

“Holy Spirit, Come with Power”—Gwen Laughlin

Music has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. Growing up in the congregation of Superb Mennonite Church, there was music everywhere. Though I was never the best singer and didn't have a particular instrument that I played, this is where my fondness of singing began and my first experience singing in a choir. This fondness for singing continued on at my time at RJC where I joined all the choirs I could, followed by the musicals at the end of the school year and has carried on into the present by joining church choirs and Sonrisa/ Coro Nova.

The song *Holy Spirit, Come with Power* has always been a personal favorite hymn of mine. It was always on the list for favorite music or music Sundays growing up. I find that there are times where I just end up singing the song or humming the tune as I go about my day. Because of this, this hymn was one of the first hymns that I can remember having memorized as a teen, not from actively learning it but just having it stuck in my head all day.

The lyrics of the song depict the Holy Spirit as an active and vibrant entity. Using adverbs as breaking, bursting, breathing and burning shows a different facet than the normal. I find the tune and music of this hymn very catchy and find that it sticks with me long after I have sung it. It is a dynamic song, that makes me feel energized about the rest of my day and my continuing Anabaptist relationship.

“How Great Thou Art” – Reflection by Nicole Tiessen

Music has been one of the constants in my life for as long as I can remember. My parents would tell me that as a young child my older neighbours would stand at the back alley fence and listen to me sing while playing – providing hours neighbourhood entertainment for all who would listen. If you knew how much I talked as a child this is likely not a surprise! This love of music grew into junior choir at church, school choirs & musicals, piano & voice lessons and then off to RJC, where through opportunity & genuine encouragement I grew both in confidence and ability. I felt proud to sing in Chorale – a tradition that my Mom and her siblings had done before me.

From a young age, I felt deep within me that music was a core part of church and I knew it was a worship medium that resonated with me. It was a way I connected my faith, my family and my Mennonite heritage and a way that I continue to find community through Lynne and her direction of our choir Coro Nova. Nothing sends shivers down my spine like hearing the story of our Mennonite ancestors singing the song “Nun Danket Alle Gott” as they left the train station in Russia. Music has always been core to our faith.

When selecting a hymn for this morning's service I immediately went to songs that tied me to moments. Singing “Here in this Place” at opening program as a keen yet nervous RJC student, a recollection of my Dad telling me once that his favourite hymn was “Amazing Grace” and the hymns we sang together this past fall as Coro Nova, coming back together after 18 months in the pursuit of community, during an ongoing pandemic.

Each hymn is tied to a memory, an emotion and a moment.

But today is Mother's Day and being as such it felt only right to honor my Mom's Mom, my Grandma Lillian Dueck, with one of her and my Grandpa David's favourite hymns.

Growing up, like many in this congregation, I was blessed to have a close family – extending beyond my parents and brothers to my Grandparents, Uncles, Aunts and cousins and even the larger extended families on both sides. I felt supported, loved, encouraged and valued by this large network. I know now as an adult that this is not everyone's lived experience and truly what a gift I was given.

From an early age, I understood what it was like to lose core people in our lives, with my Dad's brother, my Uncle Peter when I was 4 and then with both my Grandfathers before I reached adulthood. Loss as a child is an interesting and difficult thing to navigate and to understand. The hymn I chose today is "How Great Thou Art". It was sung by my Mom's cousin Paula Roth at my Grandpa's funeral – which was 30 years ago this past February. For me it represents a time of significant loss and shift in our family, but also a time of togetherness, remembrance and celebration for a life well lived. A decade later when my Grandma passed away she had included a note in her belongings to have Paula sing this same song at her service and included a line at the end that said...."Thanks Paula!" with an exclamation mark. Many of you knew my Grandparents and knew what a full of life & fun personality my Grandma had...she definitely had one last twinkle in her eye with this instruction.

I had the honor of being their only Granddaughter – 7 grandsons and me. My Grandma, proudly introduced me and led with this fact to people we would meet and the bond we had was incredibly strong. I carry her with me every day.

In the years that have passed, this is one song I strongly associate with my Grandpa and Grandma – not only the moments at the end of their lives but all the beautiful moments that came before. The people they were, the values & faith they held and the love they shared with each other and our family. I listen to the lyrics and am always filled with emotion & a twinge of sadness but I am equally filled with gratitude for what we were given by them.

In researching the hymn for today I found words to the poem that inspired the hymn. "O Great God" was written by Carl Boberg and he recalled "It was in 1885, and in the time of year when everything seemed to be in its richest coloring; the birds were singing in trees and wherever they could find a perch. On a particular afternoon, some friends and I had been to Kronobäck where we had participated in an afternoon service. As we were returning a thunderstorm began to appear on the horizon. We hurried to shelter. There were loud claps of thunder, and the lighting flashed across the sky. Strong winds swept over the meadows and billowing fields of grain. However, the storm was soon over and the clear sky appeared with a beautiful rainbow."

When you sing this song you can almost feel those loud claps of thunder and then the shift to the rainbow shine brightly with each chorus. As we emerge from a 2 year pandemic this felt like just

the right words for today – we have been through a storm but there is still hope. Our rainbow is emerging.

I was surprised to see that while based on the original poem “O Great God”, that both the melody and lyrics have evolved and countless versions have been sung in the last century. We have seen our world shift drastically in the last years – the foundations are still with us but some of the lyrics have changed. We too adapt and we change, but what is most important is that the roots of our beliefs, family and values stay constant...when those things remain in place the other things around us can have the space to grow & stretch. In the years since my Grandparents passed on many things have changed yet the core of our family and the closeness we share despite illness, distance and time remains. And for that I am grateful.

“Halle, Halle, Hallelujah!”—Jane Regier

Rachel - What do you like about signing at church?

