

Proper 19/17<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost (Series C)

“Jesus Sinners Does Receive” (*Christian Worship*, #304)

## Remarkable

(“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” 1 Timothy 1:15)

Remarkable, isn't it? 298 years ago, a Lutheran pastor was preparing his sermon for this same Sunday in the church year, on this very same Gospel reading (Luke 15:1-10/the parables of the lost sheep and lost coin). He was searching for a way to enable the Gospel message to be sown into the people's hearts as well as into their minds. He wanted to make an emotional connection (in the best sense of that word) as well as an intellectual one. He decided to write a hymn that the people would sing immediately following the spoken message—a song which we continue to use to this day. Incredible!

Remarkable, isn't it? The depth of God's amazing love is a great, wonderful mystery. It is a truth we would each still do well to ponder for a few moments each day, whether as a penitent but troubled sinner or as one who grieves for another's wandering from the faith. We may mourn as parents concerned for an adult child or a sibling who has strayed or as a child worried about a faithless classmate or friend. More broadly we can be sorrowful over the lost condition of the entire world. And yet, God's love and the power of his Spirit is greater than all of that. There is no gap nor lost connection that he cannot bridge. We can daily renew our commitment to sharing the Good News with that world, starting in our own little corner of it with our family and friends. This is a comfort beyond our human understanding!

Remarkable, isn't it? Did you notice how Pastor Neumeister's text moves from the collective to the personal (serving as a model for our own prayer life)? In the first four stanzas the “sinner” is referred to in the third person. In the last three stanzas it moves to the first person. There are 10 first person pronouns in the last three stanzas but not one in the first four. As wonderful as the news is that God's love extends to all, even more unbelievable is that this love is also...for me. Trust these words—Christ Jesus came into the world to save me. This is astounding news!

Think about that for a while...live in confident hope...and give thanks.

As your pondering, you might try praying the words of this hymn of the Church once each day this week.



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Jesus sinners does receive; oh, may all this saying ponder  
who in sin's delusions live and from God and heaven wander.  
Here is hope for all who grieve—Jesus sinners does receive.

We deserve but grief and shame, yet his words, rich grace revealing,  
pardon, peace, and life proclaim; here their ills have perfect healing  
who with humble hearts believe—Jesus sinners does receive.

Sheep that from the fold did stray are not by the Lord forsaken;  
weary souls who lost their way are by Christ, the shepherd, taken  
in his arms that they may live—Jesus sinners does receive.

Come, O sinners, one and all, come, accept his invitation.  
Come, obey his gracious call; come and take his free salvation!  
Firmly in these words believe—Jesus sinners does receive.

I, a sinner, come to you with a penitent confession.  
Savior, show me mercy, too; grant for all my sins remission.  
Let these words my soul relieve—Jesus sinners does receive.

Oh, how blest it is to know, were as scarlet my transgressions,  
it shall be as white as snow by your blood and bitter passion,  
for these words I do believe—Jesus sinners does receive.

Jesus sinners does receive. Even I have been forgiven.  
And when I this earth must leave, I shall find an open heaven.  
Dying, still to him I cleave—Jesus sinners does receive.

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Text: German hymn by Rev. Erdmann Neumeister, 1671-1756. The English translation is a composite.  
Tune: MEINEM JESUM LASS ICH NICHT, found in the *Neu-verfertigtes Darmstädtisches Gesang-Buch*, Darmstadt, 1699.  
The tune has been altered slightly from the original.

Both text and tune are in the public domain.

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

Other notes—

Rev. Neumeister also had a close relationship with J. S. Bach. Bach applied for a position at his church in Hamburg. Neumeister was very interested in bringing the recitative/aria song forms from secular opera into the music of the church. He wrote the librettos for at least five of Bach's cantatas, most notably "Savior of the Nations, Come"/BWV 61.

He also wrote two other hymns which we continue to sing: "God's Own Child I Gladly Say It" and "I Know My Faith Is Founded."