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Feed The Flock (Jan 21) LOVE FOR ALL - A Hymn To Prepare For The Lord's Supper

1 message

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LOVE FOR ALL

A Hymn To Prepare For The Lord's Supper

To students of literature, the name Longfellow immediately brings to mind the famous poet who became a household legend in both America and Europe. Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (1807-1882) was read and memorized by most children in schoolhouses throughout the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. As a child I had to read and attempt to commit to memory two of his more famous poems, *The Song of Hiawatha*, and *The Midnight Ride of Paul Revere*. Many a child could quote these words:

Listen my child and you shall hear, Of the midnight ride of Paul Revere.
On the eighteenth of April, in Seventy-Five; hardly a man is now alive,
Who remembers that famous day and year.

Longfellow became the poet laureate of America and one of the most famous men of his era. But lost to most Americans was another poet named Longfellow. This Longfellow did not write of legends like Hiawatha and Paul Revere, but of truths that have impacted souls for over 150 years.

Samuel Longfellow (1819-1892), youngest sibling of Henry Wadsworth, went a different route than his more famous brother. He went to Harvard Divinity School and became a minister, writing sermons and composing hymns for worship. In 1864 he published a hymnal, *Hymns Of The Spirit*, in which was found this beautiful hymn, *Love For All*. While it might not be as famous as his brother's poetry, it has stirred my heart, and that of thousands of others. As we sing the story, not of famous patriots, but of infamous prodigals, let it touch your heart as well. It is a hymn based on the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32). Read it and weep, knowing it is a story about you and me.

Love for all, and can it be? Can I hope it is for me —
I, who strayed so long ago; Strayed so far, and fell so low?

I, the disobedient child, Wayward, passionate and wild;
I, who left my Father's home, In forbidden ways to roam;

I, who spurned his loving hold; I, who would not be controlled;
I, who would not hear his call; I, the willful prodigal —

To my Father can I go? At his feet myself I'll throw;
In his house there yet may be, Place — a servant's place — for me.

See! my Father waiting stands; See! He reaches out his hands:
God is love; I know, I see, Love for me — yes, even me.

As you read the text, and sing the hymn, can you not see the smile and feel the embrace, of God's forgiving love? Can you sense with me that I am the wayward prodigal who has come to myself and returned home, timid and fearful of shameful rejection, only to be joyfully kissed by a Father Who has prayed for my return since the day I left? All I wanted was a servant's place; all I got was a Father's embrace.

In that pigsty I beat my breast, and, with head bowed, cried in agony, "Father, be merciful to me a sinner!" I, who had strayed so far and fell so low, could only hope there was a spark of compassion left in my Father's heart. I, who had rebelliously gone my own way to live my own life, who had contemptuously rejected his pleas, now returned in sorrow and shame, for I had nowhere else to go.

How would He receive me?

As I made that last turn in the bend to walk down that old familiar path toward home, I strained to see if my Father would recognize me, or even care.

Suddenly, I saw Him standing on the upstairs veranda.

I saw Him excitedly pointing at me.

I saw Him bolting down the stairs.

I saw Him running shamelessly toward me, disregarding all protocol that should be given to someone who had shamefully treated Him.

As He neared, I saw the tears.

I saw the strain in His eyes from months of worry.

I saw in His face the joy of a Mary and Martha, as if a dead loved one had come back to life!

I saw forgiveness, yes, up to seventy times seven (Matthew 18:22).

I saw my Father, waiting stands, reaching out His loving hands.

Then I cried out, "God is love. I know. I see. Love for me, yes, even me!"

Since I am focused on poetry I would like to bring us to the Table of the Lord with another beautiful rhyme that has made an impact on my life since I heard it as a young man decades ago. I have thought of it often as I read the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and as I came to commune with my Lord. I pray it helps you remember, as I have felt so often, God's love, and Christ's hug.

The Touch of the Master's Hand

by Myra Welch

Twas battered and scarred, and the auctioneer thought it scarcely worth his while,
To waste much time on the old violin, but held it up with a smile.

"What am I bid, good folks," he cried, "Who'll start the bidding for me?"

"A dollar, a dollar," then, "Two! Only two? Two dollars, who'll make it three?"

"Three dollars once, once; three dollars, twice; Going for three..." but no,

From the room, far back, a gray-haired man came forward and picked up the bow.

Then, wiping the dust from the old violin, and tightening all the loose strings,

He played a melody so pure and so sweet, as a caroling angel sings.

The music ceased, and the auctioneer, with a voice that was quiet and low,

Said – "What am I bid for the old violin?" as he held it up with the bow.

"A thousand dollars! And who'll make it two? Two thousand, who'll make it three?"

"Three thousand once, three thousand twice, And going and gone!" said he.

The people cheered, but some of them cried, 'We do not quite understand.'

"What changed its worth?" – Swiftly came the reply: "The touch of the Master's hand."

And many a man with life out of tune, and battered and scarred with sin,
Is auctioned cheap to the thoughtless crowd, much like the old violin.
A mess of pottage, a glass of wine; a game --- and he travels on.
He is going once, and going twice, He's going and almost gone.
But the Master comes, and the foolish crowd, never can quite understand;
The worth of a soul and the change that's wrought...
By the touch of the Master's hand!

- Rick