

Proper 15 (August 17, 2014)

“In Christ There Is No East or West” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #653)

It is amazing that even with our technological interconnectedness and the world wide web, humans still find so many different ways to separate ourselves into groups. We like to make distinctions based on education, location, economic class, culture, race, tribe, family, nationality, gender, age...the list goes on and on. This is also true within the Church. Even with the occasional merger, the ageless splintering goes on—Roman Catholic and Protestant, denominational and non-denominational, almost countless groupings within denominations and, more and more common, stand-alone congregations.

Within this ubiquitous partitioning a Scriptural truth gets lost—we are all heirs of the same heavenly Father; we all look the same to God.

Jesus spoke of “other sheep not of this pen” and of there being “one flock and one shepherd.” (John 10:16) St. Paul had a similar radical reality check for his listeners—there is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian or Scythian. (Galatians 3:26-29; Colossians 3:11-17)

What links us is our common humanity, our common sinful nature, our frailness, our utter helplessness, our guilt and shame.

What links us is our common Redeemer for “Christ is all and is in all”, into whose name we are all baptized.

For hundreds of years before the age of technology, the Church has been a “global village.” All Christian groups around the world share a common sacred Scriptures. All pray the Lord’s Prayer. Most confess the Apostles’ and Nicene creeds. But we also share our common songs as we celebrate our oneness in the singing of “psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in our hearts to God.”

There is a deep and abiding comfort in knowing that song never ends. Even as we retire for the day, somewhere other Christians are beginning another day, praying the same prayers, reading the same Bible, serving the same Lord, and singing the words and melodies we know and share. And we are assured that song will continue “throughout the whole wide earth” without interruption until Christ returns. Such is the amazing grace of God!

Barry L. Bobb
Carmel IN



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In Christ there is no east or west, in Him no south or north,
But one great fellowship of love throughout the whole wide earth.

With God there is no tribe or race; in Him we all are one.
He loves us as His children through our faith in His dear Son.

So, brothers, sisters, praise His name who died to set us free
From sin, division, hate, and shame, from spite and enmity!

Join hands, disciples of the faith, whate'er your race may be;
Who serves my Father as His child is surely kin to me.

In Christ now meet both east and west; in Him meet south and north.
All Christian souls are one in Him throughout the whole wide earth.

Text: Stanzas 1, 4, 5 are in the public domain; stanza 2 is copyright © 1993 Mark A. Jeske; stanza 3 is copyright ©1982 Jubilate Hymns Ltd., administered by Hope Publishing Company.

Tune: MCKEE is a variant of a folk tune African Americans heard sung by Irish immigrants. It was made famous by the Jubilee Singers at Fisk University in Nashville TN (the first American university to offer a liberal arts education to men and women irrespective of their color) as "I Know the Angel's Done Changed My Name." The melody was further altered when wedded to this hymn text by Harry T. Burleigh (1894-1946), a famous African American composer and arranger in New York City. Burleigh named the tune after Elmer M. McKee, the rector at St. George's Episcopal Church where Burleigh was the baritone soloist for 52 years. The history of the tune reflects the theme of the hymn text.

[This devotion was prepared for the website of the Center for Church Music, Concordia University Chicago. It may be downloaded or printed for local use.]