

August 17, 2025 + 10:30 A.M.  
Eleventh Sunday of Pentecost

**We Join in Worship**

*If you need extra space for a wheelchair or walker, or if you have young children with you, please feel free to make use of our  
Prayground, the extra space across the aisle from the sound booth.*

Liturgist: Hunter Balczo

**PRELUDE**

*Morning Prayer*

Cornelius Gurlitt

**WELCOME**

**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**\*THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

**\*CALL TO WORSHIP** (Adapted from *Psalms* 80)

Leader: Give ear, O Good Shepherd, you who lead us like a flock! You who are enthroned upon the cherubim, shine forth before us. Stir up your might, and come to save us!

**ALL: Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

Leader: You brought out a vine and planted it. You cleared the ground for it; it took deep root and filled the land. The mountains were covered with its shade, the mighty cedars with its branches; it sent out its branches to the sea, and its shoots to the river.

**ALL: Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.**

Leader: Turn again, O God of hosts; look down from heaven and see; have regard for this vine, the stock that your right hand planted.

**ALL: Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved. Let us worship God!**

**\*OPENING HYMN:** “All Things Bright and Beautiful” (267)

**INVITATION TO CONFESSION:**

Leader: In his first letter to the Thessalonians, Paul honors those who receive the Word with joy from the Holy Spirit. Let us confess how we fail to let the Word enliven us with joy.

**PRAYER OF CONFESSION** (unison)

**God of redemption, we come to you to confess our neglect of the joy that is available to us when we allow your Word to transform us. We confess that we neglect to accept it when people change for the better. We neglect to do our own soul searching to see what we need to change about ourselves. We neglect to take ownership of our actions that cause harm, and so we neglect to make amends and restoration. We neglect to do the hard work of challenging each other to do better and be better. Forgive us for our sins of omission. In the beautiful name of Jesus Christ our liberator we pray. Amen.**

**KYRIE:** Glory to God, No. 579 (unison)

**Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

**Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy. Christ, have mercy.**

**Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy. Lord, have mercy.**

## **ASSURANCE OF PARDON**

Leader: Friends, hear the good news! Jesus rescues us from the coming wrath!

ALL: Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!

## **GLORIA PATRI** (unison, 577)

**Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and Holy Ghost;**

**As it was in the beginning, is now, ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

**As it was in the beginning, is now, ever shall be, world without end. Amen.**

## **STATEMENT OF FAITH** (From *The Belhar Confession*)

**We believe that God has entrusted the church with the message of reconciliation in and through Jesus Christ, that the church is called to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, that the church is called blessed because it is a peacemaker, that the church is witness both by word and by deed to the new heaven and the new earth in which righteousness dwells. We believe that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit has conquered the powers of sin and death, and therefore also of irreconciliation and hatred, bitterness and enmity, that God's lifegiving Word and Spirit will enable the church to live in a new obedience which can open new possibilities of life for society and the world.**

<b>We Hear God's Word</b>
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## **EMBODIED WORD FOR DISCIPLES OF ALL AGES**

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

**God of power and grace, fill us with the wisdom of your word and the understanding of your Spirit so that we may be your church: a people with dreams and visions at work in all the world; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.**

**HEBREW BIBLE LESSON:** *Isaiah 58:9b-14*

**EPISTLE LESSON:** *1 Thessalonians 1:1-10*

**LESSON FROM ACTS:** *Acts 9:19b-30*

**SERMON:** Beautiful Transformation

**MUSICAL MEDITATION:** Isabelle and Jon Orem

<b>We Respond in Faith</b>
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### **PRAYERS OF THE PEOPLE AND THE LORD'S PRAYER**

**Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.**

## OFFERING INVITATION

We are called to ministries of redemption and reconciliation. Let us give our tithes and offerings so that we may effectively do this hard work together. If you have not already done so, please place your offering in the plate as it is passed. If you are worshipping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option on the website. Let us reflect on stewardship as we listen to today's offertory.

**OFFERTORY**      *Song of Faith*

Johann Kuhnau

### \* DOXOLOGY:

**Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;**

**Praise God, all creatures high and low;**

**Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**Praise God, in Jesus fully known;**

**Creator, Word, and Spirit one;**

**Alleluia! Alleluia!**

**Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia!**

### \*PRAYER OF DEDICATION: (Unison)

**God of redemption, we dedicate these gifts to you and to your service. Guide us as we seek to use them according to your will. In the beautiful name of Jesus Christ our liberator we pray. Amen.**

### \*CLOSING HYMN "For the Beauty of the Earth" (Glory to God 14)

<b>We Go Into the World</b>
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## BENEDICTION

**POSTLUDE**      *Sarabande*

Handel

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\* So that we can properly greet people who come to the building during Sunday morning worship, Door A will be the only unlocked external door during the worship service.

