Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Have you noticed something the last four weeks? Lent, and these hymns are very timely – at least so they seem. Why is that? We are still in the middle of a global health situation issue that has been called everything from, pandemic, to an over-blown panic. The responses and measures taken – whether you believe them to be correct or not – have impacted the lives of everybody in some form or another. It has left us all wondering, “What’s next?” All are us are expectantly hoping that things will loosen up as more people get vaccinated so that we can return to some sort of normalcy.

Needless to say the unrest caused by this situation has caused people to be more stressed and has led many people to behavior which is certainly not typical for them. Fear – of the unknown, of the illness itself, of what the future may hold – simple fear, has been the mode of operation in the lives of too many people.

What strikes me is that maybe we do not realize on a regular basis how fragile life truly is, and how tenuous is the state of our faith. Without something big to bring it our mortality to light, we simply do not take the time to regularly consider that we do “walk in the valley of the shadow of death.” As a general rule, people do not want to consider death, and the simple fact that at a moment’s notice all that we have could be stripped away from us.

**Lord of Our Life and God of Our Salvation**

**Hymn #659**

Mid-week Lent 3

03.10.2021

Imagine being Job. In literally one day, he was robbed of all his children by death, and stripped of all his earthly possessions. *Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped (God). And he said, “Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.* (Job 1:20-22)

How would you respond to such tragedy?

As if that were not enough, God allowed Satan to also attack Job’s body. *So Satan went out from the presence of the Lord and struck Job with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head. 8 And he took a piece of broken pottery with which to scrape himself while he sat in the ashes. Then his wife said to him, “Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.” But he said to her, “You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?” In all this Job did not sin with his lips.* (Job 2:7-10)

How would you respond now? It just keeps getting worse! Trials, tribulations, sorrows seem to continuously pile up. What is the response? I can imagine that many would respond as did Job’s wife, angry at God, a “curse God and die,” attitude.

Let’s be honest, there are days we feel that we have had as many things piled upon us as had Job. Some people may make a statement along the lines of, “I can’t complain, I know there are people who have it worse than I do.” Yet inwardly they are close to being overwhelmed by the pain, sorrow, and sheer feeling of wondering if it is ever going to stop!

Yes, we live in the wilderness – in a fallen creation. Sinfulness abounds and affects us all. Our sinfulness and the sinfulness of others leaves a scorched earth path of pain and destruction in its wake.

We so often see ourselves as the afflicted that we do not realize how often we have been the afflicters, that we are the ones who have hurt others with our words or actions. Even the best Christians, those whom we think of as the “good people,” have left behind many walking wounded in their lives, a wake devastation, usually not even knowing they have done so.

We all need to come to God in repentance, asking Him to open our eyes to see where we have hurt others and to bring healing through repentance. And in the next breath, we need to ask for the strength to forgive those who have brought pain and suffering into our lives.

We also need to ask God to forgive us for those times we accused Him of ignoring us, and not listening to our pleas for help. We must do this remembering most especially that in Christ Jesus, all has been forgiven.

And then, I pray that this hymn, as well as the hymns from the last couple weeks would flow forth from your lips as fervent prayers in the midst of life in these tumultuous times.

Why you ask? Because again, our hymn arose in the heart of the author as a prayer to God in the midst of strife and threats from our satanic foe and the world. Matthäus Löwenstern was a counselor at the Imperial Court which was strongly Roman Catholic. Emperor's Ferdinand I and III were determined to wipe out any who confessed the Lutheran expression of the Christian faith. To do so, they enacted policies of counter-Reformation which produced death, disease, and destruction in many parts of the Roman empire, including the area of Silesia, Löwenstern's homeland. This area is now lost in what today is Poland, the Czech Republic, and Germany.

Philip Pusey's desire to make this hymn available in English was spurred on by the struggles of The Church against a variety of attacks attempting to secularize the church – attempts to bring The Church in line with the cultural beliefs of the time. (Sounds familiar, doesn’t it?) This illustrates that from Germany to England, and a span of 200 years, the attacks of Satan upon the faith of Christians in a variety of historical settings is usually very similar. Is such a hymn, reflecting the same concerns, any less necessary today some 500 or 300 years later? Hopefully this drives home the fact that The Church finds comfort and hope through the shared experiences expressed by the mutual singing of this hymn.

If we are only willing to be honest, it is easy to see the continuing battle between God and Satan, between the church and the satanic forces of evil, as something which continues in our time as well. Thankfully this hymn opens our eyes to see the even greater reality of God as Lord of our life and salvation. In this hymn we realize and confess that God does intervene on behalf of his people, both as His Church and as individuals.

Our hymn confesses and prays to our Lord, expressing the thoughts: Lord, we know your power and might both to keep us in all that we do, and also as our Savior from sin and death. We pray you to hear us in our time of need.

But we also hear the expectant hope in the tune used to confess this truth.

(sing) *Lord of our life and God of our salvation, Star of our night and Hope of ev'ry nation: Hear and receive Your Church's supplication, Lord God Almighty.*

Do you hear the expectant hope expressed in the tune as the verse is concluded, that God will hear and receive this supplication?

Hopefully you know that The Church has often been depicted as an Ark. It harkens back to the flood and God’s keeping Noah, his family, and the animals safe in the ark as the seas of the flood destroyed all other life outside the ark. So, The Church has been depicted as ‘holy ark of Christendom’ which God keeps safe even in the stormy seas of this tempestuous life, as the enemies of The Church are continuously striving to overcome us.

*See round Your ark the hungry billows curling; See how Your foes their banners are unfurling And with great spite their fiery darts are hurling, O Lord, preserve us.*

Now you hear the tune reflect that expectant hope that God will preserve us in the face of all attacks.

*Lord, be our light when worldly darkness veils us; Lord, be our shield when earthly armor fails us; And in the day when hell itself assails us, Grant us Your peace, Lord.*

It is true that the darkness of this world seeks to cover us, driving us into darkness. It is a constant struggle against the forces of evil. Too often we strive to fight against Satan’s attacks by our own strength. What feebleness is that? Only when we acknowledge our weakness, trusting not in our own strength, but trusting solely in God our shield are we finally strong. We will overcome, for sin, death, and Satan have been overcome for us in Christ. Hell can rage and rally against us, but the victory is already ours. Say it boldly, “I am baptized into Christ!”

Do you again hear the melody expectantly trusting, knowing that it is accomplished, and we have only to wait? (sing) *Grant us your peace, Lord.*

Waiting for what? Waiting for what God delivers to us… Do you hear it in our last verse?

*Peace in our hearts, where sinful thoughts are raging,* Yes, Christ’s peace, the forgiveness of sins is delivered to our ears. *Peace in Your Church, our troubled souls assuaging,* Yes, Christ’s peace placed upon our tongues, poured between our lips, strengthening us in body and soul. *Peace when the world its endless war is waging,* Christ’s peace is present when we come into Christ’s Church. Look up, examine at the shape of this nave – see the ribs of an inverted boat – designed on purpose to depict the Ark. Christ closes us in, just as He sealed the ark once all were aboard. Closed in and save, the world rages against us. Here we have peace and strength as Christ visits us so that we might go back out these doors refreshed and renewed to be His holy people.

Our hymn ends in notes of prayerful expectation – *Peace in Your heaven.* Yes, that is our everlasting hope. We know it to be our future, but it is still an expectant hope. We wait for it, but we wait with sure confidence, knowing Him who died and rose again for us. We know it is ours, we are simply waiting.

Come, Lord Jesus! Amen.