

8/5/2018

## **“It Is Well with My Soul”**

Scripture: Isaiah. 40:28-31; Matthew 10:28-31; 3 John 1:2-4 NRSV

Series: Songs of Faith and Inspiration– “It Is Well With My Soul”

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**Theme: We can trust in God’s presence, love, and perfect will.**

As we worship together this month, our messages and worship will center on “Songs of Faith and Inspiration”. We know of course, that praise and worship of God, in both Old and New Testament times, encouraged and expressed faith and inspiration through music and song. And, the words, or lyrics, were and often continue to be, based on personal experiences.

Beginning in 2003, Robert J. Morgan, wrote a three part collection of Books called *Then Sings My Soul*, (Thomas Nelson Publishers). In them he shares the personal stories behind the writing of the hymns and songs of faith that have inspired so many through the years, including some of the more recent and contemporary ones.

We begin our series today with **“It Is Well with My Soul”**. It is both the title of a beloved hymn, as well as an expression of faith and blessing. By it, we are saying or singing, we can trust in God’s presence, love, and perfect will.

As we have considered last Sunday, and all of us should know by now, we all face hardship and affliction at some time in our lives. But, we can say with the author of Psalm 34 (:19), ***“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD rescues them from them all.” (NRSV)***

We heard Luke’s account of Paul and himself, along with many others, who were thrown off course and even shipwrecked on their journey to Rome. All survived as they trusted God for direction and protection.

But, we know from events, such as the catastrophe of another Duck Boat a couple of weeks ago in the US, that sometimes lives are lost when disaster strikes. Sometimes that which is rescued is other than the body.

Robert Morgan shares this account of the origin of the hymn **“It Is Well with My Soul”**:

When the great Chicago fire consumed the Windy City in 1871, Horatio G. Spafford, an attorney heavily invested in real estate, lost a fortune. About that time, his only son, age 4, succumbed to scarlet fever. Horatio drowned his grief in work, pouring himself into rebuilding the city and assisting 100,000 who had been left homeless.

In November of 1873, he decided to take his wife and daughters to Europe. Horatio was close to D. L. Moody and Ira Sankey and wanted to visit their evangelistic meetings in England, then enjoy a vacation.

When an urgent matter detained Horatio in New York, he decided to send his wife Anna, and their four daughters, Maggie, Tanetta, Annie, and Bessie, on ahead. As he saw them settled into a cabin aboard the luxurious French liner *Ville du Havre*, an unease filled his mind, and he moved them to a room closer to the bow of the ship. Then, he said good-bye, promising to join them soon.

During the small hours of November 22, 1873, as the *Ville du Havre* glided over smooth seas, the passengers were jolted from their bunks. The ship had collided with an iron sailing vessel, and water poured in like Niagara. The *Ville du Havre* tilted dangerously. Screams, prayers, and oaths merged into a nightmare of unmeasured terror. Passengers clung to posts, tumbled through darkness, and were swept away by powerful currents of icy ocean. Loved ones fell from each other's grasp and disappeared into foaming blackness. Within two hours, the mighty ship vanished beneath the waters. The 226 fatalities included Maggie, Tanetta, Annie, and Bessie. Mrs. Spafford was found nearly unconscious, clinging to a piece of the wreckage. When the 47 survivors landed in Cardiff, Wales, she called her husband: "Saved Alone."

Horatio immediately booked passage to join his wife. En route, on a cold December night, the captain called him aside and said, "I believe we are now passing over the place where the *Ville du Havre* went down." Spafford went to his cabin but found it hard to sleep. He said to himself, "It is well; the will of God be done."

He later wrote his famous hymn based on those words.

The melody for "It Is Well," title VILLE DU HAVRE, was written by Philip Bliss who was himself soon to perish, along with his wife, in a terrible train wreck in Ohio. (*Then Sings My Soul*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2003)

The questions that come to my mind as I read this story and sing the words of this beloved hymn of faith and encouragement are these: "Is it well with my soul?" and "How is it with your soul?"

Do we have the faith and assurance under such circumstances to say, "It is well; the will of God be done."?

John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, often asked the members of his classes and societies, "How is it with your soul?" Each participant would reply in earnest revealing both strengths and weaknesses, joys and sorrows, success and failure, in describing their

spiritual life of Christian discipleship.

They would share problems, struggles, worries and fears, as well as blessings, biblical and spiritual insights and wisdom gained.

They would share about financial and money matters, personal relationships.

They would talk about habits and addictions, or areas of their lives that were out of control.

They would relate disappointments, unfulfilled hopes and dreams, loss and grief.

They would talk about illness, disability, suffering and death.

They would discuss their hopes, doubts or assurance of salvation and the afterlife.

Perhaps they would read and reflect upon such affirmations as Isaiah 40:28-31:

*“Do you not know?           Have you not heard?  
The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.  
He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.  
He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.  
Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;  
but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength.  
They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary,  
they will walk and not be faint.”*

We too can affirm God’s care as David did by his words of the 23<sup>rd</sup> Psalm (vs. 3):

*“He restores my soul.”*

Or from the gospels, the words of Jesus, from Matthew 10:28-31:

*“Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father. And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. So don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.”*

Or from the epistles, such as from the third letter of John (3 John 1:2-4 NRSV):

*“Beloved, I pray that all may go well with you and that you may be in good health, just as it is well with your soul. I was overjoyed when some of the friends arrived and testified to your faithfulness to the truth, namely how you walk in the truth. I have no greater joy than this, to hear that my children are walking in the truth.”*

**So, are we faithful to the truth of Christ?      Do we walk in the truth of Christ?**

Do others see in our lives the love of Christ made real to them?

And do our lives reflect the holiness of God's Spirit within us?      Are we the salt and light that Jesus calls us to be for the world?

**Remember that Jesus and the Holy Spirit are stronger than any force of darkness in the world!**

You can have the peace and assurance that you and your loved ones are in God's strong and loving hands; now and for all eternity.

If you haven't already received the assurance, that blessed assurance of your salvation, I invite you to do it today as we prepare for Holy Communion. And, if you are not sure of the state of your soul, or if you are sick or weighed down in your heart or soul, take it to Christ in prayer today.

. . . May each of us be able to say with assurance, peace and joy . . . It is well with my soul.