April Weekly Reflections

Now the Green Blade Rises

*“Now the green blade rises, from the buried grain,*

*Wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;*

*Love lives again, that with the dead has been:*

*Love is come again, like wheat arising green.”*

“Now the Green Blade Rises” was written by John MacLeod Campbell Crum (1872-1958) using a familiar tune. Crum lived in England throughout his life and was active in the Church of England throughout his life. He was ordained as a priest in 1900 and held several positions in the church including: chaplain to the Bishop of Oxford, Francis Paget, assistant curate at Windsore, vicar of Mentmore at Ledburn, and canon at Canterbury.

While serving the church, Crum worked in a variety of theological areas and wrote on biblical and architectural topics, as well as studying historical works, and writing children's books. His works include Road Mending on the Sacred Way (1924), What Mean Ye by These Stones? (1926), The Original Jerusalem Gospel (1927) and St Mark's Gospel, Two Stages of its Making (1936). He also wrote a variety of hymns throughout his ministry.[[1]](#footnote-1)

“Now the Green Blade Rises” utilizes several different scriptures to illustrate the power of Jesus’ death and resurrection. It centers on John 12:23-24: “Jesus answered them, ‘The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.’” This text served as the final Gospel reading of Lent this year because of its obvious connections to Holy Week.

1 Corinthians 15:37-38 uses the grain metaphor again to explain the resurrection, “And as for what you sow, you do not sow the body that is to be, but a bare seed, perhaps of wheat or of some other grain. But God gives it a body as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body.” The grain metaphor reminds us that death and burial are not the end of the story, the end of the story is resurrection and new life.

This hymn reminds us that the power of the resurrection is here and now. The power of the resurrection is for each and every one of us. Each day we die to our old selves and rise anew just as Jesus died and was buried so that he could rise anew on Easter morning.

Christ Is Risen! Alleluia!

*“Christ is risen! Alleluia! Risen our victorious head!*

*Sing his praises! Alleluia! Christ is risen from the dead!”*

Those words are the chorus of the hymn “Christ is Risen! Alleluia!” which we often sing at Easter. The words to this hymn were written by John S.B. Monsell, an Irish clergyman of the Anglican tradition and a poet in the 1800s. This hymn is only one of about 300 hymns that Monsell wrote! The words are put to a tune composed by Frederick C. Maker, an English church musician from the same time period.

This hymn is one of my favorite Easter hymns, for two very simple reasons. It is LOUD and we get to sing “Alleluia” a lot! But besides getting to triumphantly express the joy of Easter, the words and music of this hymn help us experience the beauty of Easter. This hymn does not minimize the pain of Holy Week and Good Friday. The second verse reads “Christ is risen! All the sadness of our Lenten fast is o’er; through the open gates of gladness he returns to life once more; death and hell before him bending see him rise, the victor now, angels on his steps attending, glorying round his wounded brow.” I love how these words remind us that what Jesus experienced in his crucifixion and what we experienced in our 40-day journey of Lent is real sadness. But, the hymn helps us realize that knowing the truth of the resurrection in the midst of the reality of death is what makes our Easter joy so real and lasting, rather than something temporary or fleeting.

I think we especially need that reminder this year. As we have now been living in these pandemic times for over a year, even as we celebrate Easter we are aware that so much is different than how it ought to be. We cannot forget or gloss over the way that the pandemic has changed all of us. But, Jesus has been through this year with us, and his resurrection has the final say. Our joy at Easter is real, lasting joy, even while we still live in a pandemic reality. Christ is risen! Alleluia!

Thine Is the Glory

*“Thine is the glory, risen, conqu’ring Son;*

*Endless is the vict’ry thou o’er death hast won!”*

Thine is the Glory is a beautiful and beloved Easter hymn with poetic words set to a familiar Handel tune. The famous words to this hymn were written by Edmond Budry, a Swiss hymn writer. They were translated into English by R. Birch Hoyle.

To me, the best part of this hymn is the second verse: “Lo, Jesus meets thee, risen from the tomb! Lovingly he greets thee, scatters fear and gloom; let his church with gladness hymns of triumph sing, for the Lord now liveth; death hath lost its sting!”

These words remind me that Jesus’ resurrection has important meaning in my life. This may seem obvious, but sometimes I think we tend to forget the most obvious things. We know ABOUT Easter, but we don’t always think about how Easter impacts the way we live our lives. Budry’s words remind me that Jesus’ resurrection means that the risen Christ is with me, and all of us, right now. Jesus’ resurrection does not end all pain and suffering, but it does give us Jesus’ never-ending presence in the midst of anything that we might face. With the risen Jesus by our side, we know that death does not have the final say in our lives, and we can face whatever comes our way, even a worldwide pandemic, as Easter people, confident in Christ’s resurrection and his presence with us! Such a confidence allows us to give glory to God.

Alleluia! Jesus is Risen!

*“Alleluia! Jesus is risen! Trumpets resounding in glorious light!*

*Splendor, the Lamb, heaven forever! Oh, what a miracle God has in sight!*

*Jesus is risen and we shall arise. Give God the glory! Alleluia!”*

This hymn was written by Herbert F. Brokering. Brokering also wrote the other familiar hymn that shares this tune, Earth and All Stars (which in our congregation is lovingly known as the test tube song). David N. Johnson wrote the tune to match the lyrics that Brokering wrote for Earth and All Stars.

Brokering was asked to write an Easter hymn to this tune so that it could be included in one of our Lutheran hymnals, With One Voice. He pulled together many of the different images and themes of the Easter season and celebration and he created Alleluia! Jesus is Risen!

Perhaps what I love most about this hymn is that it is unapologetically joyful! Every verse and every image convey the joy that we experience at Easter! We see angels and archangels and all of creation coming together to celebrate God. The greatest and the least among us are united in praising God.

This hymn calls on us to rise up to give God the glory. It calls us to tell the story of Jesus, to break our bread together, to sing with creation. It tells us what life in the Spirit looks and feels like.

This hymn reminds us that living our lives with God is a joyful thing and cause for celebration. Alleluia! Jesus is Risen!

1. https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/resources/history-of-hymns-now-the-green-blade-riseth [↑](#footnote-ref-1)