

## Near the Cross—July's Hymn of the Month 2020

By Bill Dagle

This virus that has invaded our world isn't the first time we've seen such trouble. Neither will it be the last. The book of Revelation makes that clear. The worst is yet to come. You don't want to be here when it arrives. The flu season of 2017-18 brought 80,000 deaths and 900,000 hospitalizations, and that's with a vaccine available. One hundred years, over 50 million died due to the Spanish flu—the worst pandemic in human history. In 1849, an epidemic broke out in New Orleans killing over 3,500. This epidemic which had started in the orient three years earlier, now had spread to Manhattan with 500 to 800 dying each week by mid-July. Cholera was taking its toll; and before it was all over, 5,000 New Yorkers would succumb to this dread disease.

During this cholera outbreak, Fanny Crosby volunteered to help as a nurse to the suffering and afflicted. She spent her days comforting the sick and stumbling over coffins that lined the hallways of the hospital. It was during this time that Fanny started evaluating her relationship with her heavenly Father. As she said, "For the last several years, she had tried to hold God in one hand, and the world in the other."

To help Fanny overcome this time of depression, a close friend, Theodore Camp, invited her to attend, with him, the revivals at the Broadway Tabernacle that fall of 1850. Back then, they had altar calls. They were invited to the altar in the front to be counseled and to have the opportunity to receive Christ as personal Savior. Twice, Fanny had gone forward, but the night of November 20<sup>th</sup> proved to be a turning point in Fanny's life. As the congregation sang, *Alas and Did My Savior Bleed*," Fanny said, "My very soul was flooded with celestial light. I leaped to my feet shouting 'Hallelujah, Hallelujah!'" Fanny Crosby was born again.

From that day forward, she gave her time, talent and treasure to the God she loved. The end results were over 8,000 hymns. Her desire was to win over a million souls for her Jesus. That goal was not met in her lifetime, but surpassed by now as her songs have prepared the hearts of millions to receive the message of salvation that Christ so freely gives. What started out as a time of suffering and pain during a cholera outbreak was used to bring a good person into the family of God.

Fanny's hymn, *Near the Cross*, expresses so well what happened to this religious person, Fanny Crosby. She went from religion to relationship. As she wrote in verse 2, "Love and Mercy found me." More than a religious symbol, the cross makes it possible for sinful people to go to Heaven. Christ paid the price and offers forgiveness for all who ask for it. Jesus keep me "near the cross."

Jesus, keep me near the cross,  
There a precious fountain—  
Free to all, a healing stream—  
Flows from Calv'ry's mountain.

Near the cross, a trembling soul,  
Love and Mercy found me;  
There the bright and morning star  
Sheds its beams around me.

Near the cross! O Lamb of God,  
Brings its scenes before me;  
Help me walk from day to day,  
With its shadows o' r me.

Near the cross I'll watch and wait  
Hoping, trusting ever,  
Till I reach the golden strand  
Just beyond the river.

*Refrain:*

In the cross, in the cross  
Be my glory ever;  
Till my raptured soul shall find  
Rest beyond the river.