

Be Still, My Soul

✧ in the parched wastelands (vv.5-6)

✧ in the fruitful valleys (vv.7-8)

Dear fellow souls redeemed, a planting of God's grace:

Ah, springtime on the prairie! Hard to believe, but under this blanket of white God's land is waiting to burst into bloom. In my teen years spring was calving season for ranchers who would spend each weekend at another neighbor's ranch for roundups and branding. Have you ever seen the prairie as the sun is coming up, from the back of horse to the distant horizon? Not a sound of civilization, just bird songs in the gently waving grass. That cow up ahead joins all the rest with their calves. Real cowboys are roping in the corral for young bucks and greenhorns, two per calf. One reaches under the front leg to flip the calf left shoulder up. The other sits on at the rear to pull the upper leg back while his feet hold the lower leg. Quickly comes the red hot branding iron, the shots, the cutting that makes another steer from a bull calf. When your clothes and eyes are full of dust and all that comes out of the east end of west bound calf, it's time for dinner. A large dining room like this you've never seen before, packed with hungry cowboys. As fast as wives and sisters and sweethearts can carry in platters of meat and huge pans of potatoes and gravy, it's all disappearing between discussions. Would you see yourself as one of the ranch hands or feel more like one of the calves enduring the worst day of his life? **Be Still, My Soul...**

✧ in the parched wastelands (vv.5-6)

Flying over the prairie from the desert Southwest back to our 10,000 lakes, it's striking how dry everything looks in the heat of summer. The rain clouds rising off the Pacific Ocean have dumped their waters on the coastal range, the Cascade Mountains, finally on the Rockies, so that not much remains for the prairie eastward. But you can see from above where the water runs. That's not just green grass snaking here and there across the land. Those are trees following rivers between **parched wastelands**.

Back away from the water is a picture of life without God. Through His "weeping prophet" Jeremiah the LORD has already complained about this: ***"My people have committed two sins: They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water."*** (2:13 NIV84) Most of us would not know the first thing about cisterns because we have so much water here. But in arid regions like Israel today, they still catch rainwater runoff in cisterns. Some here might be strong enough to dig a hole in the ground, but to make that hole hold water would take plastering skills mostly lost in antiquity. No matter for our proud, sinful hearts. We have this self-destructive bent away from pure life-giving springs of God's truth to holes that drain water away.

It's a curse on our common humanity as God the LORD says: ***"Cursed is anyone who trusts in mankind, who seeks his strength from human flesh, and who turns his heart away from the Lord. ⁶He will be like a juniper bush in the wasteland. He will not see good things when they come. He lives in a dry place in the wilderness, in a salty land where no one lives."*** (EHV ¹) Not just politicians, but prophets and preachers have long preferred to tell people what they want to hear, true or not. Human hearts glue to lies that sound good to these itching ears. Even Bible-believers can fall into the trap by citing "synod position" or favorite theologians instead of God's Word. Juniper bushes are good for nothing in building, as useless as the salt flats where no one lives because nothing grows there. Avoiding God's truth brings desolation. Thank God that we do not have to die there. **Be Still, My Soul...**

¹ EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version* (<http://wartburgproject.org>). NPH, © 2017. Order: 800-662-6022.

✧ in the fruitful valleys (vv.7-8)

Trees don't plant themselves. They cannot choose where they grow. The wind carries seeds to where water flows. That same wind brings storm clouds with more rain to turn desert wasteland into a lush green valley bursting with life. 100 years before Jeremiah, Isaiah told of God's powerful love to make the wilderness ***"rejoice and blossom....Then will the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer, and the mute tongue shout for joy. Water will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert. The burning sand will become a pool, the thirsty ground bubbling spring..., grass and reeds and papyrus will grow."*** (Isaiah 35:5-7 NIV84)

Wherever God's truth is honored in the Holy Scriptures of the Bible, hearts and homes, men and women, young and old from all walks of life flourish in the care of our heavenly Father. They are not following their hearts because God says, ***"The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it? "I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve."*** (Jeremiah 17:9f NIV84) You have something far better to trust than your heart if you're seeking good days. ***"Blessed is anyone who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. ⁸He will be like a tree planted by water. It sends out its roots to the stream. It does not fear the heat when it comes. Its leaves will remain green. It is not concerned about a time of drought. It does not stop producing fruit."*** (EHV)

Some try so hard to avoid religion that miss the water of life. Anti-Catholics in our culture are generally rejecting the virgin birth of God's Son and the Triune God altogether. Anti-reformed often just hate the passion of some Christians. Anti-Confessional Lutheran insist everyone should have their own interpretation of truth. Any Christian echoing the prophets' ***"Thus says the LORD..."*** will get pushback: "So! You think you're right all the time! You think only your church will be saved!"

Abraham Lincoln who read his Bible daily, more and more as the Civil War raged on, had a great answer when someone asked, "Is God for the North or for the South?" President Lincoln: "God is always on the side of right. It is my constant prayer that we may always be on the side of God."

The Bible tells us everyone makes mistakes, but God does not. ***"We all stumble in many ways. If anyone is never at fault in what he says, he is a perfect man, able to keep his whole body in check."*** (James 3:2 NIV84) Our job is to follow Jesus and ***"Search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: they testify about me."*** (John 5:39 TPA) Follow the Holy Scriptures and you can't go wrong.

Look how the Holy Spirit pictures this for us, like tree roots reaching for water in the streams. The tap root of an oak tree, some say, reaches as deep as the tree is tall. Jesus came with the Holy Spirit resting on Him to ***"provide for those who grieve in Zion – to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair. They will be called oaks of righteousness, a planting of the LORD for the display of his splendor."*** (Isaiah 61:3 NIV84) Deep in the soil of God's Word there is a rich treasure of pure water soothing your soul.

Be Still, My Soul – in the fruitful valleys because sometimes God's blessings are so rich that you feel guilty. Yet Jesus took all our guilt away by His innocent death on the cross. You should no more feel guilty about God's blessings than a tree should feel bad when it's roots reach water. God wants to ease your anxiety with Word and sacraments. Think on your Baptism, God's name on you. Find faithful preachers and meditate on God's Word. Constantly be preparing to receive Holy Communion in the worthiness of Christ whose body and blood are given and shed for you. Then you will be bearing fruit as Jesus says, ***"I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing....This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples."*** (John 15:5,8 NIV) ***"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright; he is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."*** (Psalm 92:12-15 NIV84) Amen.

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