

Proper 7 (Series B)

“Evening and Morning” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #726)

A short walk around the lake leads us to the trailhead that goes up the ridge. Here the trees are sparsely placed and the ground dry and rocky. Just over the ridge is one of those mountain lakes that can't be seen except by the trail, and here the forest becomes thick with lush undergrowth. Above the lake is Windy Ridge, a pinnacle that affords dramatic vistas of lakes and valleys, fast flowing mountain streams, and snowcapped mountains far off in the distance.

We hiked the trail nearly every day those first two weeks of June. June was still spring at 9000 feet in the Colorado Rocky Mountains. The snow fields of the first few days were gone by the second week, and each day, it seemed, a new crop of spring flowers burst open on the meadow just below Windy Ridge. First, there were the bright yellow Glacier Lilies. They were followed by the equally bright daisy-looking Arrowleaf Balsam Root, then a burst of purple flowers, white flowers, until the meadow was bedecked in a bright floral carpet.

It's not just the beauty of it, though the beauty is hard to miss. It's the marvelous complexity of it all, the interdependence, the perfect symmetry: the sky, the land, the waters, the plants, the birds, the animals, the insects — and yes, the people.

In the opening stanza of Paul Gerhardt's masterful hymn, *Evening and Morning*, he alludes to that bedazzling interconnectedness of life in God's good world. The times are ordered, we know, by the rotation of the earth, and we human creatures mark the passing days by the sunset and dawning. Beyond the physical world, God has endowed us with the delightful gifts of such things as gladness and joy, hope and satisfaction, even sometimes in the midst of suffering and sadness.

Of course, the world God has created is not the primary location, and certainly not always a reliable location, to marvel at the goodness of God. The morning and the evening, the sunset and dawning are good times to remember in prayer and devotion our own baptism when we were washed clean of the stain of sin; each day we are invited to remember and claim the forgiveness that pours forth from the springs of Christ's death and resurrection.

For this good and perfect gift we daily give thanks. Our hearts overflow with praise. Our lives are marked by the sign of the Crucified One and under the order and the direction of the Merciful One. Our faith receives those gifts and the fruit of that faith is that our lives will issue in praise, and that our good works will be sweet incense before the throne of grace. This day is the gift that falls between this morning and this evening, and our song is a sign that this day, too, will be lived for Christ and for the sake of God's kingdom.

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Evening and morning, sunset and dawning,
wealth, peace, and gladness, comfort and sadness:
These are thy works; all the glory be thine!
Times without number, awake or in slumber,
thine eye observes us, from danger preserves us,
causing thy mercy upon us to shine.

Father, O hear me, pardon and spare me;
calm all my terrors, blot out my errors
that by thine eyes they may no more be scanned.
Order my goings, direct all my doings;
as it may please thee, retain or release me;
all I commit to thy fatherly hand.

Ills that still grieve me soon are to leave me;
though billows tower, and winds gain power,
after the storm the fair sun shows its face.
Joys e'er increasing and peace never ceasing:
these shall I treasure and share in full measure
when in his mansions God grants me a place.

To God in heaven all praise be given!
Come, let us offer and gladly proffer
to the Creator the gifts he doth prize.
He will receiveth a heart that believeth;
hymns that adore him are precious before him
and to his throne like sweet incense arise.

Text: Paul Gerhardt, 1607-76;

Stanzas one and two—English translation by Richard Massie (public domain)

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Tune: DIE GÜLDNE SONNE (public domain)

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