

Notes from the Music Director (No. 8)

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rochester, Pennsylvania

Henry Doktorski, III

September 6, 2015—15th Sunday after Pentecost



Anna Hoppe

Today's readings speak of miraculous healing. Isaiah prophesies, "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped." The Psalmist proclaims, "The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind." Finally, the evangelist Mark tells how Jesus cast an unclean spirit from a little girl and restored hearing to a deaf man's ears.

Our Gathering Hymn, "Healer of Our Every Ill," was written by Marty Haugen. His biography appeared in the second issue of this publication.

Our Hymn of the Day, "O Son of God, in Galilee," with text by Anna Hoppe and music by William Billings, marvels in the healing miracles of Jesus but also enjoins us to cast our

cares on to the son of God, who will make all mysteries understandable in the promised land. "Meanwhile to them the list'ning ear of steadfast faith impart, and let Your word bring light and cheer to ev'ry troubled heart."

The lyricist for today's hymn—originally published as "O Thou Who Once in Galilee"—was Anna Bernadine Dorothy Hoppe (1889-1941). She quit school after eighth grade and took a job as a stenographer in her hometown of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. She began writing poems on spiritual topics, some of which appeared in the *Northwestern Lutheran*, a periodical of the Wisconsin Evangelical

Lutheran Synod. Her hymns were published in *Songs for the Church Year* (1928). She wrote about 83 hymns.

Hoppe said of her work, “Many of my hymns have been written on my way to and from church and to and from work. I utilize my lunch hours for typing the hymns and keeping up correspondence. Still I find a minute here and there in which to jot down some verse.”

“O Son of God, in Galilee” is sung to “Lewis-Town,” a tune by William Billings (1746-1800), America’s first choral composer. As a young boy, he started music lessons with a local choirmaster, but at the age of 14 years his father died. He quit school and began working as a tanner to help provide for his family. Keenly interested in music, Billings studied *Tans’urs Musical Grammar* and various psalm books and became a fine teacher of singing and America’s first professional composer. He was affiliated with the New South Unitarian Church in Boston. The entire body of all of his music was written for four-part a cappella chorus.



William Billings

In 1770, Billings made history with the publication of *New England Psalm-Singer* (sometimes titled *American Chorister*). With a frontispiece engraved by his friend Paul Revere, the songbook was the first collection of music completely written by an American and included over 120 compositions. His songs were published in a number of other books including *The Singing Master’s Assistant* (1776) and *Music In Miniature* (1779). By 1790, there was hardly an American psalm book that didn’t contain some of his songs.

One contemporary wrote about Billings, “[He] was a singular man, of moderate size, short of one leg, with one eye, without any address & with an uncommon negligence of person. Still, he spake & sung & thought as a man above the common abilities.”

Unfortunately for Billings, the primitive state of the United States copyright law allowed others to publish his work without providing

payment to the composer. By the time the copyright laws had been strengthened, it was too late for Billings: the favorites among his tunes had already been widely reprinted in other hymnals, permanently copyright-free. He died in poverty at the age of 53 and was buried in an unmarked grave. His newspaper obituary noted that he was a “celebrated music composer.” Today his music is frequently found in Sacred Harp songbooks.

To listen to Marty Haugen’s “Healer of Our Every Ill” go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vgtu8f01Gxs>, and to hear “O Song of God, in Galilee” by Anna Hoppe and William Billings sung by the Chancel Choir of Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church with myself as organist and choirmaster, go to <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zaPc5Fe5VG8>.

Resources

Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version (Zonderfan: 1989)
LBW: Lutheran Book of Worship (Augsburg Publishing House: 1978)
WOV: With One Voice (Augsburg Fortress: 1995)
W&P: Worship & Praise Songbook (Augsburg Fortress: 1999)
ELW: Evangelical Lutheran Worship (Augsburg Fortress: 2006)
Wikipedia: <https://en.wikipedia.org>
Hymnary.org: <http://www.hymnary.org>
GIA Publications: <http://www.giamusic.com>
Hymntime.com: <http://hymntime.com>
Singers.com: <http://singers.com>

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