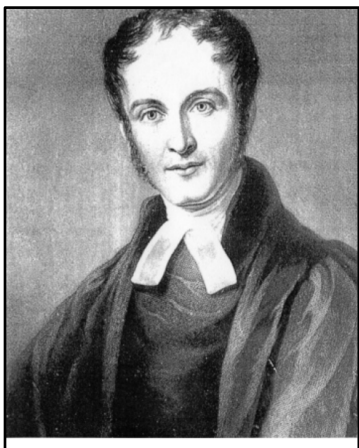# Notes from the Music Director (No. 7)

Grace Evangelical Lutheran Church, Rochester, Pennsylvania

Henry Doktorski, III

August 30, 2015—14th Sunday after Pentecost

Henry Francis Lyte

Today's readings may give cause for us to contemplate: which is better—following the letter of the law or the spirit of the law? In Deuteronomy, Moses orders the Israelites, "You must neither add anything to what I command you nor take away anything from it, but keep the commandments of the Lord your God with which I am charging you." The Psalmist asks, "O Lord, who may abide in your tent? Who may dwell on your holy hill?" and the Lord answers, "Those who walk blamelessly, and do what is right."

On the other hand, the Epistle of James the Just admonishes us, "But be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves." And Mark tells us when Jesus was asked by the Pharisees and the Scribes why he allowed his disciples to break the laws of Moses by putting food in their mouths without first washing their hands, the Master indicated that they who strictly follow the laws of Moses may be missing the whole point and deceiving themselves. "There is nothing outside a person that by going in can defile, but the things that come out are what defile."

I think we can all admit—as we discovered six Sundays ago on the 8th Sunday after Pentecost when the readings focused on sheep and shepherds—that domestic sheep, who are naturally fearful and insecure creatures, need a good shepherd, and we human beings, who much of the time are also fearful and insecure (recall Isaiah 53:6, "All we like sheep have gone astray"), need a strong leader throughout life, through trials and through death.

Our sending hymn, "Abide With Me," with text by Henry Francis Lyte and music by William Henry Monk, is a prayer for God to remain present throughout life, through trials, and through death. The opening

line alludes to Luke 24:29, "Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent."

The text for "Abide With Me" was written by Henry Francis Lyte (1793-1847), the Scottish son of a ne'er-do-well father who abandoned his family. His mother moved to London (perhaps to find employment) where she died. Henry was taken in by the headmaster at Portora Royal School in Enniskillen, County Fermanagh. After studying at Trinity College, Dublin, Lyte took Anglican holy orders in 1815, and for some time he held a curacy in Taghmon near Wexford.

Throughout his life, Lyte suffered from respiratory illnesses such as asthma and bronchitis. He wrote the poem for "Abide With Me" in 1847 while he lay dying from tuberculosis; he survived only three more weeks after its completion.

The hymn tune most associated with Lyte's poem is "Eventide," composed by William Henry Monk (1823–1889), an English organist, church musician and music editor who composed many popular hymn tunes. He also wrote music for church services and anthems

I recommend listening to what I consider two especially wonderful performances of "Abide With Me," by: (1) the King's College Choir, Cambridge (go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=deJDkU6qiGE), and (2) the Saint Olaf Cantorei and Congregation at Boe Memorial Chapel at Saint Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota (go to https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kkXI-8no9ZE).

Sources

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