

July 19, 2026 + 10:30 A.M.

Ninth Sunday of Pentecost

We Join in Worship

Liturgist: Hunter Balczo

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.

PRELUDE *Morning Has Broken* Traditional Gaelic Melody, Martha Mier

WELCOME

ANNOUNCEMENTS

***THE PEACE OF CHRIST**

*** CALL TO WORSHIP** (Adapted from *Psalms* 139)

Leader: O LORD, you have searched us and known us. You know when we sit down and when we rise up; you discern our thoughts from far away.

ALL: You search out our paths and our lying down, and are acquainted with all our ways. Even before a word is on our tongues, O LORD, you know it completely.

Leader: You hem us in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon us. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us; it is so high that we cannot attain it.

ALL: Where can we go from your spirit? Or where can we flee from your presence? If we ascend to heaven, you are there; if we make our beds in the deeps, you are there.

Leader: If we take the wings of the morning and settle at the farthest limits of the sea, even there your hand shall lead us, and your right hand shall hold us fast.

ALL: If we say, "Surely the darkness shall cover us, and the light around us become night,"

Leader: Even the darkness is not dark to you; the night is as bright as the day, for darkness is as light to you.

ALL: We praise you, for we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works! We worship you, O God!

***OPENING HYMN:** "We Are Standing on Holy Ground" Sing 2x (Glory to God, 406)

INVITATION TO CONFESSION:

Leader: In his letter to the Romans, Paul writes, "We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers." Together let us confess our complicity in that suffering.

PRAYER OF CONFESSION (unison)

Creator God, we join our hearts and voices in confessing unto you. We confess that we are contributing to the suffering of your creation. We are harming your air, your water, your land, and your living children. We confess overconsumption of natural resources. We confess pollution of the elements that give us life. We confess inaction to heal your planet when our action is required. Forgive us for causing creation to groan in suffering. Help us to do better. In the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, 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! Paul writes, "I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us."
ALL: **Jesus Christ saves us and gives us glory! Hallelujah! Thanks be to God!**

GLORIA PATRI (577)

**Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the 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: (Adapted from *The Confession of 1967*)

God has created the world of space and time to be the sphere of God's dealings with people. In its beauty and vastness, sublimity and awfulness, order and disorder, the world reflects to the eye of faith the majesty and mystery of its Creator. God has created humanity in a personal relation with God's self that people may respond to the love of the Creator.

We Hear God's Word

EMBODIED WORD FOR DISCIPLES OF ALL AGES

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

Gracious God, as we turn to your Word for us, may the Spirit of God rest upon us. Help us to be steadfast in our hearing, in our speaking, in our believing, and in our living. Amen.

HEBREW BIBLE LESSON: *Genesis 28:10-19a*

EPISTLE LESSON: *Romans 8:18-25*

GOSPEL LESSON: *Matthew 13:36-43*

SERMON: Steps unto Heaven

SECOND HYMN: "Nearer, My God, to Thee" (Insert)

We Respond in Faith

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:

Leader: God is always beckoning us to draw nearer, to seek to be in God's presence. Let us give our tithes and offerings so that we can continue to support each other and our community in drawing nearer to God. If you are here in person, please place your offering in the plate as it is passed. If you are worshiping from home, please mail in your checks or use our online giving option on the website. Now let us practice stewardship as we listen to today's offertory.

OFFERTORY *In the Garden*

C. Austin Miles, arr. Martha Mier

***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)

O God, we seek to draw nearer to you. We dedicate these gifts to you and ask for your Wisdom as we use them to support each other and the community in this process. In the name of Jesus Christ, our risen Lord, we pray. Amen.

We Go Into the World

***CLOSING HYMN:** "As the Deer" (Glory to God, 626)

BENEDICTION

POSTLUDE

His Eye Is on the Sparrow

Charles H. Gabriel, arr. Martha Mier

Permission to reprint/podcast/stream music in this service obtained from ONE LICENSE with license #A-739456. All rights reserved. Permission to reprint/podcast/stream the music in this service obtained from CCLI with print license #11390760 and streaming plus license #21397339. All rights reserved.

