

August 28, 2022
The Eleventh Sunday
After Pentecost
Pastor Matt Duerr

“FLASH”

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, Amen. I'm sure you've all heard that expression 'be careful what you pray for,' and well what's the story behind it? It is said that it's based on an experience that Martin Luther had. It was the year 1505, the month was June, and he went home following a year of academic studies at the university of Hereford. He had completed his master's degree and was now enrolled in the law program to become a lawyer. This made his parents very happy because his father was planning on him becoming the family lawyer. Hence the company lawyer, for his copper mining business. It would be so much cheaper and so much more convenient to just have an attorney there on staff all the time. And he was so excited about this that he had decided to expand his copper mining business and already had signed the lease on several new additional furnaces for extracting the copper and putting it into the form that could be used.

His mother was also very excited about the prospect because since his dad was busy at work and expanding, he wasn't at home and helping around the house in any way shape or form. So, Martin could be the family lawyer, the company lawyer, work from home (before even having zoom); and he could bring in the firewood to heat the house and for cooking with and he could take care of all the chores outside and some of the things on the house that needed repair. This was going to be grand once he got his law degree and became a lawyer!

Unfortunately, when he came home, he shared with his mom and dad that; 'you know mom, dad, my heart is really not in my studies. I think there's more to the world than having a job, and the law of this world, and the legal processes. I think there's got to be more to life than them. And I'd like to pursue what my real purpose is in life, and explore life, and eternal life and what that all means, and who God is, and what His role should be in my life

and everything like that.’ To which his parents responded with a month of ‘You owe us, we've sacrificed everything for you, so that you could be here!’

So, on July 2nd, 1505, he was returning to the university of Hereford. His mind was on the family issues, and he thought that well maybe, he should just pray to God about it a little bit and ask for some divine direction. So, his mind was on the family, his mind was in prayer. As he's walking on this dirt road to Hereford when he realized he hadn't been paying attention to what was going on around him. The sky was getting darker, black. I mean literally black clouds were building, the wind was gaining strength and momentum and was beginning to kind of go from all directions, and little dust devils were blown across the road around him. There was Thunder off in the distance and you know all of this is going on and he's praying and thinking. It's all just kind of going on and then all of a sudden something changed. It all stopped. The wind stopped, the sound of birds, everything stopped. And there was just silence. And then this kind of a metallic smell, then a buzzing, a tingling in the air, and a hair on his arms and his hands and his head, it all kind of started to stand on end.

And then flash! Bank! And no, it wasn't a swat team that his parents had sent after him, throwing a flash bang grenade at him like we see in the movies. A bolt of lightning struck the ground just feet away from him causing this huge expansion of the air from the tremendous heat of this, you know, a 27,000-volt bolt, which knocked him off his feet and into the drainage ditch on the side of the road. When the clap of Thunder hit, the rain let loose, the wind resumed, hail started to fall. The ditch started filling with water and he's coming to his senses after being literally blown off his feet and realizes ‘I've got to get out of this ditch, I could die.’ And he crawls up on the road, which is now mud and the lightning is still going all around, and nature is releasing its fury. He curled up into the fetal position and he screamed, “Help me Saint Anne I will become a monk.” Well, evidently Saint Anne heard him; well, no she didn't. We can't pray to the Saints. But God heard him. Be careful what you pray for. God did get his attention and he went back home, and he realized I need to follow through on my prayer. So, he told his parents “I'm not becoming a lawyer. I'm selling all my books. I'm taking the money from that and then I'm going to go to the monastery to become a monk.” And so, fifteen days later, he

was at the door of the Augustinian monastery there in Hereford, knocking and saying, "Please let me in I need to fulfill a prayer. I need to become a monk."

Martin Luther's saw it as very similar to what happened to Saint Paul. Remember he was originally named Saul and he was a Pharisee, and he was out on a mission to arrest Christians? And how did God stop him on the road? A bright light, flash of light, stopped him dead in his tracks. And not thunder, but His voice; "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

And in fact, it happened again in 1880, when a Swedish pastor by the name of Carl Boberg was walking on a road. He was deep in thought; he had been studying Psalm 8 and wasn't really paying attention to what was going on around him when a thunderstorm hit. Now thunderstorms are not unusual in Sweden and weren't unusual for Karl Boberg. He'd seen many of them sitting safely in his house. This was his first time out in one and like Luther, a bolt of lightning struck a tree nearby.

Rain came down in torrents, he could barely see, but he made out in the distance what appeared to be a barn. So, he ran to it as fast as he could just sprinted and got there and dove into that barn. He got up on his hands and knees, breathing hard, and looked out the door of that barn and watched the fury of nature. And then it stopped, the fury was replaced by peace. The clouds broke, the sun began to shine down. Everything had been washed cleaned. Little drops of rain on the leaves, the bright green leaves were glistening, and birds began to chirp but there was a gentle breeze and he walked out and smelled the smell following a summer rain. It was beautiful! It was psalm 8.

