

Hymns that highlight my spiritual path

This Sunday the message is going to be different. You are invited to help me sing some of the hymns that give voice to my faith journey. Don't tell Sid, but I pray through the music! I have chosen all of the hymns we will sing today as they also belong to my faith journey. You already have sung two of my favorites – our Processional hymn: Come, we that love the Lord,– and our Sequence hymn: Like the murmur of the dove's song. Meaning-filled poetry wedded to perfectly enhancing music – that is what makes a great hymn to me.

Our Psalm sounds the inner longing for a relationship with the Divine, the Creator of all that is good. "As the deer longs for the water-brooks, so longs my soul for you, O God." I have always loved the simplicity and forthrightness of this first hymn, asking for forgiveness for our mistakes and guidance in all we do. Let's sing these verses of **Dear Lord and Father of mankind.**

"Dear Lord and Father of mankind, forgive our foolish ways!
Re-clothe us in our rightful mind, in purer lives thy service find,
in deeper reverence, praise.

In simple trust like theirs who heard, beside the Syrian sea,
the gracious calling of the Lord, let us, like them, without a word,
rise up and follow thee.

Drop thy still dews of quietness, till all our strivings cease; take from our
souls the strain and stress, and let our ordered lives confess the beauty
of thy peace.

Breathe through the heats of our desire thy coolness and thy balm;
let sense be dumb, let flesh retire; speak through the earthquake, wind,
and fire, O still small voice of calm."

I connect with God in nature, through our animal friends, in hiking, backpacking, camping, walking on the beach, and gardening. On my working honeymoon in 1965, I played the portable pump organ for church services my husband led in the campgrounds of Glacier Nat'l

Park. I remember the joy of our little band of believers out under the Tamarack pines singing at the top of our lungs "**How Great Thou Art!**"
"O Lord, my God! When I in awesome wonder Consider all the works
Thy hands have made, I see the stars, I hear the mighty thunder, Thy
power throughout the universe displayed;

Refrain:

Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee, **How great Thou Art**, how
great Thou art. Then sings my soul, my Savior God, to Thee, How great
Thou Art, how great Thou art.

When through the woods and forest glades I wander And hear the birds
sing sweetly in the trees; When I look down from lofty mountain
grandeur And hear the brook and feel the gentle breeze: (Refrain)"

When Martin Luther King was murdered, my husband, a youth minister,
gave up a year of law school to keep the First United Church of Christ in
downtown Oakland open to the youth of the area and community
organizers in an effort to diffuse recourse to violence. Two years later
as I was teaching music at Willard Junior High on Telegraph Avenue in
Berkeley, the People's Park, Anti Vietnam War and Civil Rights
demonstrations led to riots. My school children were tear-gassed as
crowds and riot policemen ran down the street. The words that the
English poet Frank Mason North wrote in 1905 spoke to these troubled
years and their recurring heartache. I truly believe that we are the
hands and feet of God. **Where cross the crowded ways of life.** Join me
is singing this hymn that reflects my understanding of the need for
social justice.

"Where cross the crowded ways of life, where sound the cries of race
and clan, above the noise of selfish strife, we hear thy voice, O Son of
Man.

In haunts of wretchedness and need, on shadowed thresholds dark with
fears, from paths where hide the lures of greed, we catch thy vision of
thy tears.

The cup of water given for thee still holds the freshness of thy grace; yet long these multitudes to see the true compassion of thy face.

O master, from the mountain side, make haste to heal these hearts of pain; among these restless throngs abide, Tread the city's streets again."

In 1969 my Alison was born. Her name means "gift from God." I was so happy. My large family was on its way – or so I thought. My husband had graduated from PSR and had started law school because in the 60's he said, "People not only need prayers, but good legal advice." The day after he passed the Bar, he answered the call to Chico United Church of Christ. We tried to have another baby, and it didn't seem in the cards, so we took in a Piute Indian girl as a foster child. Then the unbelievable happened. In January 1975 I almost lost my life, I lost my baby, and I lost any ability to have another baby. I was catapulted into menopause at age 30. I was devastated. The women in our church ministered to me with such love that they brought my broken spirit back to life. **Love Divine, All Loves Excelling** says it all.

"Love divine, all loves excelling, joy of heaven, to earth come down, fix in us thy humble dwelling, all thy faithful mercies crown. Jesus, thou art all compassion, pure, unbounded love thou art; visit us with thy salvation, enter every trembling heart."

All this time I had been a church musician; since I was 11, playing the pump organ at St. Stephens Episcopal in SLO for the 8 am service, then the Methodist, Lutheran, UCC for 23 years while married to the UCC minister, and 13 years for the SLO First Presbyterian. Thank God for the gift of music restoring my soul. **God of Grace and God of glory** speaks powerfully to the Christian's earnest prayer for help in troubled times.

"God of Grace and God of Glory, on thy people pour thy power; crown thine ancient Church's story; bring her bud to glorious flower. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour, for the facing of this hour.

Cure thy children's warring madness, bend our pride to thy control; shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.

Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, lest we miss thy kingdom's goal, lest we miss thy kingdom's goal."

I have lived through a very unpleasant divorce, earned my doctorate under very difficult circumstances, been blessed to return to my hometown and find work in music education here, been greatly blessed in knowing and loving Jim Lindholm, but also experienced losing him to pancreatic cancer after only being together 14 years.

God's grace keeps coming into my life and re-filling my cup. Four months after Jimmie passed, in April 2008, I got a call from Roger Ludin to be your substitute organist/choir director. I have been your "permanent substitute organist/choir director" ever since. And this church led me to my new husband Allan and new lease on life. We have been able to travel a great deal and know the need for tolerance. Lenny's class was phenomenal in helping us understand Islam when we traveled to Uzbekistan and Turkey. Thank you, Lenny. I love the use of music throughout our Episcopal worship services. 5 hymns usually, service music – and a prelude and postlude! And though my choir is few in numbers, we are huge in spirit! I have so many "favorite" hymns that I could have used to express my journey of faith, my spiritual path. But these few spoke meaningfully to me at turning points in my life. I hope you have found them meaningful too.

As the Psalmist says, "Why are you so full of heaviness, O my soul? And why are you so disquieted within me? Put your trust in God; for I will yet give thanks to him, who is the help of my countenance, and my God."

In conclusion, please join me in singing **Amazing Grace**.

"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 that brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home.

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. "