* 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.

PEEK AT THE WEEK:

SUNDAY 7/19:	Outdoor Worship – 10:30 AM Fellowship Hosts: Session/Hospitality
MONDAY 7/20:	GA – 6:30 PM Al-Anon – 7:00 PM
TUESDAY 7/21:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM Session – 6:30 PM AA – 7:30 PM
WEDNESDAY 7/22:	Private Flute Lessons 2-8 PM GA – 7:00 PM
THURSDAY 7/23:	Scripture in the Park 6:30-7:30 PM at Redar Park in Schererville
SATURDAY 7/25:	Sackurday – 12:00 PM AA – 6:30 PM
SUNDAY 7/26:	Salad Sale

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- **SALAD SALE NEXT SUNDAY, JULY 26TH** Come prepared to get a delicious meal and support our general fund in the process!
- **CROSS NECKLACES FROM ZAMBIA** A number of people have asked about the cross necklace Pastor Tyler wears every Sunday. Samson Kaleya, the brilliant artist in Zambia, is willing to make more for us! If you would like one, please let Tyler know before the end of July. \$20 per necklace will cover Samson's work and shipping.
- **AUGUST CALENDAR FUNDRAISER** For the month of August, we will be doing a Calendar Fundraiser. A person selects a day to sponsor and donates the amount of the date sponsored. For example, if someone sponsors August 20, they would donate \$20. A copy of the calendar will be available in the narthex and digitally online. There is a limit of two sponsors per day, and it is open to members of the congregation and friends of the church.
- **SCRIPTURE IN THE PARK** Beginning this month, we're offering a special Bible study and discussion opportunity called "Scripture in the Park." We're going to join together with folks from Immanuel Presbyterian Church in Schererville for 6 weeks of informal Bible study at Redar Park in Schererville. The first "Scripture in the Park" night will be July 9th and will continue on Thursday evenings through August 13, from 6:30-7:30 pm. We meet at the picnic shelter; feel free to bring a Bible, something to drink, and a lawn chair (or you can sit at the picnic tables, whichever is more comfortable). If you have any questions, contact Heather Casiano.
- **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??** The sneakers that we all collect will help raise money to support our church's general fund AND will help our environment by keeping sneakers out of landfills. Bring the sneakers (athletic shoes only) to the church and put them in one of the blue bins...either by Door D (inside) or in the narthex.

Prayer List

Anthony
Brady Vanes
George Griner
Guy Hendricks
Bill and Anettia Holmes
David Markley
David Kingen
Diana and Ray Mendoza
Janet Orem
Cindy Waltz and Sister
Yvonne Suroviak
Georgette and Garry Sknerski
Jakob Holden
Denise Matthys
Jan Oprea
Florance Cody
Kathy & Chuck Pumnea
The Windstrups
Rick Parker
Gary Everhart
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
Marian Clayton
Ella P
Rita Stronczek
Keren, Zuriel, and Gedeon
Edna Cruz
Charlie
Jerry & Rena Martinez
Tyler Gall
Luana Sulkowski
Sonny Buono
Tammy
Mike Kelly
Sue Heth
Oscar Ochoa
Jean and Clara
Dave Shelborne
Kali Rosalia
Carlito
Wendy
Jessica S
Loved ones of Susan Hankins

Genesis 28:10-19a

¹⁰ Jacob left Beer-sheba and went toward Haran. ¹¹ He came to a certain place and stayed there for the night, because the sun had set. Taking one of the stones of the place, he put it under his head and lay down in that place. ¹² And he dreamed that there was a stairway set up on the earth, the top of it reaching to heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. ¹³ And the Lord stood beside him and said, "I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring, ¹⁴ and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring. ¹⁵ Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go and will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you." ¹⁶ Then Jacob woke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place—and I did not know it!" ¹⁷ And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven." ¹⁸ So Jacob rose early in the morning, and he took the stone that he had put under his head and set it up for a pillar and poured oil on the top of it. ¹⁹ He called that place Bethel.

