



Song Notes (pun intended) for July 25

In the Garden

This was the most requested hymn to sing this summer! *In the Garden* was written by C. Austin Miles, who, in 1892, abandoned his career as a pharmacist and wrote his first gospel song, which was published by the Hall-Mack Company. He later became editor and manager of the music publishing company and served them for 37 years.

Miles' hobby was photography, and he managed to build his own darkroom for developing his film. He discovered one day that he could read his Bible in the special red lighting of the darkroom. He often read passages of scripture as he waited for the developing process to finish. Since he was a musician and a songwriter, he often found himself reading with the express purpose of getting ideas for Christian songs.

One day in March 1912, while developing film and waiting for the process to complete, Miles picked up his Bible. It had fallen open to John, chapter 20. He found in that chapter the story of Mary's coming to the garden to visit the tomb of Jesus. As she looked into the tomb her heart sank because he wasn't there. Jesus, standing nearby, spoke to her, and she recognized him, and her heart leaped for joy!

Miles imagined that he was present with them in the garden, witnessing the wonderful event. He wrote, "This is not an experience limited to a happening almost 2,000 years ago. It is the daily companionship with the Lord that makes up the Christian's life."

In the inspiration of that moment he wrote a poem, which he said came quickly to him. That same evening he composed a musical setting, and in doing so gave to

the world a song that has been recorded over 1 million times.

All who requested this hymn said that it has brought them peace and comfort. Also: "it was my grandmother's favorite," and "it was sung at my mother's funeral."

Be Still My Soul

This was the second most requested hymn to sing this summer. Little is known about the author of this hymn, Katherine von Schlegel. Some hymnologists suggest that she may have become a Lutheran nun. She wrote many beloved hymns that were sung in Germany and surrounding Scandinavian countries in the late 17th century.

This text appears at the time of German pietism, similar in spirit in many ways to the Wesleyan revival in England of the same era. The German pietistic movement inspired a hymnody characterized by faithfulness to Scripture, personal experience, and deep emotional expression. Katherine von Schlegel is thought to be the leading female hymn writer of this period.

The tune FINLANDIA complements this stirring poem wonderfully. The melody comes from a symphonic tone poem by Jean Sibelius by the name of *Finlandia*. Sibelius wrote it as a patriotic offering in 1899. This composition was performed as the final of seven pieces as the music to accompany a series of tableaux, each reflecting portions of Finnish history. Out of agitated and tumultuous opening music, symbolizing the struggles of the Finnish people, emerges the serenity of the hymn-like melody we know as FINLANDIA, symbolizing hope and resolution.

The Peace Celebrations of 1899 provided the political backdrop for the composition as well as a subtle protest by the composer against the rising censorship from Russia felt in the nearby Scandinavian countries. The censorship was so intense that the composition could not be promoted publicly under its formal title *Finlandia*, as the Russian Empire would deem that too patriotic. In order to please the Russian censors, other titles were devised such as "Happy Feelings at the Awakening of Finnish Spring."

It Came Upon the Midnight Clear

This may be the only commonly sung Christmas carol in our hymnals that does not mention the birth of Christ! The focus is rather on the song of the angels, “Peace on the earth, good will to all,” taken from Luke 2:14.

This carol was written by Massachusetts native Edmund Hamilton Sears (1810-1876) who was an ordained Unitarian minister, serving congregations throughout Massachusetts.

The carol’s central theme contrasts the scourge of war with the song of the angels’ peace to God’s people on earth. Hymnologists say that this is one of the earliest social gospel hymns written in the U.S. Sears’ context was the social strife that plagued the country as the Civil War approached, and the carol sheds light on the poet’s concerns about the social situation in the U.S. in the mid-19th century.

Even today, this carol articulates the situation of our world with images of those “beneath life’s crushing load, whose forms are bending low, who toil along the climbing way with painful steps and slow....” The second half of this stanza offers hope that the song of the “blessed angels” who “bend on hovering wings” would soothe the “Babel sounds” of a suffering world. The person who requested this carol said, “I want to hear the song of the angels again—peace on earth, goodwill to all.”

Joy to the World

Isaac Watts was a congregational minister in England and lived from the mid 1600’s to the mid-1700’s. He has been recognized as “The godfather of English hymnody.” He composed over 700 hymns, including “I Sing the Mighty Power of God,” “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross,” and “O God, Our Help in Ages Past.”

While Isaac Watts did not write this text strictly for Christmas use, he did purposely cast his paraphrase of Psalm 98:4-9 in Christian terms, titling it “The Messiah’s coming and kingdom.”