He took off quickly to his home while the memory of all of it was fresh in his mind and in his senses and he wrote a poem. A nine-verse poem called "O Store Gud" which means "Oh great God." He did in less than an hour because again it's basically a paraphrase of Psalm 8, which King David wrote when King David had some sort of an experience like this too. He matched it to an old Swedish folk tune which today is now called "O Store Gud," and he began to use it in his church and the people really liked it. Word got out and it started becoming a staple in the Swedish churches.

Twenty years later, it was found in a small German songbook. We don't know who, but someone translated it from Swedish to German. And in 1927,

in Russia, an English missionary by the name of Stuart Hine found one of those songbooks. And he loved the message. So, he translated it to Russian and began using it in his church. And he began using it as a short way of introducing people to God. It's the awesome God who has power over all creation, the God who brings peace after the thunderstorm or in the storms of our life. Twenty-one years later, he was sent back to England because of World War Two. He was visiting a refugee camp when he came upon two Russians using the song that was Swedish, that had been translated into German, that he had translated into Russian; and they were using it to evangelize some fellow Russians who were in this refugee camp.

He went back home; he translated it into English and this time he added a verse. Because this poem is about the great God, the God of creation, and the power that He has, and the peace that comes after the storm, and the peace that comes through Jesus Christ, but what he didn't say was that there's eternal peace through Christ. So, he added the verse; "When Christ shall come, with shout of acclamation, and Take Me Home with joy will fill my heart. He had it printed up like a little Bible tract. He titled it "How Great Thou Art," and he used it as a jumping off point for evangelism.

A couple years later, it was picked up by a well-known soloist named George Beverly Shea and George Beverly Shea shared it with his friend Billy Graham. Billy Graham said we need to share that with the people in our upcoming crusade. And so, they did. George Beverly Shea shrank it down to three verses, a verse about how great God is, about that great God sending Jesus, and that Jesus is coming back. And when it came time for the altar call, they had an overwhelming response. You see, the thing is this. Billy Graham preached the exact same sermon he had been preaching all during this crusade. The only difference this time was this song was sung. And they began to look and ask, why would this song have such an impact? And they began to see that it brought hope. It brought stability to a world, primarily to a nation, the United States, a nation that had come through World War One, World War Two, was now enjoined in the Korean conflict, it was now in the Cold War with Russia, and was reeling from McCarthyism back home in the United States capitol. It's a song that's a natural follow-up to Joy to the World. The God who

was rejected by His creation, did not reject His creation but redeemed it and saved it by sending His own Son. How Great Thou Art is His credentials.

Who is this God? He is the God of creation. Look at His world and see Him and His power. Look at His Word, see His prophetic power and the fulfillment of those prophecies through Jesus. And when we do that, we will see, and we will understand what David saw when he wrote Psalm 8. We will understand what Carl Boberg saw and experienced when he wrote “How Great Thou Art” or “O Store Gud.”

You'll understand what Nehemiah saw in our Old Testament reading this morning. God had delivered His people out of exile just like He said but they were in trouble. The walls of Jerusalem had not been rebuilt and the surrounding people were getting ready for attack and so what did Nehemiah do? He prayed to that mighty God and listen to how he prayed. “O Lord God of heaven, the great and awesome God who keeps His covenant of love with those who love Him and obey Him. Let your ears be attentive and your eyes open to hear the prayer of your servant.” And God did and God took care of it.

As we come to the end of this sermon series, and I thank you for the many emails that have been sent saying all these hymns have really touched you. I want you to look at the world today; and if you're like me and I think you are you're concerned about the church. Not just Zion and Immanuel and Foothill or Shepherd of the Hills, but concerned about the church, capital C, in this world. We're concerned about our country, probably concerned about your family in this world. What do you do? Do what's always been done, follow in the footsteps! Follow in the footsteps of Martin Luther. Follow in the footsteps of King David. Follow in the footsteps of Carl Boberg. Follow in the footsteps of Nehemiah.

Number one praise God! He is a great awesome God. He's the God of How Great Thou Art, so maybe sing that song “How Great Thou Art. And then pray because He is the answer! No one, nothing else is, only God has the answer because He's God. He's that God of absolute power and uses that power to bring absolute peace; peace that passes all human understanding.

And now for the rest of the story. As we sing that hymn, How Great Thou Art at the end of our service today, you're probably going to look and say, ‘wait

a second, there were nine verses, they added one, that makes 10 verses. Shea shortened it to three, but we've got four, why? Very simple, in our Lutheran Service Book, they thought that we should not leave out that part that God prompted Carl Boberg to write. So, as you get to verse 2, pay close attention to those words. It's Carl Boberg walking and seeing experiencing that great God. The God who spoke to him through a thunderstorm, spoke to him through his study of Psalm 8, spoke to him through his life experiences and brought it all together to where he says, "Oh Lord my God, how great Thou art!" May we God's church, may our families, may our country, see the great and awesome God and turn to Him for that peace.

In our Saviors name, Amen.