<b>Life of the Church</b>
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### PEEK AT THE WEEK:

SUNDAY 8/17:	Outdoor Worship – 10:30 AM School Supply Collection Fellowship Hosts: Ministry of Hospitality
MONDAY 8/18:	GA – 6:30 PM Al-Anon – 7:00 PM
TUESDAY 8/19:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH) Session – 6:30 PM AA – 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAY 8/20:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM (FH) GA – 7:00 PM
SUNDAY 8/24:	Salad Sale School Supply Collection

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- **SAVE THE DATE!** Sunday, Sept. 7th is going to be our church's "Fall Kick-Off," including a potluck lunch and games for all ages. We'll also have information about the exciting opportunities to participate in this fall across the various ministries of our congregation.
- **ON-LINE STREAMERS NEEDED!** Are you interested in helping us to make our service accessible to others? Do you like technology? Are you willing to learn? Do you know of someone who might be able to come once a month for a couple hours on a Sunday morning to set up our online service and run the audio and video? If your answer is yes to any of these questions, please consider helping us out. Contact Jean Smith 219-730-7749 for more information.
- **IT'S TIME FOR OUR ANNUAL SCHOOL SUPPLY COLLECTION!** All are invited to bring one or more new school supplies to worship August 3-24, or weekdays August 4-22. There will be collection bins in the sanctuary and near the church office. If you'd like a list of items needed, there is a flyer on the narthex table (or it can be emailed to you). All items will be donated to a local Highland school. If you'd like to help but can't make it to the church building at all, you can mail in a monetary donation marked for school supplies, and we'll do the shopping for you. Contact Heather Casiano, [hcasiano@fpchighland.org](mailto:hcasiano@fpchighland.org), with any questions. Thank you for your help in equipping our local students and teachers!
- **CALLING ALL CRAFTERS** The FPCH crafters will be meeting on the 2nd and 4th Wednesdays of each month from 1pm to 3pm in the meeting room upstairs. The next meeting will be on **August 27**. All are welcome to come! Please join us!
- **ENDOWMENT FUND DONATIONS** Please consider making donations to our church Endowment Fund. Contributions can be made in memory of a loved one or in honor of someone. Donations to this fund can also be made to commemorate special events, such as weddings, birthdays, births and anniversaries. The Endowment Fund is a great way to support grants to ministries in our congregation and our general fund. The money is invested in Vanguard, and each year the fund has been growing. Envelopes are located in the pews and narthex or you can send a check to the office.
- **BUILDING USE FORMS** Just a quick reminder that for the safety and security of everyone using our building, we need to have building use request forms filled out by both members and non-members whenever they use any area of the building outside of regular church activity functions.
- **FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL MEDIA!** If you don't already follow us on Facebook and Instagram, please start doing so @firstpchighland on both Facebook and Instagram.
- **INTERESTED IN BECOMING A MEMBER OF FPCH?** You are always welcome here, whether a member or not! If you are interested in joining as a member, though, we would love to have you! Please talk to Pastor Tyler if you would like to learn more.

## **Opportunities to serve as the HEART, HANDS, and FEET of Jesus Christ:**

- **BLESSING BOX** Please continue to place items in the Blessing Box and take items if you are a person in need! Items most commonly donated: Canned goods with pull tabs, socks, toilet paper, non-perishable foods, small snacks, toiletries, baby wipes and diapers. Please check expiration dates!
- **HELP STOCK OUR PANTRY!** Please pick up a beautifully decorated grocery bag in the narthex and fill it to help the church's food pantry.
- **GOT SNEAKERS?** We are still participating in the Got Sneakers Fundraiser where there is nothing to buy or sell; all we need is your support and your gently worn, used, or new sneakers! Blue bins are located in the narthex, and inside and outside DOOR D by the office. Every pair counts!