Jane - It's nice to hear a bunch of people all singing together. We sing at home on our own but it sounds nice to hear everyone all together. If we didn't go to church then I wouldn't get to see my grandma Donna (Driedger), and that also makes church special.

Rachel - How does signing at church make you feel?

Jane - It makes me feel happy and I like to hear it.

Sometimes I try to sing along and it's hard work but sometimes I can. When I can sing along I feel happy.

Rachel - Do you have a favourite church song?

The Hale-hale-hale song, because I just like it. I can sing along with that song because I have sung that song since I was a baby in my crib.

- Jane & Rachel Regier

Amazing Grace—Lil Bartel

Both Lil and I did some research into the background for Amazing Grace and the following comes from three sources: Kenneth Osbeck's *101 Hymn Stories*, *Hymnal Companion for Hymnal: A Worship Book*, and *131 Christians Everyone Should Know*. As to some of the reasons Lil has chosen this hymn she writes, I am always moved by the hymn “Amazing Grace”. I tend to look at the date of Hymns we sing in church, many from the 17 and 18 century and also listen to the more vibrant voices when we sing the older hymns, tested and still loved.” Further to that, however, is the compelling story of John Newton who is the hymnwriter.

Newton was nurtured by a Christian mother who taught him the Bible at an early age, but he was raised in his father's image after she died of tuberculosis when Newton was 7. At age 11, Newton went on his first of six sea-voyages with the merchant navy captain.

Newton lost his first job, in a merchant's office, because of “unsettled behavior and impatience of restraint”—a pattern that would persist for years. He spent his later teen years at sea before he was press-ganged aboard the H.M.S. Harwich...Newton rebelled against the

discipline of the Royal Navy and deserted. He was caught, put in irons, and flogged. He eventually convinced his superiors to discharge him to a slaver ship...he remained arrogant and insubordinate, and he lived with moral abandon: "I sinned with a high hand," he later wrote, "and I made it my study to tempt and seduce others"....

[on one sea voyage in 1947] the ship was overtaken by an enormous storm. Newton had been reading Thomas a Kempis' *The Imitation of Christ*, and was struck by a line about "uncertain continuance of life." He also recalled a passage in Proverbs, "Because I have called and ye have refused,...I also will laugh at your calamity." He converted during the storm, though he admitted later, "I cannot consider myself to have been a believer, in the full sense of the world."

Newton then served as a mate and then as captain of a number of slave ships, hoping as a Christian to restrain the worst excesses of the slave trade, "promoting the life of God in the soul" of both his crew and his African cargo.

[As the years wore on he] became increasingly disgusted with the slave trade and his role in it. In 1769 he quit, was ordained into the Anglican ministry. [In that role he began composing hymn texts and tunes]. [18 years later] Newton wrote *Thoughts Upon the African Slave Trade* to help William Wilberforce's campaign to end the practice of [slavery]—"a business at which my heart not shudders," he wrote. Recollection of that chapter in his life never left him, and in his old age, when it was suggested that the increasingly feeble Newton retire, he replied, "I cannot stop. What? Shall the old African blasphemer stop while he can speak?"¹

Even more near the end of his life, Newton was quoted as saying, "My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner and that Christ is a great Savior!" John Newton 1725-1807. Lil comments, "that Amazing Grace is still there for us all." Thank you.

- Lil Bartel

"May God Bless You and Keep You"—Sarah Regier

"The Lord Bless You and Keep You" is one of my favourite hymns because of how it creates a sense of community. I really enjoy sending hymns in general, actually. The lyrics often have two interpretative possibilities; they're both personal blessings and collective benedictions. It makes me feel cared for, but it also makes me feel like part of a community of care, someone who is able to play a part in letting others know that they're cared for. In the case of "The Lord Bless You and Keep You," the lyrics invite us together into God's presence even as the congregation separates from each other at the end of a service. It opens "The Lord bless you and keep you," which is fairly simple and straightforward. May you be safe until we meet again. But then it moves on "The Lord lift his countenance upon you and give you peace." *Countenance*, the noun, can mean both one's face and one's support or approval, so we say to each other 'may the Lord see you and pronounce you good; may you be at peace in God's love.' Then the last line: "The Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious unto you." Again, we hope for God's attention, God's radiant attention, even, and for his grace for each other. So often in our

¹ *131 Christians Everyone Should Know*, from the editors of "Christian History Magazine" (Nashville, TN: Christianity Today // B&H Publishing Group, 2000), pp.88-90

hymns and prayers we ask God for his grace upon ourselves, but in this hymn we bear that hope for each other in community.

I think the familiarity of this song also contributes to bringing people together. I've heard the verses from Numbers read as a benediction often— often enough that I can recite them from memory even though I never actively tried to learn them. They have a good rhythm. I think that the most familiar passages and liturgies of the church make a congregation feel at home and feel a sense of belonging. The fact that, when I go to a new church, they read the same familiar passages for communion always relaxes me. Benedictions are also often common between churches, and they're both familiar and also deliberately meant to invite you into the community, to wish you well and invite you to come back. This hymn is familiar to me, and the passage is familiar to me, and so it always makes me feel like I belong.

I also just really like the harmonies. Singing in four-part harmony has always been something that makes me feel connected to the congregation around me— it takes some focus, an awareness of one's own part and how one fits into the larger whole. I love to hear how my own singing harmonizes with the people next to me, and as someone who almost always has the melody, I'm delighted when there are people nearby singing the other parts with confidence and strength. Singing this hymn takes some attention for me; it's a little tricky to get right, and putting the work into singing it is, for me, representative of the care I have for the people I'm singing with. It's just a very beautiful hymn. Truthfully, I can think of nothing better that I want to offer my family in Christ than the peace and grace and love that this hymn hopes for them.