



First Mennonite Church

Midweek E-Newsletter

December 8, 2021

From Pastor Tom

Wayfaring Strangers

One of the new Advent hymns in *Voices Together* will actually sound quite familiar to many of us. That's because it uses a familiar melody, namely the old gospel song "Wayfaring Stranger." Here's the first verse of the original, in case it will help to jog your memory:

I'm just a poor wayfaring stranger, traveling through this land of woe.
And there's no sickness, toil or danger in that bright world to which I go
I'm going there to see my father; I'm going there no more to roam.
I'm just a-going over Jordan; I'm just a-going over home.

You'll find many variants of these lyrics, but the gist is the same. Like many early gospel songs, it talks honestly about the pain and hardship we often experience in our lives, but at the same time reminds the singer/listener that there is a better world to come. And, that when our time comes to cross "over Jordan" (a metaphor for leaving our earthly life and entering eternal life), such pain will be a thing of the past.

Ten years ago, a songwriter by the name of Jacque B. Jones decided to write a new text to this song. Here is its first verse:

Poor of the earth, I am a shepherd; in rugged fields, I make my home.
Yet I attend the words of prophets, and I can hope. How will I know?
Sprung from the roots, the line of Jesse, will come one chosen for us all.
The prophet's songs foretell a leader—a virgin's child. How will I know?

The new song text is clearly about Christmas—or more specifically, Advent. It foretells the coming of a leader, prophesied in Scripture and "chosen for us all" from the line of Jesse, who will come into the world as the child of a virgin. Good news, right? Exciting news! And yet for this poor shepherd, it was hard to hold onto this good news when he or she didn't know when it would be fulfilled. All he can do is wonder and wait.

The melody's minor key fits the text of all four verses perfectly—their longing and yearning, wanting to hope, yet finding hope difficult at times. Its message, in other words, is not all that different from *Wayfaring Stranger*, just told using a different story. Both texts acknowledge that life can be difficult, sometimes overwhelmingly so. And yet in both texts there is a powerful hope shared by people of faith. And in the new text that hope has a name, a name the shepherd has not yet learned, but will soon: Jesus. We will be singing this song in coming weeks. May it help us acknowledge our own pain and hardship and remind us of the Hope that we all share, a Hope both already here and still to come in its fullness.

Upcoming Events

- ☞ Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary will honor Leonard Wiebe, former pastor of Faith Mennonite Church, Newton KS and former WDC church planter, and Frederick J. Speckeen during separate Zoom receptions on **Tuesday, Dec. 7** — Wiebe from 6:30 to 7:15 p.m. Eastern Time, and Speckeen from 7:30 to 8:15 p.m. ET. (*The link can be obtained by emailing bjohnson@ambs.edu.*) Wiebe was selected as one of two alumni for this recognition. Alumni Director [Janeen Bertsche Johnson](#) (MDiv 1989) noted that for three years, AMBS has selected two alumni for recognition — one for contributions in congregational ministry; and one for contributions in teaching, mission work, peace work, spiritual direction, or another ministry. “As we looked through this year’s nominations, we were impressed by the rich service that Fred and Leonard have given over their lifetimes — Fred in administrative leadership and Leonard as a pastor and church planter,” she reflected. “We hope their stories inspire others to see seminary education as a vital gift for whatever professional path they may take.”
- ☞ **Farewell for Hank & Erin Unruh:** This Sunday, December 12, after the morning worship service we will have a carry-in meal, followed by a time of sharing with Hank & Erin. Please bring a main dish, salad, and/or dessert. Bring your own table service if possible. Our Covid task force has asked that we wear masks as much as possible when we are not eating. During the meal, the number of persons in the fellowship hall will be limited to approximately 50, with overflow if necessary, in other locations.
- ☞ **The McPherson Community Brass Choir under the direction of Jerry Toews will give their Christmas Brass Concert Sunday, Dec. 12 at 7:30 p.m. in the Goessel HS gym.** This event is sponsored by the Goessel Ministerial Alliance. Note the location change accommodating for social distancing. Come and enjoy a festive brass Christmas concert!
- ☞ **Have yourself a honkin’ good holiday, December 17 from 4-6 p.m.!** MCC is thrilled to host this drive-thru event again this year. Order your charcuterie box(es) today to enjoy in the comfort of your home, spread Christmas joy and order extra to give as gifts! Suggested donation per box is \$25. We’re also collecting items for [MCC hygiene kits](#) at this event. **Place your order by 5 p.m. Thursday, December 9.** [Details and order form are on \[mcc.org\]\(http://mcc.org\).](#) Questions? Please call 316.283.2720.
- ☞ **Camp Mennoscah Christmas Gathering** is Dec. 18 at 2:30 p.m.! Join us in the Dining Hall at Camp Mennoscah for afternoon fun—bring games to play indoors or out. Camp will provide popcorn and generic pop. (Masks recommended and encouraged for inside activities.)
- ☞ **Immerse yourself into the Christmas message with music and song Sunday December 19 at 4 p.m. Hopeful Blues is honored to host Doxology Ensemble**, a 12-voice male ensemble from the Anabaptist community near Hutchinson. Jointly, they will present a concert of sacred music, joining two unique ensembles for an afternoon of Christmas music. Hopeful Blues, an eclectic instrumental group based in Hope Mennonite Church in Wichita performs a variety of sacred instrumental music from old world to contemporary. Doxology Ensemble sings Acapella choral arrangements, both classic and modern. The Christmas repertoire includes arrangements of traditional carols, rousing spirituals, and soaring choral settings of scripture. After a two-year hiatus, we are excited to be rehearsing again and are looking forward to sharing the joy of the Incarnation through song. The concert will be held at Hope Mennonite church, 868 N Maize Road, Wichita KS. Admission is free, and donations are welcomed.

Other Announcements

- ☞ **Please consider preparing to contribute to this Sunday's designated offering to go to the local budget. Thank you for your generosity!**
- ☞ **Poinsettias:** You are invited to share poinsettias for Advent! Please place plants in the Fellowship Hall south window area. Plants can be taken home after the December 24 Christmas Eve Service. Thank you!
- ☞ **'TIS THE SEASON FOR ANNUAL REPORTS! The deadline is December 15** (one more week!) this year for your annual reports to be submitted to the church office. Thank you for your hard work throughout the year, committee and council members!
- ☞ **The MCC Comforter Blitz Committee is looking for additional committee members!** Would you be interested in assisting the making of comforters for Mennonite Central Committee, and helping to plan the annual three-day comforter making event in Yoder, Kansas? If so, we would love your skills and your voice! If interested, please reach out to Committee Chair, Kara Klingenberg at k.klingenberg@hotmail.com or call her at 620-983-9003 for more information. We are currently looking for a treasurer, advertising help, and anyone else who is interested in helping.

Verse of the Week

“Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live,” –John 11:25 (NRSV)