### Prayer List

Anthony  
Brady Vanes  
George Griner  
Guy Hendricks  
Bill and Anettia Holmes  
David Markley  
Pat and David Kingen  
Diana and Ray Mendoza  
Janet Orem  
Cindy Waltz and Sister  
Yvonne Suroviak  
Georgette Sknerski  
Jakob Holden  
Denise Matthys  
Jan Oprea  
Florance Cody  
Kathy & Chuck Pumnea  
Laura Buono Domsic  
The Windstrups  
Rick Parker  
Gary Everhart  
Caroline Studer  
Darlene O'Brien  
Doug & Sue Matthews  
Janet Terpstra  
Glen Nahler  
Tom  
David Hamblin  
Jana Tolley  
Larry & Bonnie Perryman  
Delta Rose  
Winnie Owen

Breeanne  
Mom Bechtler  
Victor  
Marian Clayton  
Ella P  
Edie Delgano  
Melissa J.  
Rita Stronczek  
Keren, Zuriel, and Gedeon  
OGB  
Edna Cruz  
Katie  
Charlie  
Jerry & Rena Martinez  
George  
Dustin  
Noreen  
Kim  
Jessica  
Nicole  
Greg  
Pastor Jane  
Mary Ellen Edeus  
Jane and David  
Suzanne  
Jalen  
Flora R.  
Tyler Gall  
Dustin  
Phil  
Luana Sulkowski  
Mike Kelly

### **Isaiah 58:9b-14**

If you remove the yoke from among you,  
the pointing of the finger, the speaking of evil,  
<sup>10</sup> if you offer your food to the hungry  
and satisfy the needs of the afflicted,  
then your light shall rise in the darkness  
and your gloom be like the noonday.  
<sup>11</sup> The Lord will guide you continually  
and satisfy your needs in parched places  
and make your bones strong,  
and you shall be like a watered garden,  
like a spring of water  
whose waters never fail.  
<sup>12</sup> Your ancient ruins shall be rebuilt;  
you shall raise up the foundations of many generations;  
you shall be called the repairer of the breach,  
the restorer of streets to live in.  
<sup>13</sup> If you refrain from trampling the Sabbath,  
from pursuing your own interests on my holy day;  
if you call the Sabbath a delight  
and the holy day of the Lord honorable;  
if you honor it, not going your own ways,  
serving your own interests or pursuing your own affairs;  
<sup>14</sup> then you shall take delight in the Lord,  
and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth;  
I will feed you with the heritage of your ancestor Jacob,  
for the mouth of the Lord has spoken.

### **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

**1** Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy,  
To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ:  
Grace to you and peace.

<sup>2</sup> We always give thanks to God for all of you and mention you in our prayers, constantly <sup>3</sup> remembering before our God and Father your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>4</sup> For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup> because our message of the gospel came to you not in word only but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of persons we proved to be among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup> And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy from the Holy Spirit, <sup>7</sup> so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. <sup>8</sup> For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia but in every place your faith in God has become known, so that we have no need to speak about it. <sup>9</sup> For they report about us what kind of welcome we had among you and how you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God <sup>10</sup> and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

### **Acts 9:19-30**

For several days he was with the disciples in Damascus,<sup>20</sup> and immediately he began to proclaim Jesus in the synagogues, saying, “He is the Son of God.”<sup>21</sup> All who heard him were amazed and said, “Is not this the man who made havoc in Jerusalem among those who invoked this name? And has he not come here for the purpose of bringing them bound before the chief priests?”<sup>22</sup> Saul became increasingly more powerful and confounded the Jews who lived in Damascus by proving that Jesus was the Messiah.

<sup>23</sup> After some time had passed, the Jews plotted to kill him,<sup>24</sup> but their plot became known to Saul. They were watching the gates day and night so that they might kill him,<sup>25</sup> but his disciples took him by night and let him down through an opening in the wall, lowering him in a basket.

<sup>26</sup> When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples, and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.<sup>27</sup> But Barnabas took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus.<sup>28</sup> So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord.<sup>29</sup> He spoke and argued with the Hellenists, but they were attempting to kill him.<sup>30</sup> When the brothers and sisters learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.

### **Beautiful Transformation**

*Isaiah 58:9b-14; 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10; Acts 9:19b-30*

Last week we learned of Saul’s miraculous encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus, when eggshells were placed on his eyes. We learned of those three days of soul searching, of Saul having to face the truth of what he had done and who he had to become. We learned of the reluctant hospitality and intervention of Ananias who was terrified of Saul but obeyed his God anyways. And of course we learned of Saul’s conversion—the in-breathing of the Holy Spirit, the softening of his heart, the falling away of those shells, the embrace of the way of Jesus of Nazareth—the way of transformation, the way of love. His conversion was a process. His transformation was true. And what a beautiful sight it was!

