

Before her death Crosby famously praised her blindness, saying, "When I get to heaven, the first face that shall ever gladden my sight will be that of my Savior!" It is worth noting that in "Blessed Assurance" she exclaims that "visions of rapture now burst on my sight," even though she was blind. Fanny Crosby possessed and communicated a unique and inspiring spiritual vision that encouraged many in their Christian faith.

#### **Amazing Grace**

In a small cemetery of a parish churchyard in Olney, England, stands a tombstone with the following inscription: "John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slavers in Africa, was, by the rich mercies of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the Faith he had long labored to destroy." This fitting testimonial, written by Newton himself prior to his death, aptly describes the colorful life of this man, one of the great preachers of the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

John Newton's mother, a woman of faith, died when he was 6. His father, a ship captain, took him onto his crew at age 11. The influence of the older men on board was, to say the least, less than positive; in today's terms we would say he became a raging alcoholic and a misogynist. From that time on he worked on several ships and on the mainland of West Africa, collecting slaves for traders and transporting them to the West Indies and America.

On March 10, 1748, while returning to England from Africa during a particularly stormy voyage when it appeared that all would be lost, Newton began reading Thomas a Kempis' book, *The Imitation of Christ*. How a book like that made its way onto a slave trading ship is a minor miracle. The message of that book and the frightening experience at sea sowed the seeds of Newton's eventual conversion to faith in Jesus Christ.

For the next several years he continued as a slave captain, trying to justify his work by seeking to improve conditions as much as possible, and holding Sunday worship services for his hardened crew. Eventually, however, he felt convicted of the inhuman aspects of this work and became a strong and effective abolitionist. He returned home to England, became the clerk at the port of Liverpool, and began to study diligently for the ministry.

At the age of 39 John Newton was ordained by the Anglican Church and began his first pastorate at the little village of Olney, near Cambridge, England, where he served for 15 years. His next, and final, pastorate was at St. Mary Woolnoth Church in London, where he established a strong relationship with William Wilberforce and other political leaders engaged in the efforts to abolish slavery. It is interesting to note that the year of Newton's death, 1807, was the same year that the British Parliament finally abolished slavery throughout all its domain.

Until the time of his death at age 82, Newton never ceased to marvel at God's mercy and grace that had so dramatically changed his life. It was the dominant theme of his preaching and writing. Newton saw himself as the prodigal son who had been welcomed home (Luke 15:11-32), which influenced his writing of "Amazing Grace," along with 1Chronicles 17:16 ("Then King David went in and sat before the Lord, and said, "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that you have brought me thus far?").

Several requests were made for this hymn, but only one person commented on why it is meaningful to them: "I had a woman sing this a capella at my late husband's memorial service. It was beautiful."

By the way, *The Imitation of Christ* is still in print and considered a classic of Christian spirituality. In fact, second only to the Bible, it has been translated into more languages than any other book.

## Great is Thy Faithfulness

While many hymns are born out of a particular dramatic experience or moment of insight, this hymn was simply the result of the author's reflection on Lamentation's 3:22-23, and, as he put it, his "morning by morning realization of God's faithfulness."

Born in a log cabin in Franklin, KY, Thomas O. Chisolm (1866-1960) began his career as a school teacher (at age 16!) and then became the associate editor of his hometown newspaper before moving to Louisville to become office editor and business manager of the *Pentecostal Herald*. He changed careers to become a Methodist pastor for a period of time, then an insurance agent, from which he retired. He wrote more than 1,200 poems, some of which became hymn texts, such as our beloved "Great is Thy Faithfulness."

Those who requested this hymn said, "Because we can all sing out about our trust in God's faithfulness—a congregational uplifting" and "The last verse bespeaks the great hope and joy with Jesus at our side."

### PRELUDE

### WELCOME

### CALL TO WORSHIP

**Come, thou fount of every blessing,  
tune our hearts to sing your grace.  
Streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
call for songs of loudest praise.**

**As we praise you, gracious God,  
warm our hearts,  
bring light to our minds,  
and align our will with yours—  
that our lives may be enriched by your love,  
that we may be blessed to be a blessing  
as we go forth from worship today.**

### HYMN *Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing (#475)*

Come, thou Fount of every blessing;  
tune my heart to sing thy grace;  
streams of mercy, never ceasing,  
call for songs of loudest praise.  
Teach me some melodious sonnet,  
sung by flaming tongues above;  
praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,  
mount of God's unchanging love!

Here I raise my Ebenezer;  
hither by thy help I'm come;  
and I hope, by thy good pleasure,  
safely to arrive at home.  
Jesus sought me when a stranger,  
wandering from the fold of God;  
he, to rescue me from danger,  
interposed his precious blood.

O to grace how great a debtor  
daily I'm constrained to be!  
Let that grace now, like a fetter,  
bind my wandering heart to thee.  
Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,  
prone to leave the God I love;  
here's my heart; O take and seal it;  
seal it for thy courts above.

