

Now, I know that everyone here read the weekly email very closely on Thursday. So just for the first timers, this week we are starting a new sermon series called How Sweet The Sound! This was originally pulled from the LifeChurch library of resources and expanded by Scott and me. We will be looking at different songs, hymns, or spirituals each week and digging into what they mean, what they say to us about who God is and what we believe about God. So! Welcome to week 1.

Now I must admit to you, I've never been pulled in exclusively by the music in a worship service. There are some songs that I love and that I enjoy when I get to experience them in worship. But- if I had to choose only one aspect of a worship service, it wouldn't be the music. I actually prefer to listen to sermons or prayers. I have friends that are totally music people though. If there isn't good, beautiful music, they don't consider it to have been a great worship service. To each their own. But I tell you that to say that I haven't really looked deeply into hymns before. I know the ones I heard often growing up, I know the ones I don't love for one reason or another, so this was a new experience for me. We're digging into the scriptures behind these songs, what they are actually saying to us and for us. This week's hymn- you may have guessed from hearing it a few minutes ago... we're talking about Be Thou My Vision! This does happen to be one of my favorite hymns. It reminds me of being a kid in a huge, dark wood sanctuary with an organ playing.

As I was thinking about this sermon though, I realized that I didn't really know what the hymn was saying. There is a lot of fancy language here. We don't often see thees and thous in our everyday lives. So, I looked it up. [SLIDE: "Modern" Language]

Now, I am not going to read this whole thing to you. Mostly because it always sounds really awkward to just read lyrics to a song. And I am definitely not going to sing it at you... God gave me the gift of making a beautiful sound... but I think maybe only God thinks it's a beautiful sound, that's okay! Now, we sing the line- "Be Thou my vision O Lord of my heart, Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art." WHAT?! That is some language that I don't fully understand. Did you know that people have written lyrics in a more modern way of speaking? I definitely didn't but I also loved these newer lyrics. Shout out to RH Reinhard! What they put as that line was this: "Lord, be my Vision, be my guiding star; Nothing is more to me, Lord, than you are."

How beautiful is that? We are asking God to be our guiding star, and saying explicitly how much God means to us. That's what this whole hymn is about. God's importance to us and how God remains our guide, our source of wisdom and our goal for our lives. When writing this sermon I felt like it would be a bit overwhelming to go through the entire song line by line. So, I chose to focus on the second verse that we sing.

[SLIDE: Song Verse] In this whole song, one of my favorite hymns, one line that I have always held an issue with is this: “Thou my great Father, and I Thy true son;” obviously, without the Thy-s and Thou-s, it says: “You are my great Father, I am your true son;”. Now, you may not know this about me, but I don’t LOVE gendered language. That may actually not be a huge surprise to you. I don’t use gendered language for God, I don’t like when people use “mankind” instead of humankind, and I think “HouseSpouse ” is the PERFECT phrase to describe a stay-at-home partner. IT RHYMES! That’s not the point though, because these are all just phrases right? So, we have the song lyric “You are my great Father, I am your true son” Well... I dug into this more. And here is where we come to our scripture for today- this is [SLIDE: Romans 8: 15-17] (CEB)

You didn’t receive a spirit of slavery to lead you back again into fear, but you received a Spirit that shows you are adopted as God’s children. With this Spirit, we cry, “Abba, Father.” The same Spirit agrees with our spirit, that we are God’s children. But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God’s heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with Christ so that we can also be glorified with Christ.

For some context, we are reading a passage in the book of Romans where the apostle Paul is writing to the Church in Rome about trying to be people who are not self-centered. He spends this whole chapter reiterating that people who live by a spirit of selfishness will die. But! If the people of God live by the Holy Spirit they will live. This all goes back to Jesus living and dying for us. We are still able to read this scripture as if Paul was writing to us specifically because we believe that scripture still holds truth to all times and space, as long as it is read in context. So, we get to our scripture. Paul explains that we received a Spirit that shows we are adopted as God’s children! Notice that this is a capital Spirit where the “spirit of slavery” is a lowercase spirit. We have received the Holy Spirit, making us the adopted children of the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer! Adopted Children of God! How cool is that? Please everyone take a moment to update any needed family information.

We sing this line, [SLIDE: Song Verse] “You are my great Father, I am your true son” because we are adopted by God through the Spirit of God. Now, as I mentioned, I don’t love the gendered language of Father, and son, but I can totally get on board with the fact that the adoption language of the Biblical Era being important to understanding why this relationship is fundamentally important to our understanding of God. In biblical times, the word adoption had a two-fold meaning: [SLIDE: Adoption]

1. The private act of receiving a stranger into the family as a son
2. A public, legal ceremony (act) of recognizing the son as the heir

So, it wasn't really a gendered thing. It was the focus of bringing someone into a family and recognizing that person as an heir in that family. Our scripture says: "But if we are children, we are also heirs. We are God's heirs and fellow heirs with Christ, if we really suffer with Christ so that we can also be glorified with Christ." We are so ready to accept our adoption as God's true children, and accept that we are now heirs alongside Christ, but there seems to be a bit of a caveat in the scripture, "if we really suffer with Christ so that we can also be glorified with Christ". This all looks back to what we celebrated on Sunday. Christ's death and resurrection to save humanity. We died to our sin when Christ was crucified. That is why we are able to be adopted and be heirs of God. These seem like big shoes to fill, but we are welcomed into them by this Spirit that we all have. God chose and adopted each of us when Christ died for our sins. We can't pay that back. But, we can be God's faithful children. We are heirs along with Christ. We inherit the kin-dom of God because we were chosen by God. We are the true children of God.