But it wasn’t complete. Saul had certainly been transformed in the eyes of God through the intervention of Jesus Christ and the in-breathing of the Holy Spirit. But Saul still had work to do, for in order to be effective in his call as an apostle he had to find welcome in the community of the faithful—all those disciples, deacons, and followers who had been carried like seeds upon the Holy Wind and planted the Word with love and passion. And that was not going to be an easy task. For, the falling of eggshells did not mean an erasure of history. And Saul’s history with his now fellow faithful was full of ugliness.

He could not just reappear in Jerusalem as one of them, with no questions asked. This was not a no-harm, no-foul situation. For, there had been a lot of harm perpetrated, and it had been foul. For the community of the faithful in Jerusalem, Saul would have been the veritable boogie man. Children would have been taught to run and hide if they ever saw his recognizable face. Adults themselves would have run and hid, or like Stephen, they would have faced him with the knowledge that his might be the last face they would ever see.

Needless to say, the faithful in Jerusalem were not thrilled at Saul’s arrival. Nor should they have been. They had every reason to be afraid. They had every right to be resentful. They had every right to refuse him. After all, he had torn them from their homes and families. He had imprisoned them. He had overseen the execution of their beloved Stephen. He had been the leader of the reign of terror that had scattered some and left others trembling with fear in their homes. These are not matters that can just be swept under the rug, as though they had never happened. Again, history cannot be erased. Nor should it ever be erased. And so the faithful in Jerusalem did not welcome Saul with open arms. Rather, full of fear, they refused him. Given all that he had



done to them, they did not believe that his heart had softened. They did not believe that he had become a disciple. They did not believe that he had become one of them.

I am sure that many of us grew up hearing the phrase, “Forgive and forget.” This has always been a well intentioned attempt to foster forgiveness by telling people to erase the harm that has been done. For, if the harm is forgotten then we can simply move on. The problem with forgiving and forgetting, though, is that it is not possible. No matter how hard we try to do so, we can’t just forget things that have happened to us. The other problem is that forgiving and forgetting is not what Jesus teaches us. On the contrary, Christian forgiveness requires that we look directly at the perpetrator of harm and acknowledge the harm that has been perpetrated. For, if we forget then there is really nothing to forgive.

Our reading today has this line: “When he had come to Jerusalem, he attempted to join the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, for they did not believe that he was a disciple.” We don’t hear more about the people’s reaction, but it is implied in the word “attempted.” This means that at first Saul tried and failed to join them because they were afraid. With all of this history of fear, they needed an acknowledgement of the truth of what had been done to them, and they needed proof that his heart had changed, that he had been transformed. I like to think that they demanded that Saul take responsibility for the persecution he had wrought against them. I like to think that they required a full accounting from him. And after those days of looking within, of soul searching, Saul should have been ready to do so.

When Saul of Tarsus came to stand before them, the disciples in Jerusalem had to decide if they could and should accept the truth that a monster can change, that a heart can soften, that eggshells can fall. Luckily for Saul, they were followers of a messiah who preached forgiveness as one of the fullest expressions of love and who preached love as the single most important commandment. They would not offer cheap grace, though. They demanded evidence of change, and they expected a lifetime of reconciliation.

And so one among them, Barnabas, took him, brought him to the apostles, and described for them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who had spoken to him, and how in Damascus he had spoken boldly in the name of Jesus. He vouched for the fact that Saul had already begun to put his life on the line in order to share the good news of Jesus Christ—the good news of love. He even had to leave Damascus in the shelter of a basket because of threats against his life, much as Moses had been sent to safety in a basket long ago. So, his transformation was evident in Damascus. But that was all just hearsay for those gathered in Jerusalem. He still had work to do before his transformation could be believed. So he went in and out among them in Jerusalem, speaking boldly in the name of the Lord. And then he proved his resolve directly in front of them by speaking and arguing with the Greeks, who attempted to kill him. Like Stephen, the very deacon whose execution had cemented Saul’s villainy, Saul boldly risked his life in order to share the truth of his God.

