

Saturday, 16 December 2023
14th day of Advent

Fling Wide the Door [ELW 259, verse 2]:

He is the rock of our belief,
the heart of mercy's gentle self.
His kingly crown is holiness;
his scepter is his loveliness;
he brings our sorrows to an end.

Now gladly praise our king and friend,
and worship him with song
for saving us from wrong.

My high school friend has described me as a “wordsmith” and I freely admit that I love words! I love to sing them, I love serving as a reader of the Word at St. Matthew, and I enjoy being introduced to new words! For example, I am considering renaming my cat Grimalkin which describes an old female cat! She whines more, sleeps a lot, walks slowly and only wants to eat canned food! As a seasoned woman, I can identify with all of those behaviors!

In preparation for writing today's Advent devotion, I realized I was not familiar with ***Fling Wide the Door***. After consulting my hymnal and humming the melody, I found that the verses were full of good words. Several of them delight my heart: ***rock, gentle, loveliness***. Yet other words give me a feeling of prickly heat rash: ***holiness, sorrows, wrong***.

But fear not, in this season of Advent we can joyfully sing: ***He is the rock of our belief***. The words on a framed cross-stitch hanging in my living room also remind me that ***He is my rock***:

And the rains descended and the floods came and the winds blew and beat upon that house and it fell not for it was founded upon a rock.

Compare ***rock*** with the word ***gentle*** as you look at the figures in a nativity set and see this newborn babe given to each one of us. It is a scene of ***loveliness*** but then we recall that there will be suffering and death, not only in the life of Jesus, but in our own lives as well.

How do we make sense of it all? The hymn words remind us of God's holiness, God's kingship, God's power and we may feel relieved when we read that ***God brings our sorrows to an end***. Frankly, I struggle with these words. When we experience the death of a loved one, often the sorrow is piercing and for the rest of our lives we may awaken each day to face the pain of those feelings again. How then shall we live? The concluding words of verse 2 give us our marching orders: ***We gladly praise our king and friend. . . and worship him with song***. Why? Because ***He is*** and he will never leave us or forsake us. So, my friends, ***fling wide the door***, share the good news of Jesus Christ and obey the call to love one another!

Judy McLaughlin
St, Matthew Evangelical Lutheran Church