

Canticles of Praise: A Hymn Suite

Music arranged by Randol Alan Bass

Narration written by Craig Dykstra

Narration 1:

Canticles of praise....Hymns of thanksgiving....Prayers of adoration.

When the people of God have traveled a certain distance on their long journey—when the community of faith arrives at a turning point in its history – what do they do?

In every age and circumstance, Christians like ourselves have gathered for worship. They have come together to give thanks and praise to God. They have refreshed their memories of God's saving ways; they have renewed their commitments as God's own people; they have responded as a blessed community, recognizing that every step on their journey has come entirely as a gift from the God who created the universe in the first place, who gathered them as a people and guided them on their way, who sent his own Son to redeem and to save them, and who called them into mission for the healing of the world.

So it is that, at this turning point in our life together, we gather as a congregation to give thanks for the church of which we are part, to remember God's faithfulness through all its years, and, in trust and confidence, to call upon God's guiding hand and tender mercies in all the years to come.

"Praise the Lord," cries the psalmist. "Sing to the Lord a new song, his praise in the assembly of the faithful."

"Be filled with the Spirit," instructs the Apostle Paul. "Sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts, giving thanks to God the Father at all times and for everything in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." (Ephesians 5:18b-20)

I. All Creatures of Our God and King

All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing:
Alleluia, . . .

Thou burning sun with golden beam,
Thou silver moon with softer gleam,
Alleluia . . .

Thou rushing wind that art so strong,
Ye clouds that sail with heaven along,
Alleluia . . .

Thou rising morn, in praise rejoice,
Ye lights of evening, find a voice,
Alleluia . . .

Thou, flowing water pure and clear,
Make music for the Lord to hear,
Alleluia, . . .

Thou fire so masterful and bright,
That giveth us both warmth and light,
Alleluia . . .

And everyone of tender heart,
forgiving others, take your part,
Alleluia . . .
Ye who long pain and sorrow bear,
Praise God and cast on God your care!
Alleluia . . .

And thou most kind and gentle death,
Waiting to hush our latest breath,
Alleluia . . .

Thou leadest home the child of God,
And Christ the Lord our way has trod,
Alleluia . . .

All creatures, your creator bless,
And worship God in humbleness,
Alleluia . . .

Praise, the Father, praise the Son
And praise the Spirit, three in one,
Alleluia . . .

Narration 2:

*Gracious, mighty, and most merciful God,
You created the heavens and the earth.*

*The burning sun, the silver moon,
the rushing wind, the flowing water pure and clear -
Every element in the vast reaches of the entire universe
Is the work of your hand.*

And so, too, are we.

*“When we look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
The moon and the stars that you have established;
What are human beings that you are mindful of them,
Mortals that you care for them?” (Psalm 8:3-4)*

But care you do!

*Your power upholds both the stars and your people. No nation or person is beyond the reach
of your steadfast love and sustaining mercy. From the very beginning to the very end, everything and
everyone is upheld by the grace and power of your everlasting arms.*

*This good news is so surprising and so enlivening that we cannot help but dance and sing when
we hear it truly.*

II. Eternal God Whose Power Upholds

Eternal God whose power upholds both flower and flaming star,
To whom there is no here nor there, no time, no near nor far,
No alien race, no foreign shore, no child unsought, unknown;
O send us forth, Thy prophets true, to make all lands Thine Own!

O God of love, whose Spirit wakes in every human breast,
Whom love, and love alone can know, in whom all hearts find rest.
Help us to spread Thy gracious reign
Till greed and hate shall cease,
And kindness dwell in human hearts, and all the earth find peace!

O God of beauty, oft revealed in dreams of human art,
In speech that flows to melody, in holiness of heart;
Teach us to turn from sinfulness that shuts our hearts to Thee,
Till all shall know the loveliness of lives made fair and free!

O God of righteousness and grace, seen in the Christ, Thy Son,
Whose life and death reveal thy face, by whom Thy will was done:
Inspire Thy heralds of good news to live Thy life divine,
Till Christ is found in every heart and every land is Thine!

Narration 3:

For our sakes and for the sake of the world, God sent his only Son. The ultimate mystery, the profoundest gift: God took human form and became one of us. A child was born and they called him Jesus. He grew in stature and in wisdom. He taught and preached; he healed the sick. They were amazed – and they were perplexed. They adored him – and they hated him. They followed him – and they abandoned him. The depth of his love was a fearsome thing; his surpassing goodness was a terrible threat. And so they crucified him. Those who loved him despaired. Their lives were torn asunder. Their deepest hopes were broken into shards.

“But on the third day, He rose again from the dead!” (From the Apostles Creed)

Beyond hope, beyond comprehension, the risen Christ came amongst them. He came into their dwelling places. He met them on the road and at the seashore. He made himself known to them. He taught and healed them in a new way. And they recognized him!

The cross – the executioner’s tree, which had meant only suffering, death, and utter defeat – became for them and for us the sign of God’s victory, the emblem of new life, the banner of eternal hope. And ever since and forever more, Christians lift high the cross in praise.

III. Lift High the Cross

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim, till all the world adore His sacred name.
Come, Christians follow where our Savior trod, the Lamb victorious, Christ, the Son of God.

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore his sacred name.
Each newborn servant of the crucified bears on the brow the seal of Christ who died.

