

### *The Hymn of the Day*

Generally speaking, in the middle of our Sunday service we sing a hymn. Since this hymn usually comes before the sermon, many refer to it as the “sermon hymn,” but there’s more to it than that. Most of the time, this hymn has not been chosen by the pastor, but by the same committees that selected the Scripture readings (the Lectionary) and liturgical texts and assigned them to that particular Sunday. This hymn is called “the Hymn of the Day.”

D. Richard Stuckwisch has written:

“The Hymn of the Day is the chief hymn of the Divine Service. It is a distinctively Lutheran contribution, enriched over the course of centuries by a host of outstanding composers, including Johann Sebastian Bach. Taking its cues from the Holy Gospel of the day, from the other readings, and from the liturgical season, this hymn both reflects and contributes to the particular emphases of the service.”

In the Lutheran Church, the hymns we sing are not just “musical interludes” or “feel-good songs” chosen to create a mood for the moment. As Dr Stuckwisch continues:

“Lutherans give such careful attention to hymns because they are a powerful teacher of God’s Word and an eloquent means of confessing the Christian faith. Their poetic and lyrical qualities and musical accompaniment make them ideally suited to catechesis. Hymns are more easily remembered than almost any particular sermon or classroom lecture. The use of the appointed Hymn of the Day serves these purposes in a way that helps overcome the weaknesses and avoid the idiosyncrasies of an individual pastor or congregation.

“The Hymn of the Day represents the accumulated wisdom of past generations and the current consensus of our churchly fellowship. It is part of our common confession. When all or most of our congregations make regular use of the Hymn of the Day, it not only reflects but serves and supports our unity in Christ. Because our Hymn of the Day list is deeply rooted in historic precedents and shares in common with the corresponding lists of other Lutheran churches, it is broadly catholic [universal] and serves the common Christian heritage.” (D. Richard Stuckwisch, “The Hymn of the Day,” *Lutheran Service Book Companion to the Hymns, Volume 2*, 137,141).

Our singing of hymns has been rather limited these past months, as we’ve been struggling through these virus-ridden times. So during this Lenten season, we’re going to do something a little different for our midweek meditations. Each Wednesday evening, we’re going to prepare for the coming Sunday by taking a close look at the appointed Hymn of the Day. The appointed Hymns of the Day for Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Easter will be the themes for each of those Holy Days when they arrive.

There may be a little history behind the hymn, a little examination of the poetry chosen by the author, a little listen to what’s going on musically. Above all, we’ll look at the theology expressed, the text(s) from which the words of the hymn were drawn, and the gifts of God given to us in Jesus Christ to which the hymnwriter points.

If you can join us in person, please do so. If not, then join us online via the videos posted on YouTube. God grant that all of us will be enriched by the hymnody of the Church, and blessed in our preparations for the celebration of our Savior’s suffering, death, and resurrection!

So, as Johann Sebastian Bach (and many others) used to sign off many of his compositions, S.D.G. *Soli Deo Gloria!* To God alone be glory! Amen.