

I Come with Joy

FLF # 25, revised 1994

I come with joy, a child of God,
forgiven, loved and free,
the life of Jesus to recall,
in love laid down for me.

I come with Christians far and near
to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love
in Christ's communion bread.

As Christ breaks bread, and bids us share,
each proud division ends.
The love that made us, makes us one,
and strangers now are friends.

The Spirit of the risen Christ,
unseen, but ever near,
is in such friendship better known,
alive among us here.

Together met, together bound
by all that God has done,
we'll go with joy, to give the world
the love that makes us one.

Brian Wren, 1969,1982,1994.

1994-5 Revision

The hymn proved difficult to rewrite. Revision of the first stanza emerged from conversation with my marriage partner, Susan Heafield. I wanted to retain:

++remembering (recalling) the life of Jesus ("do this in remembrance of me"),

++the personal element (laid down for me)

++the opening phrase, I come with joy, which defines the hymn, is repeated later, and is what most people are likely to remember.

Problem: how to speak about "Christ" and the life of Jesus "laid down for me", without making a tongue twister ("I come with joy to meet with Christ" - too many "withs" and "with Christ" is hard to sing or say), while making it clear that its a particular life we're talking about - Jesus' life.

-I began by retaining the original phrase, "his life laid down for me." Susan's comment was to the effect that, though the historical Jesus was male, a Christ-centered hymn should use the masculine pronoun only when narrating his life-events; in this hymn, which is making only brief reference to the historical life, the phrase "his life" does "bring in all the maleness" in an unhelpful way. A single word change won't work, however. "*The* life laid down" would be too impersonal and "*Christ's* life laid down" is a tongue-twister. So the whole phrase must be rethought.

- Once that was clear, further conversation soon suggested, "*the life of Jesus to recall, in love* laid down for me." Though less resonant, for some, than, "in awe and wonder," it's accurate, and more specific than the original; many such changes are trade-offs: losing something good to say something hopefully better.

- The first line still needed changing. First attempts included, "I come with joy to be with God" and "I come with joy, I come to God". When "a child of God" came into consciousness, I felt a sense of simplicity and rightness about it.

+++The final stanza proved equally intransigent. I decided to strengthen the corporate element (together... together) and reverse the opening phrase ("go with joy"). For a long time I stayed close to the original rhyme-sounds (ways/praise ---> -ay/-ay, as in this near-final version:

Together met, together bound,
the friends of Christ will stay,
then go with joy to meet the world
and live the way we pray.

I liked the final line, but the contrast of "stay" and "go" proved too jarring - to me, and everyone else I showed it to. I listed all the "-ay" rhymes I could find, but couldn't get a line-rhyme that sounded unforced. Even:

Together met, together bound,
with joy awhile we'll stay,
then go with Christ, to love the world,
and live the way we pray.

didn't sound right - "with joy awhile" felt contrived. Finally, I decided to try letting go of that original rhyme scheme (maybe "live the way we pray" will come in useful in another hymn). Almost immediately I found the simpler revision, which harks back to "the love that made us, makes us one", while retaining the outward looking ending, where by we "go with joy" to give that love to others.

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FLF # 25, revised 1980

1980 Version

Brian A. Wren
Common Meter

Trad. arr. Austin C. Lovelace
DOVE OF PEACE

I come with joy to meet my Lord,
 forgiven, loved and free,
in awe and wonder to recall
 his life laid down for me.

I come with Christians far and near
 to find, as all are fed,
the new community of love
 in Christ's communion bread.

As Christ breaks bread and bids us share
 each proud division ends.
The love that made us, makes us one,
 and strangers now are friends.

And thus with joy we meet our Lord:
 his Spirit, always near,
is in such friendship better known;
 we see and praise him here.

Together met, together bound
 we'll go our different ways,
and as his people in the world,
 we'll live and speak his praise.

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