

Second Sunday after Pentecost, June 6, 2021

Hymn #379

***Verse 1 – all read together***

*Now the green blade rises from the buried grain,  
wheat that in the dark earth many days has lain;  
love lives again, that with the dead has been;  
love is come again like wheat arising green.*

When I was a young boy growing up in Saskatchewan,  
my family used to go and visit my maternal grandparents  
who farmed just outside of Saskatoon.  
That trip to the farm was always wonderful  
because my brother and I were set free  
from the constraints of life in the “big city” of Moose Jaw.

We could play hide and seek in the hayloft and the woods,  
drive the tractor with my grandpa,  
try and shoot gophers with a .22 and swim in the nearby sandpit.

Now, although making the trip was a rather major event. . .  
at least in those days. . .we made it several times a year—  
and one of those was in the late spring following Easter,  
just after my father had finished the last service of Holy Week  
and just after the last snow had thawed and melted.

And we went up then because winter was over and it was time to seed. . .  
and, believe you me, there was a lot of work involved  
in preparing the ground for planting.

And yet, although a time of work, it was also a time of promise:  
There was a sense of anticipation and hope at the comforts and pleasures  
a good fall harvest would bring.

At the same time, there was also a recognition  
that the whole exercise might turn out to be fruitless—  
that the crop could be lost or fail  
and an entire year’s money and time and effort wasted.

For all the grain farmers on the prairies, it was a tense time of waiting  
after the seeding was completed—waiting and hoping and praying  
that nothing bad would happen to those little seeds  
on which so much had been staked—  
not only the creature comforts of life on the farm,  
but the realities of basic survival through a prairie winter.

And then came the day when my grandparents  
 and all the other farming families would glance out at the fields  
 and see the new shoots peeking their little green heads  
 above the dark, black earth. . .  
 and the sense of celebration and thanksgiving prompted by that sight  
 was almost tangible enough to grasp with your hands.

Certainly there were still numerous things that could go wrong—  
 like drought or grasshoppers, hail or wind,  
 a prairie grass wildfire ignited by a lightning strike,  
 too little or too much rain, a hard frost or a late snowfall—  
 but, at least for now, it was time to rejoice.

The wheat had appeared once more and with it had come hope—  
 hope that the crop would be good,  
 hope that the future would be bright,  
 hope that life would be full and rich.

***Verse 2 – all read together***

*In the grave they laid him, love by hatred slain,  
 thinking that he would never wake again,  
 laid in the earth like grain that sleeps unseen;  
 love is come again like wheat arising green.*

Jesus, the Lord of life, had been laid in the grave, and like a seed  
 that is sown and must die before it can bring forth its fruit,  
 so he was planted in the earth  
 in order to rise to new life three days later.

In the same way, we who will die one day,  
 we have the promise of the risen Christ that we will live again—  
 and live an altogether new and more glorious life.

The words of this hymn frequently ran through my mind  
 when I was preparing for the funeral of my mother 11 years ago—  
 which is pretty much the reason why my siblings and I decided  
 that instead of a spray of flowers on the casket  
 that a shock. . . a sheaf. . . an armload of wheat. . .  
 would be placed on top of the coffin. . . which we did.

And then, at the end of the service, we gave everyone present  
 a cluster of stalks with full heads of grain to take home  
 as a graphic and powerful reminder of our promised new life.

Like a grain of wheat which is sown in the earth and dies  
 and which later brings forth stalks of wheat  
     which bear little resemblance to that original seed—  
         so when we die and are buried, our mortal bodies  
         serve as the seed from which will arise an immortal body—  
 a glorified and resurrected body, St. Paul says,  
 that will be a different from this present one as the stalk is from the seed.

Related, yes. . .but the same? No!  
 Buried, yes. . .but dead? Not quite. . .and not forever!  
     Instead, we will only be sleeping in the heart of God—  
     sleeping until we are awakened again by love—  
 by the touch of the One who is the Author of love and the Giver of life.

***Verse 3 – all read together silently as the melody is played***

*Forth he came at Easter like the risen grain,  
 he that for three days in the grave had lain;  
 raised from the dead, my living Lord is seen;  
 love is come again like wheat arising green.*

Seeds are planted and then the questions come:  
 Will they grow? Will they be straight and strong, healthy and full?  
     Will those tiny seeds become all they were meant to be:  
         grain to grind, flour to bake, bread to eat,  
         food to nourish and give strength?

