



Come, Ye Thankful People, Come - Chet Valley Churches

Greetings!

Please read [Mark 4: 26-34](#)

Sunday, I will be preaching the funeral of a family friend in Illinois who died in 2020 but the pandemic made it impossible for family and friends to gather. This date was selected with safety in mind.

I will be using Mark's text for the sermon, which is the Gospel reading for June 13. I am reminded of the connection to the hymnody and theology of the church. This scripture is the basis for the great hymn *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come*¹, which is traditionally used as a Thanksgiving hymn. In many communities where I have served, this hymn has been one of the touchstones of ecumenical services each November.

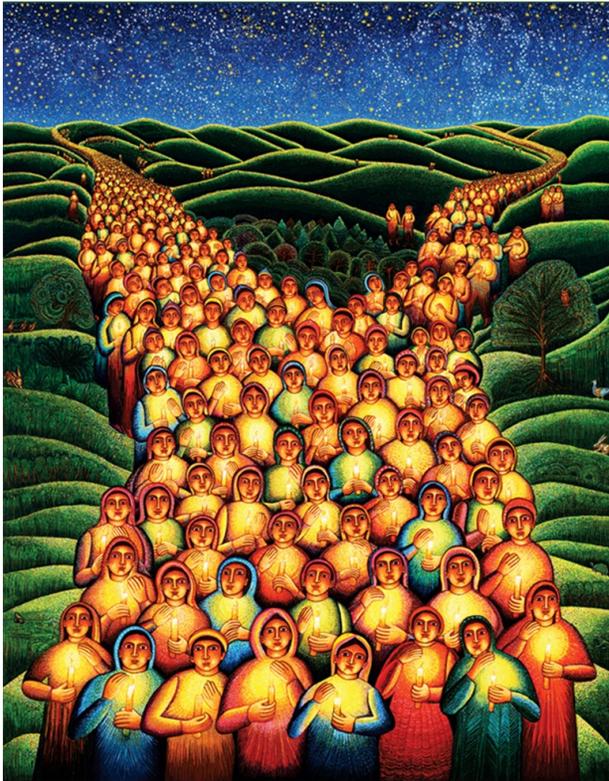
I like to use this hymn as the processional music for funeral liturgies. *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* and this text, with its companion found in Matthew 13:26-43, sets us in the direction of the eternal harvest. The Last Day. The Welcoming Home party. The Final Reward. The hymn tune is set to St. George's Windsor in a 77.77 D meter. Similar hymn meters include *Christ the Lord is Risen Today*,² *Take My Life and Let It Be Consecrated*³ and a few lesser-known hymn tunes, but worth your attention.

I mention the texts and tunes because the hymnal is a collection of the theology of our denomination and other Methodist bodies. David Rumsey backs this up in a brief article about the 1933 Methodist Hymnal in England.⁴ In the article, he speaks of the intentionality of the Wesley brothers to include theology to instruct others about faith in Jesus Christ. Rumsey identifies that Charles Wesley began writing music in 1738 while John was "filled with the Spirit" during an evangelical revival known as "Whitsuntide".⁵

Revival has long been a mainstay in Methodism. And revival has an eye towards eternity. *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* offers beautiful imagery... people gathered

by God as they *raise the song of harvest home*. Henry Alford in his poetry offers verses 2-4 as a journey from sowing seeds, to raising the crop, and final harvest.

The parabolic teaching of Jesus is at a high point in Mark 4 as he uses this art form to talk about the Kingdom of God. As a child growing up at Faith Community United Methodist Church in West Chester, I remember a children's moment where our pastor talked about having faith the size of a mustard seed. Rev. Rodney Vernon was a great visual teacher. In that children's sermon, he gave all of us a mustard seed to hold in our hand. The gift of the seed stuck in my mind and has been there for over 45 years. It comes to mind periodically when I re-read this passage from Mark or the one in Mathew and I am transported back in time. Faith – your faith – my faith – our faith - can be seemingly small at times. However, faith can create great things just like that tiny seed that produces a big bush.



Festival of Lights, John August Swanson, 1991.