#### PRAYER OF CONFESSION

**We are indeed prone to wander from you, gracious God, so we offer our hearts to you to be renewed in love and faithfulness. We confess our tendency to insist on our own way, so we ask for the grace to guide us in your way, and the ways of your Kingdom. Because of your grace at work in our lives, increase our faith, hope, and love, and make us useful for your ongoing work of renewal in the world.**

(moment for silent prayers and reflection)

#### WORDS OF ASSURANCE

—based on 2 Corinthians 5:17-18

If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation:  
the old life has passed away;  
see, everything has become new!  
All this is from God,  
who reconciled us to himself through Christ,  
and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.  
Receive the good news of the gospel:  
In Jesus Christ we are forgiven and made whole,  
and sent out to be reconcilers and peacemakers.

**Thanks be to God!**

#### PASSING THE....

#### HYMN *Blessed Assurance, Jesus is Mine (#839)*

Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
born of his Spirit, washed in his blood.

#### Refrain:

This is my story; this is my song,  
praising my Savior all the day long;  
this is my story; this is my song,  
praising my Savior all the day long.

Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
visions of rapture now burst on my sight;  
angels descending, bring from above  
echoes of mercy, whispers of love. **[Refrain]**

Perfect submission, all is at rest;  
I in my Savior am happy and blest,  
watching and waiting, looking above,  
filled with his goodness, lost in his love. **[Refrain]**

#### SCRIPTURE READINGS

Luke 15:11-32, and  
Ephesians 2:4-10

#### MESSAGE *What's So Amazing about Grace?*

#### HYMN *Amazing Grace (#649)*

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound,  
that saved a wretch like me!  
I once was lost, but now am found,  
was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,  
and grace my fears relieved.  
How precious did that grace appear  
the hour I first believed!

Through many dangers, toils, and snares,  
I have already come.  
'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far,  
and grace will lead me home.

The Lord has promised good to me;  
his word my hope secures.  
He will my shield and portion be  
as long as life endures.

When we've been there ten thousand years,  
bright shining as the sun,  
we've no less days to sing God's praise  
than when we'd first begun.

## CELEBRATION OF COMMUNION

Come, all you who are loved by God! Christ invites all to trust in him and to dine at his table. Come to receive all the benefits and blessings of his atoning death, his life-giving resurrection, and his ascended lordship.

**We come to the table not just as individuals but as a community. By sharing the bread and the cup, Christ makes us one with him and with each other.**

Just as we are nourished by the food we eat, Christ nourishes us spiritually at this table with the bread of heaven and the cup of salvation.

**At the Lord's Supper we look *back*, remembering the story of our salvation; we look *around*, seeing that we are together members of the body of Christ; we look *forward* to the great banquet in God's coming kingdom; and we look *within* to find our indwelling Lord, who promises to feed us by the Holy Spirit.**

This is the joyful feast of the people of God! Let us give thanks:

Lift up your hearts.

**We lift them up to the Lord.**

Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.

**With joy we praise you, gracious Father,  
for you have created heaven and earth,  
made us in your image, and kept covenant with us—  
even when we wandered away from you.**

**We give you thanks for Jesus Christ, our Lord,  
who by his life, death, and resurrection  
opened to us the way of everlasting life.**

**Therefore we join our voices  
with all the saints and angels and the whole creation  
to proclaim the glory of your name. Amen.**

At his last supper, the Lord Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, "This is my body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, he took the cup after supper and said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this in remembrance of me." For whenever we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).

Take, eat! Remember and believe that the body of Christ is the bread of heaven for us.

Take, drink! Remember and believe that the blood of Christ is the cup of our salvation.

[Closing Prayer:]

**Loving God, we thank you that you have fed us in this sacrament, united us with Christ, and given us a foretaste of the heavenly banquet in your eternal kingdom. Send us out in the power of your Spirit to live and work to your praise and glory for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Redeemer. Amen.**

## PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER

*Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name,  
your kingdom come,  
your will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For yours is the kingdom,  
and the power,  
and the glory  
now and forever. Amen.*

## HYMN *Great is Thy Faithfulness (#39)*

Great is thy faithfulness, O God my Father;  
there is no shadow of turning with thee.  
Thou changest not; thy compassions they fail not.  
As thou hast been thou forever wilt be.

### Refrain:

Great is thy faithfulness!  
Great is thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning, new mercies I see.  
All I have needed thy hand hath provided.  
Great is thy faithfulness, Lord unto me!

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest,  
sun, moon, and stars in their courses above  
join with all nature in manifold witness  
to thy great faithfulness, mercy, and love. **[Refrain]**

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth,  
thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide,  
strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow:  
blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

### **[Refrain]**

## BENEDICTION

May the grace of Christ attend you,  
The love of God surround you,  
And the Holy Spirit keep you,  
That you may live in faith,  
Abound in hope,  
And grow in love,  
Now and forevermore.  
And all of God's people said, Amen!

## POSTLUDE

*"As the Father has sent me, so I send you."* John 20:21