Romans 8:18-25

¹⁸ I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory about to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God, ²⁰ for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its enslavement to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² We know that the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers together the pains of labor, ²³ and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what one already sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Matthew 13:36-43

³⁶ Then he left the crowds and went into the house. And his disciples approached him, saying, "Explain to us the parable of the weeds of the field." ³⁷ He answered, "The one who sows the good seed is the Son of Man; ³⁸ the field is the world, and the good seed are the children of the kingdom; the weeds are the children of the evil one, ³⁹ and the enemy who sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are angels. ⁴⁰ Just as the weeds are collected and burned up with fire, so will it be at the end of the age. ⁴¹ The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will collect out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all evildoers, ⁴² and they will throw them into the furnace of fire, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. ⁴³ Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. Let anyone with ears listen!

Steps unto Heaven

Genesis 28:10-19a; Romans 8:18-25; Matthew 13:36-43

Our last item of business at General Assembly was to elect the next co-moderators. Prior to that election, the candidates were given an opportunity to respond to questions from commissioners so that we could better understand how they might lead. Out of left field came the question, “What is your favorite hymn?” At first blush it seemed a simplistic and unhelpful question given the limited time we had to get to know them, but their responses ended up revealing much about them that the other questions did not elicit. Really, that makes sense. For, the songs of faith resonate deep within us, connecting us to our ancestors and ancestresses, connecting us to the Spirit communities that raised us, connecting us to each other, and connecting us to God. My favorite hymn is actually one that is not in our Presbyterian hymnals. And its omission has always baffled and bothered me.

Sarah Flower Adams’ masterpiece *Nearer, My God, to Thee, Nearer to Thee!* Unlike so many other hymns that often sing in my head and heart, it was not part of my childhood. Rather, it became near and dear to me during my time in Kerala, South India, as a Young Adult Volunteer. And no, it was not because of the famous scene of the string ensemble playing it on the Titanic, though that movie was still wildly popular in Kerala even in 2009! While there, I lived and breathed and communed with God in a home for the destitute elderly who had nowhere else to go. I had so many grandmas and grandpas there! And, as was bound to happen, we had so many funerals in the little chapel that was our shared sacred space. I spent countless hours there listening to prayers and scriptures and sermons and songs in Malayalam, a beautiful language that I tried my hardest to learn but never got past the basics. Needless to say, I spent a lot of time in silent reflection and prayer—and a lot of time following the paths of the cute little lizards running across the walls.

Every once in a while, though, there would be a familiar tune underneath the words, and I would be able to sing along in English. And whenever we gathered to honor the life of a beloved grandma or grandpa, after hours of songs I did not know, those faithful elders would sing *Nearer, My God, to Thee*. And *that* was my chance to belt it out! They in Malayalam, I in English. I got to know that song so well. It became sacred to me, my song of death and resurrection as I envisioned these children of God who had been forgotten by so many on earth, being welcomed with exquisite love and extravagant joy in heaven—nearer to God indeed. And somehow it took me a very long time to connect the dots that this sacred song is a retelling of today’s scripture reading—the story of Jacob’s ladder, of steps unto heaven. You knew I’d get there at some point in my preaching!

Before we get to those steps unto heaven, though, we need a whirlwind history lesson. Isaac, whom last we met on Mount Moriah where God intervened to prevent his sacrifice, grew into an adult. He and his spouse Rebekah had twins named Esau and Jacob. By the way, I have dear friends who are twins named Esau and Jacob! But that’s a story for another day. So, Esau was born first, and Jacob came out literally on his brother’s heels, holding onto Esau’s foot. I like to believe that this showed their inherent closeness as siblings, but it also showed their tendency to struggle with each other. And struggle they did! When they were older, Jacob deceived Esau and then their father Isaac in order to obtain Isaac’s blessing that he would receive the birthright benefits of the firstborn. When Jacob later deceived his father Isaac to get his dying blessing, Esau became enraged and made plans to get revenge. And so the struggle between these twins continued. At the urging of his parents, Jacob fled. Thus ends the history lesson!

