

## What is Your Favorite Hymn and Why?

I began singing an old, old hymn the other day and it evoked such memories. I have never been a good or even adequate singer, but I love music. As I thought about why this hymn spoke to me, I recalled when I first knew all the words from memory. My brother and sister-in-law had joined the church. Shirley, my sister-in-law had a beautiful voice and immediately was in the choir. The choir was small, and it wasn't unusual for Shirley to be the only one who showed up on Sunday morning and since she didn't want to sing alone, she would enlist me to stand up and sing quietly with her. We often picked the same hymn which was "Are Ye Able." I soon knew all the words and loved the lyrics. The words spoke to me and as I sang them, I would ponder on the words. Was I able to follow God to the death at the cross? Was I able to commit that much. I came to realize that God could make me into that person that would follow God anywhere God led them. Did I succeed? No, but I'm still working on it. We are all a work in progress. In the song it turns the work of salvation over to God and humbly asks to be remolded, to be more like Jesus, to be remade in his image. The beauty of the lyrics speaks to me. I loved that time with Shirley, singing with her beautiful voice leading. Shirley was in a choir the rest of her life and when she died, I couldn't send flowers because it was Mother's day weekend (if you have ever tried to order flowers for the Monday after Mother's Day you will understand, especially when they are going to a small town in the thumb) so I sent a monetary gift to her church for the music program. They sent me a note later telling me how they had spent the money, and I knew she would have been pleased at that more than flowers that died and were tossed out in a few days. There is a lasting memorial for her at the church she loved and served for years. God works in ways that we didn't dream of. My husband's favorite hymns were "In the Garden" and "I'll Fly Away," both were sung at his memorial service. Every time he sat down at the piano, he would play those tunes. He had a wonderful singing voice, and we would often sing together in the car, that was one of the things I loved about him, knowing that he loved music but still insisted I sing. Others were not so kind. I love the hymns, hymns like "I have heard you calling in the night" or "Precious Lord Take My Hand," or songs like "I Can Only Imagine," or "It's a Wonderful World." I decided to write down the hymns and songs I love and would like played at my funeral; I might just as well have written down "The United Methodist Hymnal."

Charles Wesley wrote over 5000 hymns. Oh, to be that talented and able to write music for the glory and love of God. Among his 5000 were hymns like "O For a Thousand Tongues to Sing," "Love Divine, All Loves Excelling," "O Love Divine, What Hast Thou Done," "Christ the Lord is Risen Today," "Hark! The Herald Angels Sing." We sing his hymns in all our seasons. What a gift God gave him and how he used it for the glory of God. We all have gifts, and we are called by God to use them to his glory. Charles Wesley certainly made this his mission. John and Charles had different gifts, and both used them to honor their savior. How they blessed us! God has given each of us gifts. May we use them to glorify God the giver.

Father God, we thank you for the gifts you have given us. May we always remember to use them to glorify you and to bless others. Amen.

Grace Epperson