This act of sacrifice and love is what finally did it for the other disciples. As our text says, “When the believers learned of it, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him off to Tarsus.” This was not a matter of sending him away to get rid of him. This was a matter of sending him *home* to safety. They saved his life and in doing so proclaimed that his life mattered to them. In a way, the shells fell away from the eyes of the community of disciples, and they were finally able to see the truth of the transformation of Saul. His sins would certainly not be forgotten, but he would be welcomed nonetheless. In truth, by remembering his sins the people would understand all the more fully the power of forgiveness and transformation.



Friends, last week we recognized that every single one of us has some inward-looking, some soul searching to do. We have some truths about ourselves that we need to reckon with. This week may we recognize that with the recognition of those truths comes the mandate for action. Whatever harm we have done, we must take responsibility for it. We must apologize for it. We must make reparations. We must change our behavior. We must maintain that change for the rest of our lives. Like Saul, our transformations must be true.

And just as every single one of us has perpetrated harm at some point, every single one of us has also survived harm perpetrated by others. We have been hurt. We have had our hearts or spirits or bodies broken. But if we experience our perpetrators to be truly honest in their acknowledgement, truly contrite in their apology, truly just in their reparation, truly changed in their behavior, and truly committed in their maintenance of change, then we must also follow the way of Jesus Christ and of Stephen, but this time saying, “Forgive them, for they **know exactly what they have done, and they have changed.**” For, this is the way of the Kingdom of God, and this is how not just individuals but entire communities, indeed the whole world can be transformed. If we all seek transformation within ourselves, if we all accept the possibility of transformation in others, if we all participate in the transformation of each other.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu was one of the architects and enactors of one of the most significant processes of community transformation in the face of community trauma that the world has ever known—the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission for apartheid and the crimes committed within the context of apartheid. He famously spoke these words about God’s truth for the world: “Goodness is stronger than evil. Love is stronger than hate. Light is stronger than darkness. Life is stronger than death.” These words mean that no matter what we have done or will do, goodness, love, life, and light will prevail. And so shall we be transformed. 16 years ago, I was worshipping with fellow Young Adult Volunteers as we prepared to join communities across the world for a year, a time in which many of us experienced our own transformations. During that worship, we learned Desmond Tutu’s words as a song. I will close with that song.