I am sure that Jacob was full of fear, anxiety, and guilt when he fled. He would have been afraid that his only brother, who was known for physical strength and wilderness survival skills, was going to hunt him down and cause him harm. He would have been anxious about what was to come, going out into the unknown wilderness all on his own to embark on his life’s journey, decisively flying from the only nest and family he had ever known. He would have felt guilty—at least a little bit and maybe a lotta bit—for deceiving and betraying his twin brother, with whom he would have shared the deepest connection possible while growing up. After all, their life together could not have only been one of struggle and competition. I am sure that they kept each other company, played together, and loved each other. After all, if we do a close reading of the story we find that it was the jealousies and favoritisms and power-seeking machinations of the grown ups that tore them apart, just as it had been the jealousies and favoritisms and power-seeking machinations of the grown ups that had torn apart Ishmael and Isaac before them. My goodness, the things that we grown ups do to children with our jealousies and favoritisms and power-seeking machinations!

So, Jacob would have been full of fear, anxiety, and guilt when he fled. I am sure that we can all relate to those feelings today! As Paul so eloquently puts it in today's epistle lesson, "the whole creation has been groaning together as it suffers." There is so much to fear! And in the midst of that fear, anxiety about what is to come makes sense. For many, it has become existential. Hope is hard to find. And then there is the guilt. Collectively, we have caused this. We have allowed the weapons and wars to persist. We have caused the plight of our planet with our over-consumption and our willful ignorance. And in this, we have allowed our jealousies and favoritisms and power-seeking machinations to harm our children now and into the future. Yes, I am sure that we can understand quite a lot about how Jacob was feeling as he fled out into the wilderness!

One of my favorite explorations of scripture with you all was in early 2025 when we delved into the world of dreams. Dreams allow us to enter realities that defy our logic and control. They free us from the constraints of this physical world. It makes a lot of sense to me that God has often spoken to people in these constraint-free, other-worldly mindscapes. For to authentically encounter God, sometimes we have to release our tightly gripped control—a control so deeply rooted in our guilt, anxiety, and fear. And for many of us, the only time that control is loosened is when we sleep. So it was for Jacob.

That night he dreamt the type of dream that we all dream of having—a vivid, surreal dream given by God to ease his mind and calm his spirit, a dream that defied logic and control and therefore provided possibility beyond our stunted imaginations. There was a giant ladder stretching from earth to the highest heaven, and angels were climbing up and down, indicating a direct connection between the Creator and Creation. And the LORD YHWH stood near to Jacob and assured him that even in the midst of his guilt, anxiety, and fear, he was still part of God's covenant. He was still under God's protection. He was still filled with God's love. And, with this ladder connecting heaven and earth, God would always be near. Further, as the angels proved, this was not a one-way street. God would certainly always be near, but Jacob could also make the choice to draw nearer to God. Jacob could release his control—his guilt, his anxiety, and his fear—and he could climb that ladder.

My goodness, how beautiful! I find Jacob's mystical encounter with God on that journey to be one of the most powerful experiences in all of the scriptures. It is one of those images that binds itself to my soul, and I hope that it does the same for you. I imagine it as a very busy pathway between heaven and earth, with God's messengers going up and down frequently in great numbers, making clear God's constant activity among us. It inspires me to open my heart to the possibility of God speaking to the world with regularity. It helps me to make the constant connection between the sacred and the mundane, to envision a ladder that has its feet grounded in the soil of the earth from which we are all made and to which we all shall return, and its hands reaching into the glorious realm of eternity, from which we all come and to which we all shall return. It reminds me that there is no true barrier between earth and heaven, and therefore between us who are alive here and now and our loved ones who are alive in eternity, like those grandmas and grandpas at Mundakapadam Mandiram in Kerala, like the many saints of FPCH who are right there with them. It gives me hope. For, if God shared this dream with Jacob in the midst of his fear, anxiety, and guilt, then God also shares this dream with us. Such is the beauty and power of God's word planted within us when we choose to be good soil! We still get to experience it today!