The one-word comment from the person who requested this carol is, “Uplifting!”

PRELUDE

WELCOME

CALL TO WORSHIP—based on Isaiah 40:4

The God of peace meets us in this peaceful place offering comfort to those in distress.

**We are hurting people, weary and vulnerable,
in need of reassurance and strengthening.**

Come to this place where valleys are lifted up
and mountains and hills are made low,
where everyone is on level ground, and equal.

**We long for some evenness and stability
amid the upheavals of our lives.**

Come and receive the comfort of God’s presence,
and hear again the call to follow Christ into the
world
as bearers of good news.

HYMN *In the Garden*

I come to the garden alone,
While the dew is still on the roses;
And the voice I hear, falling on my ear,
The Son of God discloses.

Refrain:

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there
None other has ever known.

He speaks, and the sound of His voice
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing;
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing. **[Refrain]**

I’d stay in the garden with Him
Tho the night around me be falling;
But He bids me go--through the voice of woe,
His voice to me is calling. **[Refrain]**

PRAYER OF CONFESSION

God of tenderness and love,
breathe your grace into our lives.
Forgive our wandering ways,
and guide us along your paths of peace.
When we lose our way,
and forget your goodness to us,
carry us back to you.
Lead us back to faith and hope,
that we might truly proclaim:
"God is faithful!"

(moment for silent prayers and reflection)

WORDS OF ASSURANCE—from Isaiah 40:1-2

*Comfort, O comfort my people,
says your God.
Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and cry to her
that she has served her term,
that her penalty is paid,
that she has received from the Lord's hand
double for all her sins.*

In the name of Jesus Christ, Emmanuel, God with us,
you are forgiven.
God speaks to you and offers you the comfort of his
love and presence.

Thanks be to God!

PASSING THE PEACE

HYMN *Be Still My Soul (#819)*

Be still, my soul: the Lord is on thy side.
Bear patiently the cross of grief or pain.
Leave to thy God to order and provide,
who through all changes faithful will remain.
Be still, my soul: thy best, thy heavenly Friend
through thorny ways leads to a joyful end.

Be still, my soul: thy God doth undertake
to guide the future surely as the past.
Thy hope, thy confidence let nothing shake;
all now mysterious shall be bright at last.
Be still, my soul: the waves and winds still know
his voice who ruled them while he dwelt below.

Be still, my soul: the hour is hastening on
when we shall be forever with the Lord;
when disappointment, grief, and fear are gone,
sorrow forgot, love's purest joys restored.
Be still, my soul: when change and tears are past
all safe and blessed we shall meet at last.

SCRIPTURE READINGS

Isaiah 61:1-4 and
2 Corinthians 1:3-7

MESSAGE **Fortified**

SONG *It Came upon the Midnight Clear (#123)*

It came upon the midnight clear,
that glorious song of old,
from angels bending near the earth,
to touch their harps of gold:
"Peace on the earth, good will to all,
from heaven's all-gracious King":
the world in solemn stillness lay,
to hear the angels sing.

Still through the cloven skies they come,
with peaceful wings unfurled,
and still their heavenly music floats
o'er all the weary world:
above its sad and lowly plains
they bend on hovering wing,
and ever o'er its Babel sounds
the blessed angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife
the world has suffered long;
beneath the heavenly hymn have rolled
two thousand years of wrong;
and we at war on earth hear not
the tidings that they bring;
O, hush the noise and cease the strife
to hear the angels sing!

And you, beneath life's crushing load,
whose forms are bending low,
who toil along the climbing way
with painful steps and slow,
look now, for glad and golden hours
come swiftly on the wing:
O, rest beside the weary road,
and hear the angels sing.

For lo, the days are hastening on,
by prophets seen of old,
when with the ever-circling years
shall come the time foretold,
when peace shall over all the earth
its ancient splendors fling,
and the whole world give back the song
which now the angels sing.

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 *Joy to the World (#134)*

Joy to the world, the Lord is come!
Let earth receive her king;
let every heart prepare him room,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven and nature sing,
and heaven, and heaven and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns!
Let all their songs employ,
while fields and floods, rocks, hills, and plains
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat the sounding joy,
repeat, repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow,
nor thorns infest the ground;
he comes to make his blessings flow
far as the curse is found,
far as the curse is found,
far as, far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
the glories of his righteousness
and wonders of his love,
and wonders of his love,
and wonders, wonders of his love.

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