Now that I feel very confident I've beaten that point into the ground, we move to the next lines of our verse. **[SLIDE: SONG VERSE]** These are the lines on either side of the one we just looked at: "I ever with Thee, and Thou with me, Lord... Thou in me dwelling, and I with Thee one." These two lines are much easier to follow with our modern language. We are basically saying, we will always be with God, and God will always be with us because God lives within us. Here's a psalm that talks about the same thing... **[SLIDE: PSALM 73: 21-28 (CEB)]**:

When my heart was bitter, when I was all cut up inside, I was stupid and ignorant. I acted like nothing but an animal toward you. But I was still always with you! You held my strong hand! You have guided me with your advice; later you will receive me with glory. Do I have anyone else in heaven? There's nothing on earth I desire except you. My body and my heart fail, but God is my heart's rock and my share forever. Look! Those far from you die; you annihilate all those who are unfaithful to you. But me? It's good for me to be near God. I have taken my refuge in you, my Lord God, so I can talk all about your works!

I think it is really important that we look into the Psalms when we are struggling with how to feel about God and ourselves. The writers of the Psalms really have some Big Feelings that seem to be, on some level, a look into the human condition. This passage is all about how humanity has treated God kinda terribly. We yell, we get upset, as the psalmist says, we act like nothing but an animal toward God. We tend to ignore God when the good things happen and blame God when the bad things happen. Now, please don't hear this as "never get mad at God!" We are definitely allowed to have Big Feelings, yell, get angry, feel overwhelmed, be so excited we can't stand it, cry out of joy,

happy dance, all those things! As long as we are holding that true relationship with God. The psalmist says, “My body and my heart fail, but God is my heart’s rock and my share forever.” which sounds a whole lot like the Be Thou My Vision line “I need no riches, nor vain, empty praise; You’re my inheritance, now and always.” It’s almost like this was planned! RIGHT?!

**[SLIDE: SONG VERSE]** So, we know we have inheritance from God because we are God’s children. And we know that God dwells with us constantly regardless of how many times we try to push them away with our Big Feelings. But how can we be sure? In the song, Be Thou My Vision, we sing the line: “Be Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word I ever with Thee, and Thou with me, Lord”... and here’s the thing... often we hear of the Trinity of God being Creator, Son, and Spirit right? Well, we can also use the words “Creator, Word, and Wisdom,” because in the Psalms we read about Wisdom being a co-creator with God, we read about Wisdom leading and guiding us through life- exactly like the Spirit does. Even in Ephesians, we read about asking God for a “Spirit of Wisdom.” Often these are both used with feminine pronouns. Wisdom leads and guides us, Spirit leads and guides us... there is evidence for these being different words for the same person of the Trinity. And in the gospel of John, the opening line is: “In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.” We know that Christ was the embodiment of the Word of God. God’s Word was and is Jesus Christ. If that is all kind of a startling concept, please don’t hesitate to email me- we can grab coffee... I am not trying to drastically shake your faith foundation the first week that Scott is gone.

So back to our verse! When we sing “Thou my wisdom, and Thou my true word. I ever with Thee, and Thou with me, Lord” we are acknowledging the entire Trinity within us. And we are accepting that God is constantly with us. We are God’s creation, we are given God’s Spirit of Wisdom, we follow God’s Word of Jesus Christ... so, if we accept those things, what do we have on Earth? If God is our constant Ruler, our Endpoint, our Inheritance, no matter what... what do we have here on Earth?

We have each other. There is a saying, “You will never look into the eyes of someone that God doesn’t love.” How beautiful is that? God has given us to each other. God has given us the chance to actually have communities and people to do life with. Each of us has that Spirit that brings us together as children of God. Chosen, died for, children and heirs of God. How will we know each other if we don’t show and share that love and Spirit with each other?

**[SLIDE: Hang your Hat]** Here are the points to hang your hat on:

- i. You. You belong to God.

God has chosen you. Regardless of your Big Feelings, regardless of how many things are going on in our lives, regardless of all else, God has chosen each of us. God died for each of us. God has adopted us as Their own children. We are heirs alongside of Christ.

ii. God is dwelling with us

Even in our darkest days, even when we feel like everything is crazy and madness, God is dwelling within us. God is dwelling in each and every person we see. God has chosen us and continues to choose us as their dwelling place. We can't be separated from God.

iii. God is our Ruler and our endpoint, no matter what.

We can always look to God as our answer to what we are dealing with. God can handle it, which is really reassuring when things feel too big, or too small to deal with. God is our end point. Our Ruler. God won't let us fall. No matter what.

Please pray with me:

Holy, and wonderful God

You've chosen us, adopted us as your children and your heirs. You've loved us constantly and you continue to live in and among us. Help us show that love and Spirit to the world, to care for others as you care for them. And to remember that love when things feel too big and too small all at the same time. Continue to be our vision, and our ruler no matter what happens in our lives or our world. In your name, Amen.