

Come Thou Font of Every Blessing

1.1 Come, Thou Fount of every blessing,
1.2 Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
1.3 Streams of mercy, never ceasing,
1.4 Call for songs of loudest praise.
1.5 Teach me some melodious sonnet,
1.6 Sung by flaming tongues above.
1.7 Praise the mount! I'm fixed upon it,
1.8 Mount of Thy redeeming love.

2.1 Sorrowing I shall be in spirit,
2.2 Till released from flesh and sin,
2.3 Yet from what I do inherit,
2.4 Here Thy praises I'll begin;
2.5 Here I raise my Ebenezer;
2.6 Here by Thy great help I've come;
2.7 And I hope, by Thy good pleasure,
2.8 Safely to arrive at home.

3.1 Jesus sought me when a stranger,
3.2 Wandering from the fold of God;
3.3 He, to rescue me from danger,
3.4 Interposed His precious blood;
3.5 How His kindness yet pursues me
3.6 Mortal tongue can never tell,
3.7 Clothed in flesh, till death shall loose me
3.8 I cannot proclaim it well.

4.1 O to grace how great a debtor
4.2 Daily I'm constrained to be!
4.3 Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
4.4 Bind my wandering heart to Thee.
4.5 Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it,
4.6 Prone to leave the God I love;
4.7 Here's my heart, O take and seal it,
4.8 Seal it for Thy courts above.

5.1 O that day when freed from sinning,
5.2 I shall see Thy lovely face;
5.3 Clothed then in blood washed linen
5.4 How I'll sing Thy sovereign grace;
5.5 Come, my Lord, no longer tarry,
5.6 Take my ransomed soul away;
5.7 Send thine angels now to carry
5.8 Me to realms of endless day.

Words: Robert Robinson, 1758
Music: *Nettleton* by John Wyeth, 1813

Take a good tune, some religious sentiments, add some biblical allusions and weak faith. What you get is a hymn badly in need of repair. This was realized as early as 1860 when the last stanza was omitted and apparently not missed.

The hymn starts off with a poetic term for fountain or spring, “font”, which nowadays people would associate with word processing. A poetic image of heart strings is introduced in 1.2 before returning to water as streams in 1.3. I’m not sure what 19th century folk thought about “loudest praise” in 1.4 but today it’s likely to evoke a band of musicians with ear-jarring amplification. One hopes heaven is not like that.

Asking for “some melodious sonnet” in 1.5 sounds like any random melodious sonnet would do as long as “flaming tongues above” sing it, an allusion to Pentecostal tongues of fire which happened on earth. The first stanza’s last two lines break through this fog of confusion with some depth but give no hint of which “mount” is meant. Most likely it is Mount Moriah, where the story of Abraham and Isaac as well as the crucifixion took place, but this is left in obscurity.

The second stanza begins with a “woe is me” attitude and weakly admits there’s enough to “inherit” in 2.3 to “begin” praises in 2.4. Then 2.5 introduces “my Ebenezer” as if everyone knows the Hebrew meaning and allusion to I Samuel 7:12 where a “stone of help” is used as a marker of God’s aid. Why it would be raised instead of set in place is not clear. At least the rest of the stanza develops the image of help on a journey.

The third stanza begins well, but stumbles with an awkward appositive phrase in 3.3 and formal “interposed” in 3.4. It weakens with kindness personified in 3.5 and conventional sentiments in 3.6. Then it falls flat with the helpless 3.7 and negative confession of 3.8.

The fourth stanza also starts well despite the poetic “O”. Verse 4.3 is on the edge of awkwardness but works, and is well-known enough now to seem natural. Then 4.4 falls back into a negative confession of wandering. This negativism is amplified in the worst way in 4.5 and 4.6 with an affirmation of proneness to wander and leave God. Please let us confess the faith of the new man, not the nature of the old man. But the stanza ends with a bang despite the poetic “O” again.

In conclusion there is some good here among the ruins of a weak faith. Can this hymn be saved? There have been several attempts to amend it over the years. A

common change is to drop the first four verses of the second stanza and the last four verses of the third stanza and combine the remaining verses into one stanza. This, along with dropping the final stanza results in three stanzas.

However, obscurity and negativity remain with the “mount”, the “Ebenezer”, and the wandering heart. A recent revision makes several improvements, including changing “some melodious sonnet” into “ever to adore Thee”. However, other changes such as translating Ebenezer as “stone of help” fall flat. One excellent revision changed the “Prone” verses into “Never let me wander from Thee, / Never leave the God I love.”

There is still room for improvement and this is what I have attempted. Because this is such a familiar hymn, verses which are passable were kept as much as possible. Obscure verses were given some context, and negativism has been replaced with yearning affirmations of faith.

Come, Thou Font of every blessing,

Come, Thou Font of every blessing,
Tune my heart to sing Thy grace;
Steams of mercy, never ceasing,
Call for songs of endless praise.
Teach me ever to adore Thee,
Ever worship God above;
Praise the mount where I was set free,
Mount of Thy redeeming love.

To Thy grace how great a debtor
Daily I'm constrained to be!
Let Thy goodness, like a fetter,
Bind my yearning heart to Thee.
Jesus sought me when a stranger,
Wandering from the fold of God,
Rescued me from death and danger,
Interposed His precious blood.

Here I set a stone to mark where
By Thy help and grace I've come;
And I trust by Thy good pleasure,
Safely to arrive at home.
Never let me wander from Thee,
Never leave the God I love.
Here's my heart, Lord, take and seal it,
Seal it for Thy courts above.

Words: Robert Robinson, 1758
Revised: R. Gillmann, 2009
Music: *Nettleton* by John Wyeth, 1813