Last weekend, I attended The Warehouse gathering in Washington Park. The Warehouse is a new faith community connected with Hyde Park Community United Methodist Church in Over-the-Rhine. The Warehouse is an intentionally multicultural Christian community that fits into our district strategy and is nurtured at the annual conference level through Brad Aycock, Director of Fresh Starts and New Beginnings. At this gathering in Washington Park, 25 people came forward to unite with the church and learn more about Jesus and the Christian faith. There was music and games for the kids, pizza and bottled water. There was worship and preaching. Those who came forward

wanted to connect with the vision to live out faith in *social holiness*⁶, *works of mercy*⁷ and *works of piety*⁸, the great theological tenants of Methodism. While as pastoral leaders we do not talk about social holiness, works of piety and mercy directly at the beginning of our relationships with people, we do model it with our actions. And we teach it through our hymns and praise songs with an eye towards our Wesleyan heritage. Pastors Sadell and Sherman Bradley know how to reach people as the Wesleys did. They employ preaching and music to reach people for Jesus. Perhaps what is being birthed in OTR today looks like a mustard seed. But tomorrow, something big may grow that will simply be amazing! We pray and believe that it will.

Of course, we do not launch or grow ministries for our own personal celebration, but to address a hurting and broken world. Recently in our region we saw violence imposed on a Lyft driver and an Uber driver. One resulted in death and the other showed a tirade recorded on a phone inside the vehicle that was both frightening and disgusting. Some will say that the man was drunk and shouldn't be held accountable.

Perhaps that may be true, but some believe that when inhibitions come down, *real character* comes out. Transformation of individual lives and then culture starts out as a mustard seed, but the possibilities are endless. And we need to grasp at some possibilities and have some Hope!

Much of the bitterness going on now in our culture needs to be addressed: anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, anti-Asian violence, extreme political partisanship, LGBTQIA+ discrimination, racism and sexism in all forms, increasing gun violence, misogyny against women, marginalization of people of color – native and indigenous, Black, LatinX, and many other things that divide us. The things that separate us in our earthly realm appear not to be separating factors in the economy of God’s kingdom, at least not in this text. We do have Hope – our hope is in the Lord!

What are we going to do with ourselves if by grace someone we have diametrically opposed or have even discriminated against on earth is saved and shares the same eternity with us? The Hope I speak of is that our work in this life does not cause us to cross our fingers when we pray in worship, “Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven?”⁹ Hope is poured out in the ways we offer ourselves on behalf of others. And yet many of us find ourselves overcome by the human condition. And what is the human condition? It is the sin of wasting incredible amounts of time and energy pretending it is our task to separate the wheat from the chaff, acting as if it is our own field and not God’s.

And of course, this is our sin. The human condition is wrought with the need to own and possess - places, ideas, things, thoughts, churches, political parties, cultures, genders, nations, theologies and even people. These Kingdom visions by Jesus are just as challenging now as they were in his generation. These visions upset the powers and principalities of this world. God’s sense of justice seems beyond human understanding. What a vision! Jesus’s teaching from Mark 4 and the great hymn *Come, Ye Thankful People, Come* is worthy of our prayerful reflection.

Let me close with a few questions:

- Do you have faith the size of a mustard seed? What does that mean to you if you do?
- What greatness is emerging from your faith?
- Is it a personal faith or a corporate faith or both?
- Do you fight with God over ownership of the field?
- If you do, does the Harvest look and act just like you?
- What would it look like for the Harvest to be God’s business and not yours? How would that understanding change your life?

¹ The UM Book of Hymns, The UM Publishing House, Nashville, TN, 1989. Hymn #694

² Ibid. Hymn #302

³ Ibid. Hymn #399

⁴ <https://www.davidrumsey.ch/hymns.pdf>, pg. 1

⁵ Ibid, pg. 3.

⁶ <https://www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-beliefs-social-holiness>

⁷ <https://www.umcdiscipleship.org/blog/works-of-mercy-compassion-justice>

⁸ <https://www.umc.org/en/content/the-wesleyan-means-of-grace>

Peace,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Todd".

Rev. Dr. Todd D. Anderson, West Ohio Superintendent
Ohio River Valley District, United Methodist Church