*Goodness is stronger than evil, Love is stronger than hate;*

*Light is stronger than darkness, life is stronger than death;*

*Victory is ours, Victory is ours*

*through God who loves us.*

*Victory is ours, Victory is ours*

*through God who loves us.*

# All Things Bright and Beautiful

267

ROYAL OAK 7.6.7.6 with refrain


English melody, 17th century

Adapt. Martin Shaw, 1915

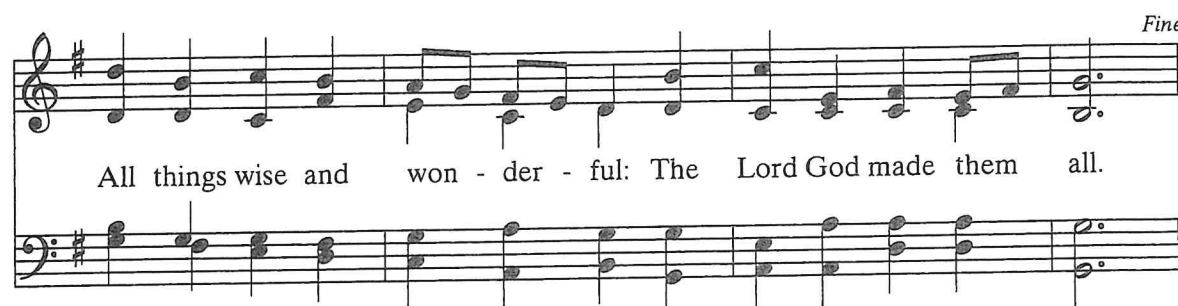
Harm. for *The Hymnbook*, 1953

Cecil Frances Alexander, 1848

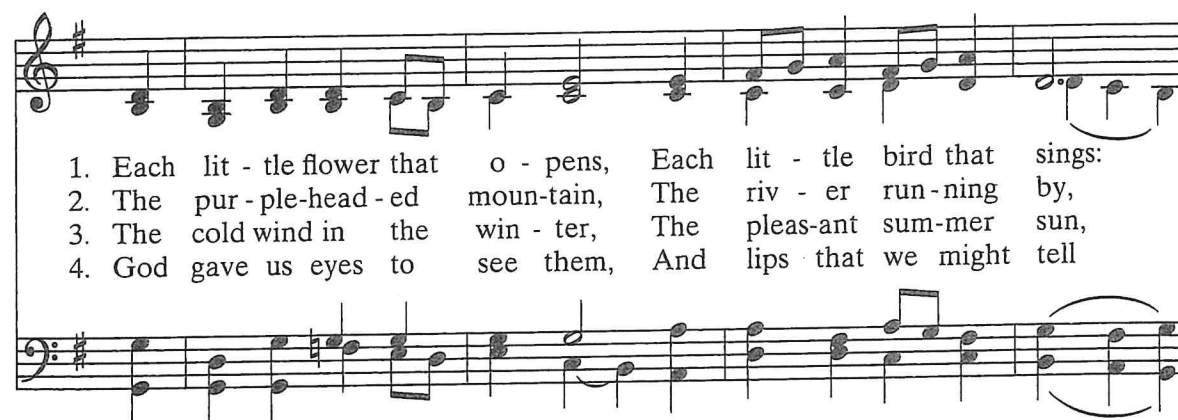
*Refrain*



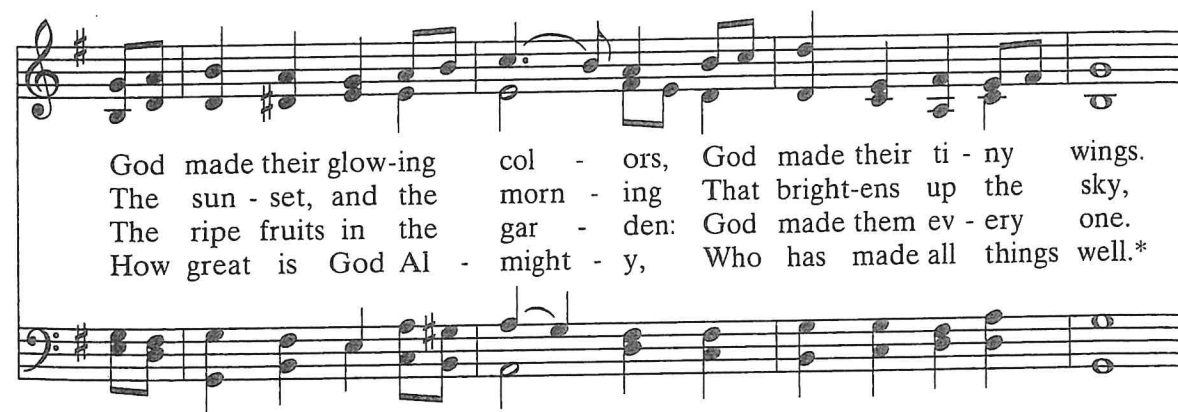
All things bright and beau-ti - ful, All crea-tures great and small,



All things wise and won - der - ful: The Lord God made them all. *Fine*



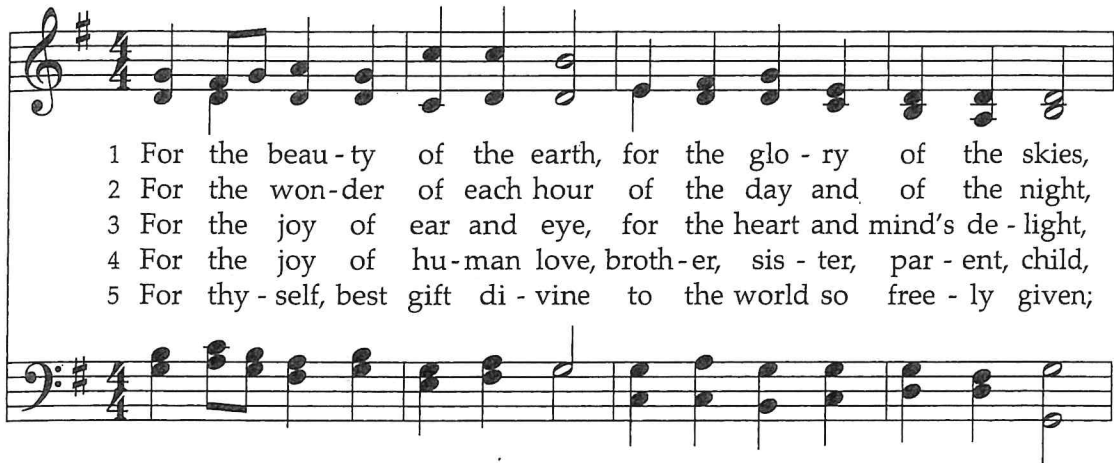
1. Each lit - tle flower that o - pens, Each lit - tle bird that sings:  
2. The pur - ple-head - ed moun-tain, The riv - er run-ning by,  
3. The cold wind in the win - ter, The pleas-ant sum-mer sun,  
4. God gave us eyes to see them, And lips that we might tell



