

A Few Thoughts for the Hunkered Down

Tuesday, February 23, 2021

“Just as You Are”

*I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens.
For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills.
I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine.*

—Psalm 50:9-11

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. Indeed, rarely will anyone die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person someone might actually dare to die. But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us.

—Romans 5:6-8

Through him, then, let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that confess his name. —Hebrews 13:15

In this season of limited travel and activity we have all felt like shut-ins. Early in the COVID shut-down we felt this more keenly, and despite the relaxing of many restrictions I suppose that we all still feel homebound. A shut-in's life is not an easy one with one of the major stresses being the frustrated desire to do and to serve. Many spend their Wednesdays missing the days that they fed over one hundred folks each week at *Lunch With Luke*. Others feel badly that their offerings have decreased as the pandemic has lessened their income. Some have gifts of song or hospitality to offer, yet are limited by restrictions in worship and in gathering. It hurts to feel unproductive, and it was one shut-in's deep anguish over this frustrated longing to do and serve that gave us one of our favorite hymns.

Charlotte Elliot was born into a clergy family in Brighton, England. The Elliots were a family of intellect and achievement, which made Charlotte feel all the worse when she became permanently disabled by illness while a young adult. Charlotte felt weighed down by a burden of sin, and was heartbroken by her inability to rise up and actively serve. A wise pastor urged her to give her life to Christ, but she felt that she needed to first improve herself and make herself more presentable to God. The clergyman's advice changed Charlotte's life as he pleaded with her to simply “come as you are.” One morning, after a long night of anguish and doubt she realized the wonderful truth. All that we can do is to present ourselves to God with a willing spirit. With this glad new conviction, she penned that celebrated hymn, *Just as I Am*.

We have come to think of this hymn in terms of the Billy Graham crusades as this was the song offered at every altar call. It is an appropriate song for such a call to salvation,

but while we associate it with a message of God's love for even the most notorious sinner, it's original intent was less dramatic than that, and strikes very close to home for all of us. God loves us and wants us to be a part of His family, even though God has no need for anything that we can offer. We come with no payment which can make us worthy. We simply come, rejoicing that Christ has already made the payment for us. It is tough to be tied down in times like these, and it will be great when many of us can get back to more productive lives, but let us always remember that no matter how great or dazzling our productivity, we can only come before God, just as we are.

Be blessed by the words of this timeless hymn. It was written for you. And as a closing prayer I offer a stanza of a familiar carol with a similar theme penned by another great female writer, Christina Rossetti.

*Just as I am—without one plea, But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bidst me come to Thee, —O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am—and waiting not, To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot, —O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am—though toss'd about, With many a conflict, many a doubt,
Fightings and fears within, without, —O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am—poor, wretched, blind; Sight, riches, healing of the mind,
Yea, all I need, in Thee to find, —O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am—Thou wilt receive, Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe, —O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am—Thy love unknown, Has broken every barrier down;
Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone, —O Lamb of God, I come!*

*Just as I am—of that free love, The breadth, length, depth, and height to prove,
Here for a season, then above, —O Lamb of God, I come!*

Blessings,

Pastor Jim

*What can I give him,
Poor as I am?
If I were a shepherd,
I would give a lamb;
If I were a wise man,
I would do my part;
Yet what I can I give him—
Give him my heart.*

—In the Bleak Midwinter, Christina Rossetti