Proper 4 (Series B)

“O Day of Rest and Gladness” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #906)

“Find rest, O my soul, in God alone; my hope comes from him.” [Psalm 62:5]

One of Max Lucado’s latest best sellers is *Anxious for Nothing: Finding Calm in a Chaotic World* (2017). Interesting, isn’t it? As Americans have more and more wealth, more free time, more material possessions, there is a gnawing sense of unease, a feeling that life is unbalanced, too crowded to enjoy. We’re missing something. We’re even anxious about being anxious!

God, our Creator, knows what his creatures need. From the beginning, within his gift of time, is the providence that one day each week is set aside for reflection, re-charging, worship, renewal of body, mind and spirit. And entering this time of regular rest is not optional, it is a *commandment* of God! Neglecting the Sabbath is not only bad for us, it’s also a sin against God’s will. We are not doing God a favor by deciding to take time out of our busy, important personal schedules to be with other believers for an hour during the weekend. We are following his divine, all-knowing design for our lives and his will.

This hymn, sung by most Christians in America in some form, does a beautiful job of presenting the theology of the Sabbath and its many benefits to us. And a deep and multi-layered theology it is! The “day of rest and gladness” commemorates the first day of Creation, when light was first made. (Light is a prominent theme in this hymn.) For all of God’s creatures the Sabbath is a healing and comforting answer to the fears and sadness of all people of every station in life, folks of every time and place. This is a moment for all to join the angels in their timeless, sacred song around the throne of God—“holy, holy, holy.” [Isaiah 6:3]

It is also the eighth day, the day Christ arose and redeemed all of creation damaged by sin and evil powers. By the power of the Holy Spirit, soothing grace comes to us in God’s Word and in his sacrament of Bread and Wine, and in our sharing and consoling with and for one another.

And the crown of Sabbath blessings—when we regularly enter into the Lord’s day of rest, we experience a taste of what that eternal rest with him will one day be.

So, sing this hymn of the Sabbath gratefully, buoyantly, and expectantly!

Barry L. Bobb {photo of Barry}

Carmel IN

O day of rest and gladness, O day of joy and light.

O balm of care and sadness, most beautiful, most bright;

this day of high and lowly, through ages joined to bless,

sing, “Holy, holy, holy,” the triune God confess.

This day at earth’s creation the light first had its birth;

this day for our salvation Christ rose from depths of earth;

this day our Lord victorious the Spirit sent from heav’n,

and thus this day most glorious a threefold light was giv’n.

This day, God’s people meeting, his Holy Scripture hear;

his living presence greeting, through bread and wine made near.

We journey on, believing, renewed with heav’nly might,

From grace more grace receiving, on this blest day of light.

That light our hope sustaining, we walk the pilgrim way,

at length our rest attaining, our endless Sabbath day.

We sing to thee our praises, O Father, Spirit, Son;

The Church her voice upraises to thee, blest Three in One.

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Text: Christopher Wordsworth 1807-85 (stanzas 1 and 2); Charles P. Price, 1920-99 (stanza 3); *The Hymnal 1982*, stanza 4.

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Tune: ELLACOMBE from the *Gesangbuch der Herzogl. Hofkapelle*, Württemberg 1784.

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and duplicated for local use.]

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More background on the hymn—

The author for the first two stanzas, Christopher Wordsworth (1807—85), was the nephew of the poet William Wordsworth. Highly educated, he wrote most of his hymns during his later years when he was priest in a small country parish in England. This particular hymn comes from his collection, *Holy Year* (1862) in which he composed hymns for the entire church year. [ELW #521 includes two other stanzas by Wordsworth.]

Stanza three in LSB comes from the hand of Charles P. Price (1920—99). Price was a priest in the Episcopal church. Born in Pittsburgh, he was educated at Harvard University, Virginia Theological Seminary, and Union Theological Seminary. He spent his career teaching at Harvard and VTS. Price was on the hymn text committee for *The Hymnal 1982* when he penned this stanza.

Stanza four in LSB comes anonymously from the hymn text committee of *The Hymnal 1982.*

(This hymn does not appear in *Christian Worship*)

According to Paul Westermeyer, the tune ELLACOMBE comes to us anonymously from the 18th and 19th century German Roman Catholics.