Christ burst his tomb at Easter,  
 ending the shame and humiliation of his death on the cross.  
     He came forth as conqueror and sovereign to announce to all  
         that God had vanquished the power of death—  
         and that the grave, the coffin, and the vault and the stone  
 would no longer have the last word on our lives.

Instead, we will live again because love lives again. . .  
 and not only the love that was seen in Jesus back then,  
     but the love that is seen in him. . .and in us. . .now:  
         In the relationships between spouses and partners and lovers;  
         in the caring of family members for one another;  
         in the support and encouragement friends give to each other;

in the consolation and strength church members share with each other;  
 in the care and compassion your pastors and leaders  
     show for this flock. . .for the Good Shepherd's flock.

Now granted, maybe that love of ours isn't always  
 all it could be or should be or might be or will be. . .  
 but it is there all the same. . .love is there, nonetheless.

And so, for its presence in our lives,  
 for all the expressions of kindness,  
 for all the moments of affection and the years of tender care,  
 for love—we give thanks and praise to the Holy One who is love. . .  
 who shows love. . .and who gives love. . .freely and abundantly.

***Verse 4 – all speak together***

*When our hearts are wintry, grieving, or in pain,  
 your touch can call us back to life again,  
 fields of our hearts that dead and bare have been,  
 love is come again like wheat arising green.*

Stand with someone at the edge of a grave  
 and look down at the casket in the ground below  
 and you will know what it means to be in the icy grip of death.  
 Visit someone suffering the ravages of cancer or a major stroke  
 or the parents of a child whose short life is about to end abruptly  
 and you can sense the devastation of a life-threatening illness.

Look into the eyes of someone who has attempted suicide  
 and you can see the pain of loneliness and despair.  
 Spend some time with a couple whose marriage  
 is coming apart at the seams and you can testify  
 to the power of sin. . .and heartache.

Listen to someone tell you how they feel  
 as though the best things of life. . .or the best years of life. . .  
 have passed them by. . .and you can feel the presence  
 of great sorrow, of deep and dark depression, of profound anguish.

All of us know all too well those wintry times  
 when life seems dead, when hearts are cold,  
 when spirits seem lifeless and life seems meaningless.

And yet, into our pain-filled lives, Christ comes—  
 and he comes to touch our sorrowing spirits and our broken hearts. . .  
 and by his touch, he calms us, binds us up and heals us. . .  
 using only the power of love.

Now, sometimes that love of his is heard  
 in the words of comfort spoken by a friend. . .  
 or rediscovered in a familiar passage from the Scriptures;

sometimes that divine and healing love is savoured and appreciated  
 at a time of crisis or loss through meals brought by neighbours or strangers--  
 or it is tasted in the bread of the eucharistic meal. . .  
 bread mixed, kneaded, and baked from grain ground and grown.

Sometimes love is seen in the lines of a sculpture,  
 in the texture of a carving, in the colours of a painting,  
 in the silky smoothness of a piece of pottery,  
 in the majesty of music sung or played,  
 in the stillness and beauty of a sunset or sunrise,  
 even in the craft and cadence of a preacher's sermon.

Sometimes it can also be found and felt in the words and music of a hymn. . .  
 like this hymn which weds text and tune together in a way  
 that not only creates beauty for our ears and solace for our souls  
 but reminds us once again of this most important of all mysteries:

that love must always be given and shared as Christ's was and is. . .  
 that love must always come as Christ's did and does—  
 quietly, gently, persuasively, surprisingly—  
 not in order to conquer and overpower the other  
 but in order to romance and win the heart of the other.

Just as wheat comes up suddenly and without warning. . .  
 just as love arrives often unexpectedly and undeservedly--  
 so the melody of this hymn carries us wherever it wishes:

down like seeds dying and up like grain rising;  
 down like Christ buried and up like Christ resurrected;  
 down like pain hurting and up like hope returning;  
 down like wheat planted and up like wheat arising—like wheat arising green.

**Please rise if you are able and sing Hymn #379 together. . .  
 and sing it quietly and thoughtfully like the prayer it is.**

Amen.

SDG