Proper 20 (Series B)

"Lord of Glory, You Have Bought Us" (*Lutheran Service Book* #851)

For most of my life I have sung and played this hymn on Stewardship/Pledge Sunday. Whenever I sing it, I find my intellectual memory kicking in so that I can sing most of it without looking at the words. At the same time, I find my muscle memory kicking in as I reach for my wallet and my checkbook. The hymn had a prominent place in the "stewardship" section of most Lutheran hymnals, past and present. *Lutheran Service Book* has, more thoughtfully, placed it in the "society" section. If we understand stewardship as primarily being about money, we miss the more profound call of Scripture and the church's liturgy, and of Jesus himself, to be agents of peace and justice in the world into which we are called by the Spirit of Christ. The channel of Christ-like love is deepened not just by our monetary gifts, but by our lives lived in service to the poor, the needy, the outcast, those who find themselves on the rim of society and of the church.

Here are a few thoughts on each stanza, an attempt to inch beneath the surface of this remarkable hymn.

> *Lord of glory, you have bought us with your lifeblood as the price,*
> *never grudging for the lost ones that tremendous sacrifice;*
> *and with that have freely given blessings countless as the sand*
> *to the unthankful and the evil with your own unsparing hand.*

Everybody gets blessed? The unthankful and the evil? Reminds me of another extraordinary line: "There's a wideness in God's mercy that is wider than the sea."

> *Grant us hearts, dear Lord, to give you gladly, freely of your own.*
> *With the sunshine of our goodness melt our thankless hearts of stone*
> *till our cold and selfish natures, warmed by you, at length believe*
> *that more happy and more blessed 'tis to give than to receive.*

I don't like to include myself with those who have cold and selfish natures, but the hymn reminds me that I am. Thanks be to God for the wideness of his mercy, which includes even me.

> *Wondrous honor you have given to our humblest charity*
> *in your own mysterious sentence, "You have done it all to me."*
> *Can it be, O gracious Master, that you deign for alms to sue,*
> *saying by your poor and needy, "Give as I have given to you"?*

The poor and needy connect us to Jesus. Connected to Jesus is where I want to be. The hymn reminds me where that connection is to be found.

> *Yes, the sorrow and the sufferings which on every hand we view*
> *Channels are for gifts and offerings due by solemn right to you;*

Right of which we may not rob you, debt we may not choose but pay
Lest that face of love and pity turn from us another day.

The acute law/gospel scalpel of the editors of *Lutheran Service Book* has excised this fourth stanza, probably because of some confusing images in the final lines. But I miss the profound image from the beginning of the verse. Our gifts, great and small, put us into the mainstream of Christian charity, a channel whose depth and breadth we cannot control, but in which we are privileged to be included.

Lord of glory, you have bought us with your lifeblood as the price,
never grudging for the lost ones that tremendous sacrifice.
Give us faith to trust you boldly, hope, to stay our souls on you;
but, oh, best of all your graces, with your love our love renew.

Finally, everything is about God's gifts to us, not our gifts to God. Those gifts are packaged in the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus and redistributed to a needy world through our care and concern for our neighbor. May the singing of this hymn rekindle our love for God and our desire to serve others in his name.

All this makes me wonder if we should sing the hymn not as the offerings are being brought forward, but as a congregation leaves its parking lot *en masse* to do a service project in its community.

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Text: Eliza S. Alderson, altered
Tune: HYFRYDOL (Roland H. Prichard)

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