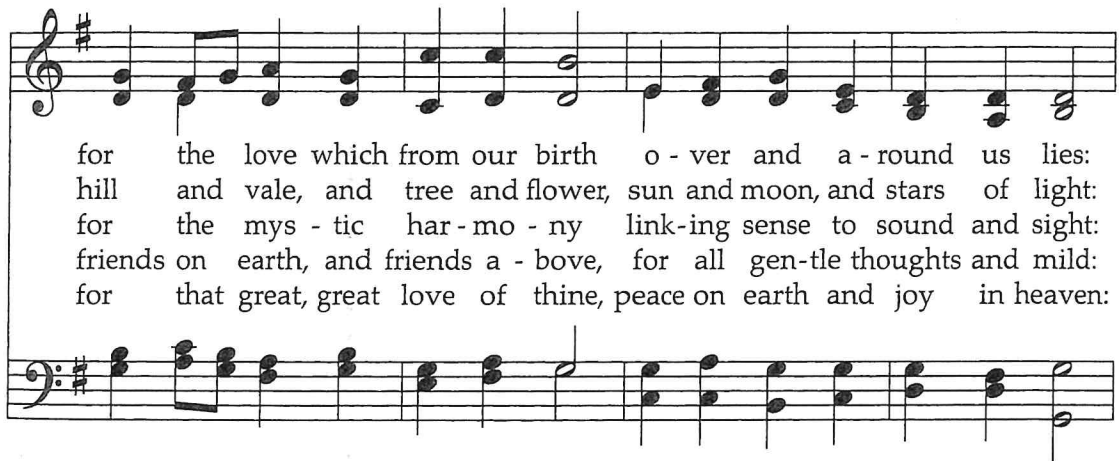
God made their glow-ing col - ors, God made their ti - ny wings.  
The sun - set, and the morn - ing That bright-ens up the sky,  
The ripe fruits in the gar - den: God made them ev - ery one.  
How great is God Al - might - y, Who has made all things well.\*

# For the Beauty of the Earth

14

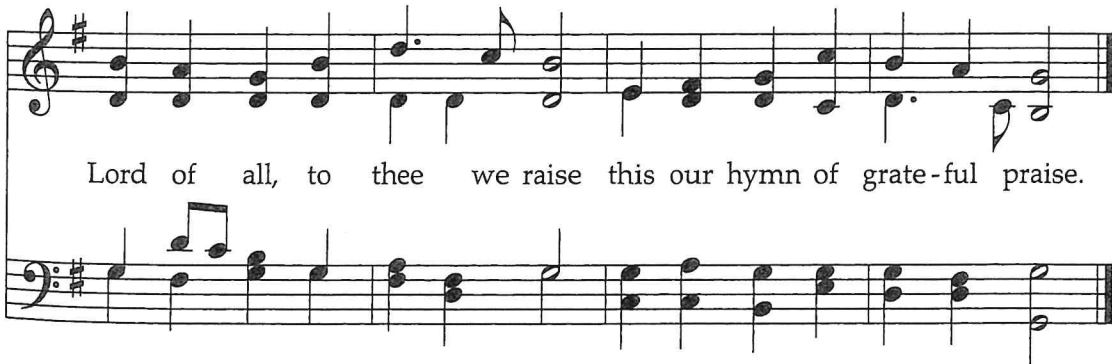


1 For the beau - ty of the earth, for the glo - ry of the skies,  
2 For the won - der of each hour of the day and of the night,  
3 For the joy of ear and eye, for the heart and mind's de - light,  
4 For the joy of hu - man love, broth - er, sis - ter, par - ent, child,  
5 For thy - self, best gift di - vine to the world so free - ly given;



for the love which from our birth o - ver and a - round us lies:  
hill and vale, and tree and flower, sun and moon, and stars of light:  
for the mys - tic har - mo - ny link - ing sense to sound and sight:  
friends on earth, and friends a - bove, for all gen - tle thoughts and mild:  
for that great, great love of thine, peace on earth and joy in heaven:

## Refrain



Lord of all, to thee we raise this our hymn of grate - ful praise.