

**A Reaction to Prof. Jacob C. Behnken's**  
***Reformation: Rediscovered Worship Principles and Practices***  
***that Call for Thanksgiving***

Thank you, Prof. Behnken, for sparking so many ideas in my mind. I'm sure the rest of the attendees at the symposium will agree with me that you have given us an excellent review of Luther's worship principles and plenty of ideas for implementing them in our ministries.

Your main point came through clearly. Corporate worship is first and foremost a gathering together to proclaim the gospel. It never ceases to amaze me every time I go through the book of Genesis with the juniors here at the seminary how and when the patriarchs worshipped. It's often described with the simple phrase, "they called on the name of the Lord." I'm guessing that many Bible readers understand that as simply a reference to prayer to the Lord. But Moses quotes God in a very important spot in Exodus (34:5–7) using the same expression. There God himself calls on the name of the Lord.<sup>1</sup> And what does he say? "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sins of the parents to the third and fourth generation." What was the sermon that day? It was simply a listing of God's characteristics and his actions. That's calling on the name of the Lord. It's proclaiming his name, what he stands for, his justice and his mercy. It's law and the gospel.

There is nothing better that we can do in worship than to tell God what he is like, than to tell those around us what he is like, what he has done. It's interesting the times that this little phrase, "call on the name of the Lord," comes up in Genesis. The first time is in Genesis 4:26, when the third generation is born into Adam and Eve's family. It's probably because the family is now large enough that they need to all be gathered together for worship. And what do they do? They call on the name of the Lord. They no doubt proclaimed the amazing characteristics and deeds of the Lord. It's interesting when Abraham calls on the name of the Lord. The first time is when he arrives in Canaan and God tells him this is the land that his descendants will possess. He builds an altar and calls on the name of the Lord (Gen 12:7–8). In the very next chapter, after God has protected him from the dangers of Egypt and brought him back home richer than ever, despite his deception, he returns to his altar and calls on the name of the Lord (Gen 13:1–4). I'll let you look up the other instances yourself. But let me make two more observations. Worship of the Lord for the patriarchs was always a response to God's promises and his saving deeds. It was not to appease fickle gods like the worship of the nations around them. And it's surprising how often their worship seems even to have had an outreach component. Abraham built that altar between Bethel and Ai, two Canaanite cities that appear to have been very close to one another, a

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<sup>1</sup> There and in Exod 33:19 the phrase that is usually translated "he proclaimed the name of the Lord" is **וַיִּקְרָא בְשֵׁם יְהוָה**.

strategic place to proclaim the name of the Lord. Corporate worship *is* proclamation of the gospel.

Another insight I'd like to thank you for, Prof. Behnken, is your reminder that freedom does not equal personal preference. With this extraordinary freedom that Christ has won for us, we do not worship the way we do because that's what "I prefer." American individualism sometimes blinds us to what freedom in Christ is *for*. You made me think of several wonderful New Testament passages. "Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts" (Col 3:16). I like the way NIV2011 changed that preposition in the first line from "in you" (NIV1984) to "among you" (NIV2011). It reflects that the "you" is plural (ὁμῖν). Public worship is a group thing. It's a coming together in which we "teach" and "admonish" each other through our psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Another passage that comes to mind is Luke 17:21, where Jesus says, "The kingdom of God is in your midst." NIV1984 had "within you," which I think many of us individualistic Americans read as a singular "you." Again, it's plural (ἐντὸς ὑμῶν). You gave us the good reminder that we New Testament Christians are all priests. What is a priest but a go-between? It's good for us to keep this in mind when we worship—that we are go-betweens between our God and our neighbor. We are there to praise the Lord. And we are there to proclaim him to those sitting next to us.

If there's one thing I missed in your essay, it's more details about the *Achtliederbuch*. I'm fascinated by the idea that our first Lutheran hymnal contained only eight hymns and yet spawned—what?—hundreds of hymns. What I'd like to suggest to get just a little taste of the *Achtliederbuch* is to ask the assembly to sing one of those hymns, Luther's "Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice." To my mind, there are no other hymns that proclaim law and gospel as clearly as it and Paul Speratus's masterpiece, "Salvation unto Us Has Come," which we'll be singing in the service tomorrow.

But first, a couple of questions to get the assembly thinking about what questions or comments they might have for you after our singing of the hymn.

- Since Luther taught that in the sermon God speaks to his people, what thoughts does this engender for 21st century preachers (both cautionary and confidence building)?
- Luther lived in a relatively homogenous world and adopted worship practices that were familiar to most. How can we, living in a multicultural world, best put his worship principles into practice?
- How can neighboring WELS pastors today work together to build a more common worship culture among their congregations?

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September 16, 2024

# 557 Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice

CW 557 sts. 1-5



1 Dear Chris-tians, one and all, re - joice, with ex - ul - ta - tion  
2 Fast bound in Sa - tan's chains I lay; death brood-ed dark - ly  
3 My own good works a - vailed me naught, no mer - it they at -  
4 But God be - held my wretch-ed state be - fore the world's foun -  
5 He spoke to his be - lov - ed Son: "It's time to have com -



spring-ing, and, with u - nit - ed heart and voice and ho - ly  
o'er me. Sin was my tor - ment night and day; in sin my  
tain - ing; my will a - gainst God's judg-ment fought, no hope for  
da - tion, and, mind - ful of his mer - cies great, he planned for  
pas - sion. Then go, bright jew - el of my crown, and bring to



rap - ture sing - ing, pro-claim the won - ders God has done, how  
moth - er bore me. Yet deep and deep - er still I fell; life  
me re - main - ing. My fears in-creased till sheer de - spair left  
my sal - va - tion. A fa - ther's heart he turned to me, sought  
all sal - va - tion. From sin and sor - row set them free; slay



his right arm the vic - t'ry won. How dear - ly it has cost him!  
had be - come a liv - ing hell, so firm - ly sin pos - sessed me.  
on - ly death to be my share and hell to be my sen - tence.  
my re - demp-tion fer - vent - ly; he gave his dear - est trea - sure.  
bit - ter death for them that they may live with you for - ev - er."

Text: tr. Richard Massie, 1800-1887, alt.; Martin Luther, 1483-1546  
Tune: Etlich Cristlich liden, Wittenberg, 1524  
Text and tune: Public domain