And so, even though there is much to fear and be anxious about, we need not have existential fear and existential anxiety about God's absence. God is near! God is here! We need not fear! And even though we are certainly guilty of so much harm, we have the transformational possibility of doing something about it! Like Jacob, we can ground ourselves in the truth that God is near, that God is here, on earth as in heaven—I mean he was so grounded that he used a rock for a pillow! And eventually, though it took many years, he made things right with Esau. We, too, can raise up our rocks, remember those steps unto heaven, and acknowledge that everywhere is Bethel, which means "the house of God." This is the house of God! That is the house of God! All of Creation is the house of God! If we truly ground ourselves in that truth, then we will change and make things right—with each other, with those whom we have harmed, with all of Creation. How could we not?! For this is God's house, where all belong and all are beloved! Look! Do you see the steps? The angels are beckoning! Amen.

406 We Are Standing on Holy Ground

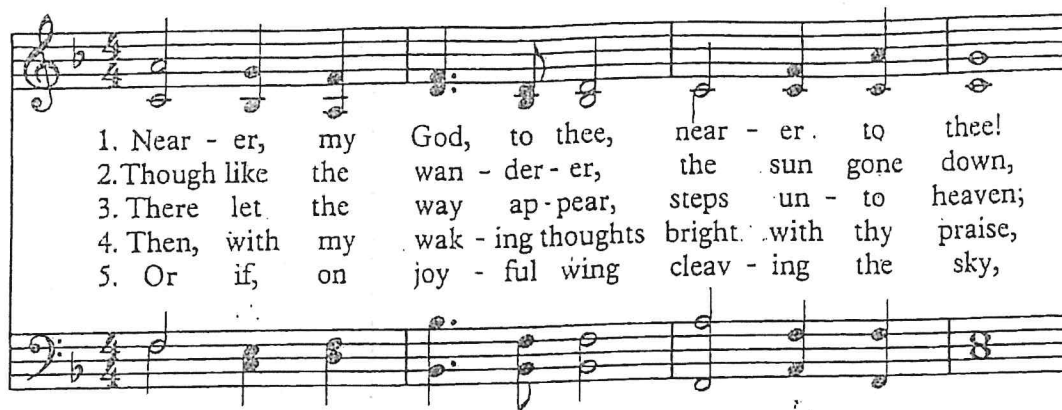
Holy Ground

The musical score is written for a single melodic line in treble clef, 4/4 time, with a key signature of one sharp (F#). The melody is accompanied by a series of chords indicated above the staff. The lyrics are written below the staff, with hyphens indicating syllables that span across measures. The score consists of five staves of music.

