

This is the first of several hymns I've written with clear messages of Christian welcome. This one was adopted by the Reconciling in Christ Program for use as its 2004 RIC Sunday Hymn of the Day. In it I try to remain true to much of the imagery in the original poetry of "Ode to Joy," while introducing welcoming imagery full force in the last two stanzas.

1. Word of Welcome

(June 2003)

In this holy place we gather, claimed through grace by God above;
Heaven's wings now wrap around us, downy depths of boundless love.
Freed from fears that keep us hidden, for the work that You desire.
Reconciling as we're bidden, hearts aflame with joyful fire.

Earth in all her verdant beauty sings Your joy made manifest;
Winged and finned and scaled and limbed life; fruitful frenzy, quiet rest.
Rushing wind and roiling waters, green of forest, blue of sky,
Dark of night and dawn of morning, all give praise to You on high.

As by imprint, nature offers witness to Your gracious care
So in freedom's faith we follow after Christ if we but dare.
Rushing wind of Spirit able, blowing from the most to least
From the font and for table, born again and bid to feast.

Word of welcome walk among us, watching as these wineskins burst
Breaking bread and pouring wine for all who hunger, all who thirst.
Now as we go forth to scatter, may Your presence yet abide
Joy of life and Love of justice, be our Wisdom and our Guide.

Text: David R. Weiss, 2003

Tune: Beethoven, Ninth Symphony, Fourth Movement ("Ode to Joy")

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I wrote this hymn for Maundy Thursday, but it would be appropriate to any service, particularly an evening one, where the Eucharist will be celebrated. I intentionally used the tune of a Christmas Carol . . . both to link Christmas to Holy Week/Easter, but also to emphasize the theme of incarnation as the driving power of Holy Week. This Eucharist is not about Jesus' impending death as a "necessary" or "destined" sacrifice, but about celebrating the life lived . . . and recognizing the impending death as the price exacted by worldly forces for that life . . . and about honoring that life not by remembering its sacrifice but by emulating its compassion.

2. It Was upon a Moonlit Night (Maundy Thursday)

(April 1, 2004)

It was upon a moonlit night/when Jesus broke the bread;
With friends now gathered at his side/in solemn voice he said,
"For, lo, these many days we have/proclaimed the Kingdom at hand;
In turns: at table, by tale, by touch/we've shown God gracious and grand.

"But now the forces of power and hate/make ready to bury this wheat,
Before their deeds are done, my friends/each of you, take and eat."
Then raising high the cup of wine/he looked the room around
And spoke once more of days now past/of children lost now found.

"My friends, the justice of our God/is sealed in gracious love;
As earth gives freely to the vine/so mercy flows above.
Yet 'gainst the mercy we freely shared/oppression has lengthened its reach.
And now, before my blood is spilled/from this cup, drink of you each."

With eyes aflame with fear and faith/did Christ thus finish the meal;
And we who gather at his request—rememb'ring, we render it real.
In mercy breaking the bread he gave/in kindness sharing the cup;
In love encount'ring the least of these/and thereby his wounds we bind up.

. . . In love encount'ring the least of these/and thereby raising Christ up.

Text: David R. Weiss, 2004

Tune: Richard S. Willis, Carol ("It Came Upon the Midnight Clear")

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