

Proper 20 (September 21, 2014)

“Salvation unto Us Has Come” (Lutheran Service Book #555)

Devastating ... exhilarating...routine. Such are the lives of first responders, members of rapid response team or veterans in the armed forces. They value the routine for getting through the day, while living for the exhilarating—the rush that comes with the rescue and victory. They can do without the accolades and interviews. It’s what they have inside that counts.

Then there is the devastating: loss of life, limb, love. Enough of that and we find another way to make a living, or lash out, or end it all for ourselves (as we see again and again in the news). In our recent history this devastation has led to the development of Critical Incident Stress Management teams. Peers and mental health personnel have as their purpose to be present, listen, and reassure that what is going on in body, mind, and spirit is a normal response to an abnormal situation (sure, loss is normal—but not on my shift). Then hopefully, we find ourselves restored—internally and relationally.

Such a healer I see in Pastor Speratus who penned the lines of the hymn printed below. In the midst of all that was devastating around him—people lost to their families, to their neighbors, to God he listens and retells how the living, dying, and rising of Jesus shows us the great cost by which we are loved by God.

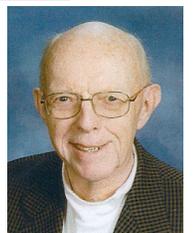
Such is the devastation of Sin—that we are at odds with ourselves, others and God. I was recently reminded that “how I see God influences how I see myself and how I see others.” Am I demanding, deserving, detached, giving, receiving?

Such is the paradox of Love. The blessing of love is not that I deserve it but that I receive it. The blessing of my spouse’s love is not that I deserve it but that I receive it. Even so, the blessing of God’s love is that we receive it, trust it, and respond appropriately out of it. (Stanza 9 below)

So how does it go with you? Where are you at loose ends with yourself, with others, with God? What will it take for you to accept that you are loved beyond all deserving because that is the holy remedy to our broken condition? Sing through the stanzas and be moved by how such faith empowers us to live life fully!

What’s more, we are told the tune is rooted in an Easter hymn of an earlier era, and when we sing the original text the first leap in the tune is on *uns* (us). Isn’t that the heart of our Lutheran expression of the Christian faith? For US! All this for me, my wholeness, my holiness—gifted by God. Let this be what we celebrate as we sing!

Paul J. H. Haberstock, LCMS (English District) pastor and church musician; retired Board Certified Chaplain with the Association of Professional Chaplains; retired member of the Northern Illinois Critical Incident Stress Management team with the International Critical



Incident Stress Foundation; in collaboration with Dr. Lia Cristina Diorio Gerken, LCMS (English District) church musician with Martin Luther Chapel in Pennsauken, New Jersey.



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Salvation unto us has come by God's free grace and favor;
Good works cannot avert our doom, they help and save us never.
Faith looks to Jesus Christ alone, who did for all the world atone;
He is our one Redeemer.

What God did in his Law demand and none to him could render
Caused wrath and woe on ev'ry hand for man, the vile offender.
Our flesh has not those pure desires the spirit of the Law requires,
And lost is our condition.

It was a false, misleading dream that God his law had given
That sinners could themselves redeem and by their works gain heaven.
The Law is but a mirror bright to bring the inbred sin to light
That lurks within our nature.

From sin our flesh could not abstain, sin held its sway unceasing;
The task was useless and in vain, our guilt was e'er increasing.
None can remove sin's poisoned dart of purify our guileful heart—
So deep is our corruption.

Yet as the Law must be fulfilled or we must die despairing,
Christ came and has God's anger stilled, our human nature sharing.
He has for us the Law obeyed and thus the Father's vengeance stayed
Which over us impended.

Since Christ has full atonement made and brought to us salvation,
Each Christian therefore may be glad and build on this foundation.
Your grace alone, dear Lord, I plead, your death is now my life indeed,
For you have paid my ransom.

Let me not doubt, but truly see your Word cannot be broken;
Your call rings out, "Come unto me!" No falsehood have you spoken.
Baptized into your precious name, my faith cannot be put to shame,
And I shall never perish.

The Law reveals the guilt of sin and makes us conscience-stricken;
But then the Gospel enters in the sinful soul to quicken.
Come to the cross, trust Christ, and live; the Law no peace can ever give,

No comfort and no blessing.

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone and rests in him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known, with love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify; works serve our neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living.

All blessing, honor, thanks and praise to Father, Son, and Spirit,
The God who saved us by his grace; all glory to his merit.
O triune God in heav'n above, you have revealed your saving love;
Your blessed name we hallow.

Text: Paul Speratus, 1484-1551. English translation from *The Lutheran Hymnal* (1941), altered.
Tune: ES IST DAS HEIL from *Etlich Cristlich lider*, Wittenberg 1524.

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