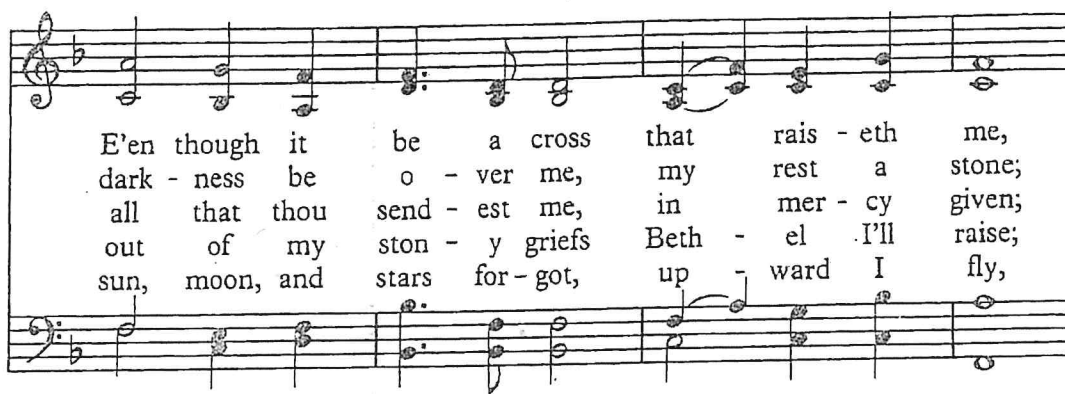
Chords: G, D, A, D, G, D, Em, D, G, F#m, F#m7, B7, E, Gm, D, A7, D, G, D, Em, F#m7, G, D, G, D, Em7, D, G, D.

Lyrics: We are stand - ing on ho - ly ground, and I know that there are an - gels all a - round; let us praise Je - sus now; we are stand - ing in his pres - ence on ho - ly ground.

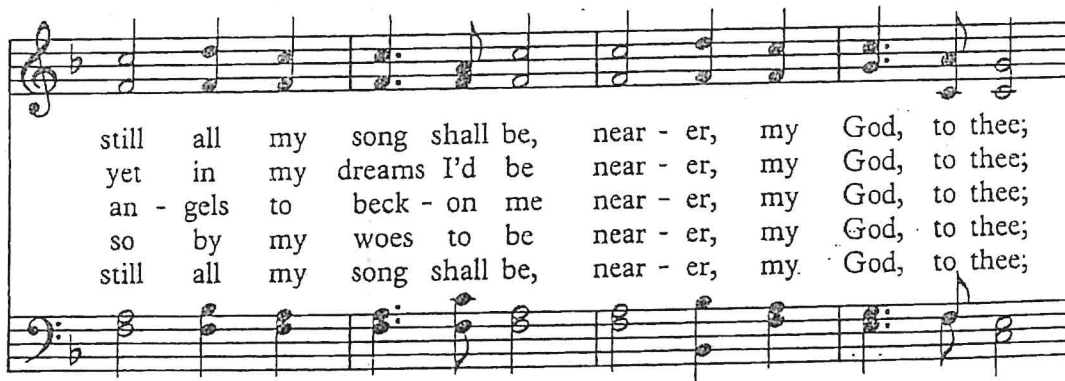
Nearer, My God, to Thee



1. Near - er, my God, to thee, near - er. to thee!
 2. Though like the wan - der - er, the sun gone down,
 3. There let the way ap - pear, steps un - to heaven;
 4. Then, with my wak - ing thoughts bright with thy praise,
 5. Or if, on joy - ful wing cleav - ing the sky,



E'en though it be a cross that rais - eth me,
 dark - ness be o - ver me, my rest a stone;
 all that thou send - est me, in mer - cy given;
 out of my ston - y griefs Beth - el I'll raise;
 sun, moon, and stars for - got, up - ward I fly,



still all my song shall be, near - er, my God, to thee;
 yet in my dreams I'd be near - er, my God, to thee;
 an - gels to beck - on me near - er, my God, to thee;
 so by my woes to be near - er, my God, to thee;
 still all my song shall be, near - er, my God, to thee;



near - er, my God, to thee, near - er to thee!

As the Deer

Verse 1

As the deer panteth for the water
So my soul longeth after Thee
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship Thee
You alone are my Strength, my Shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship Thee.

Verse 2

You're my Friend and You are my Brother
Even though You are a King
I love You more than any other
So much more than anything
You alone are my Strength, my Shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship Thee.

Verse 3

I want You more than gold or silver
Only You can satisfy
You alone are the real joy-giver
And the apple of my eye
You alone are my Strength, my Shield
To You alone may my spirit yield
You alone are my heart's desire
And I long to worship Thee.