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore His sacred name.
O, Lord, once lifted on the glorious tree your death has brought us life eternally.

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore his sacred name.
So shall our song of triumph ever be: Praise to the crucified for victory.

Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim till all the world adore His sacred name.

Narration 4:

*Christ be with me, Christ within me,
Christ behind me, Christ before me,
Christ beside me, Christ to win me,
Christ to comfort and restore me.
Christ beneath me, Christ above me,
Christ in quiet, Christ in danger,
Christ in all the hearts that love me,
Christ in mouth of friend and stranger.* (From St. Patrick's Breastplate, 5th century)

So prayed St. Patrick. So, with him, do we pray, too. For Christ the Lord is our good shepherd and the king of love. From everlasting to everlasting, he reigns with God – and by the power of the Holy Spirit he dwells within us and his love surrounds us.

IV. The King of Love

The King of love my shepherd is, whose goodness faileth never;
I nothing lack if I am His and He is mine forever.

Where streams of living water flow my ransomed soul He leadeth,
And where the verdant pastures grow, with food celestial feedeth.

In death's dark vale I fear no ill with Thee, dear Lord, beside Me;
Thy rod and staff my comfort still, Thy loving heart to guide me.

And so, through all the length of days, Thy goodness faileth never:
Good Shepherd, may I sing Thy praise within Thy house forever.

Narration 5:

*Holy God of grace and glory,
In the beginning, you created the universe
And all that dwells within it;
In the course of human history, you called into being a
Covenant people, the people of Abraham and Sarah, of
Moses and the prophets, of Ruth and Naomi, of David
And his lineage;
In the fullness of time, fulfilling your promise, you sent your
Son, you birthed our Savior, you gave us the Christ,
And in the wake of his dying and rising and ascension into
Heaven, your Spirit moved again on Pentecost to create a
new community. Your church was born to bear his name
and to spread the gospel throughout the world.*

We, dear God, are heirs of your providence, followers of Jesus, members of the body of Christ. In our own time and place, we seek to be faithful. We know we cannot do this on our

own. So, guide us, feed us, heal us, lead us. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage. On Thy people pour Thy power.”

V. Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah / God of Grace and God of Glory

Guide me, O Thou great Jehovah, pilgrim through this barren land;
I am weak but though art mighty; hold me with Thy powerful hand.
Bread of heaven, Bread of heaven, feed me till I want no more, . . .

Open now the crystal fountain whence the healing stream doth flow;
Let the fire and cloudy pillar lead me all my journey through;
Strong deliverer, strong deliverer, be thou still my strength and shield, . . .

God of grace and God of Glory, on Thy people pour Thy power;
Crown Thine ancient church's story; bring its bud to glorious flower.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the facing of this hour, . . .

Lo! The hosts of evil 'round us scorn Thy Christ, assail Thy ways.
From the fears that long have bound us, free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, for the living of these days, . . .

Set our feet on lofty places; gird our lives that they may be
armored with all Christian graces, pledged to set all captives free.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, that we fail not them nor thee.

Narration 6:

*In Christ there is no east or west,
In him no north or south;
But one great fellowship of love
Throughout the whole wide earth. (John Oxenham, "In Christ There Is No East or West")*

The breadth of God's love, which in Christ has been shown to be so vast as to have no boundaries, is given to us as a love to share.

We are called – each one of us, and all of us together – to be messengers of mercy, ambassadors of grace, repairers of the broken places, healers of the sick and hurting. Marked by Christ as his disciples, we are sent by him to spread good news, to plant seeds of new life, to raise up the downtrodden, to restore justice, and to make peace among all peoples and nations.

By Christ's command and through the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to be palpable signs and instruments of God's will and hope for the world. We are to be God's hands and feet. Through who we are and by what we do, all the world should feel the very arms of God wrapped 'round them in love and grace.

VI. We All Are One in Mission

We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,
Our varied gifts united by Christ the Lord of all.

A single, great commission compels us from above
To plan and work together that all may know Christ's love.

We all are called for service to witness in God's name;
Our ministries are different, our purpose is the same;

To touch the lives of others by God's surprising grace
So every folk and nation may feel God's warm embrace.

Now let us live united and let our song be heard.
Now let us be a vessel for God's redeeming word.

We all are one in mission, we all are one in call,
Our varied gifts united by Christ the Lord of all.

Narration 7:

“Our God, our help in ages past,” you are indeed “our hope in years to come.” Before there was anything, you were there. After there is everything, you will still be there.

*We live our lives in hope,
because you lead us and sustain us.
We live our lives in joy,
because we taste your goodness even now.
We live our lives in confidence,
because we rest in you.*

*“Our God, our help in ages past,
Our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while life shall last,
And our eternal home.”*

VII. Our God, Our Help in Ages Past

Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Our shelter from the stormy blast, and our eternal home.

Before the hills in order stood, or Earth received its frame,
From everlasting Thou art God, through endless years the same.

A thousand ages in Thy sight are like an evening gone;
Short as the watch that ends the night before the rising sun.

Time like an ever rolling stream, soon bears us all away;
We fly forgotten as a dream dies at the opening day.

Our God, our help in ages past, our hope for years to come,
Be Thou our guard while life shall last, and our eternal home.

Gloria in excelsis Deo.

Amen.