

## Favorite Hymns for September 6, 2020

### **\*Processional: LEVAS #184 “Blessed Assurance”**

*A favorite of Brenda Penner.*

Fanny Crosby, America’s most prolific hymn writer, wrote 8,000 Gospel songs and hymns during a lifetime, which spanned nearly a century. She passed away on February 12, 1915 in her 95th year. All of her days, except the first six weeks, were spent in blindness. However, not even the loss of eyesight could render defeat to this astoundingly courageous soul. Aunt Fanny, as she later was affectionately called, also wrote 1,000+ nonreligious songs, and had four books of poetry and two best-selling autobiographies published.

Frances Jane Crosby was born in Putnam County, New York, on March 24, 1820. A poorly trained doctor applied a mustard plaster poultice to her eyes when she was only six weeks old, rendering her totally blind. Even in her childhood, she realized she had a special gift.

She often said, “I have a jewel...content.”

When only 9 years of age, she wrote:

“O what a happy soul am I,  
Although I cannot see,  
I am resolved that in this world  
Contented I will be.  
How many blessings I enjoy  
That other people don’t.  
To weep and sigh because I’m blind,  
I cannot, and I won’t.”

During her 15th year, she entered the New York Institute for the Blind. Her record there was such that after graduation, she was asked to teach at the institute. She remained on the faculty for 11 years.

She told S. Trevena Jackson her little “love story,” which he recorded in his book, “Fanny Crosby’s Story of Ninety-Four Years,” She said...

“Some people seem to forget that blind girls have just as great a faculty for loving, and do love just as much and just as truly as those who have their sight. When I was about 20, a gifted young man by the name of Alexander Van Alstyne came to our institute. He was also blind and a musician. We soon became very much concerned for each other...I placed my right hand on his left and called him ‘Van.’ From that hour, two lives looked on a new universe, for love met love, and all the world was changed. On March 5 in the year 1858, we were united in marriage... I became a mother and knew a mother’s love, but the angels came down and took our infant up to God.”

One day in 1873, Aunt Fanny was visiting with a friend, Phoebe Palmer Knapp, a musician of sorts and wife of the founder of Metropolitan Life Insurance Company. During their visit Phoebe played a tune on her piano, which she had recently written. She then asked Fanny, "What does this tune say?" After kneeling in prayer for a few moments, she rose and declared, "It says, 'Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!'" and proceeded to recite the entire first stanza of the now-famous hymn.

"Blessed Assurance" was published in 1873 in the monthly magazine edited by Joseph Fairchild Knapp and Phoebe Palmer Knapp, *Guide to Holiness*. Editor John R. Sweney included it in *Gems of Praise* (Philadelphia, 1873), and Knapp also chose it for "Bible School Songs" (1873). Perhaps the biggest boost came when it appeared in *Gospel Songs, No. 5* (1887) by Ira Sankey and was sung extensively in the Moody and Sankey revivals in Great Britain and the United States.

A lifelong Methodist, Crosby captured the poetic essence of the Wesleyan understanding of Christian perfection in the phrase, "O what a foretaste of glory divine!" The entire hymn is focused on heaven, a place where "perfect submission" and "perfect delight" [stanza 2] will take place. The earthly existence is one of "watching and waiting, looking above" [stanza 3]. As we submit ourselves to Christ and are "filled with his goodness" and "lost in his love" [stanza 3], we are remade in Christ's image and are moving toward Christian perfection. This hymn appeals to the senses in a rich way. Not only do we have a "foretaste of glory," we experience "visions of rapture [that] burst on my sight," and we hear "echoes of mercy, whispers of love" [stanza 2].

Because of her long life, Fanny Crosby had an extraordinary relationship with several United States presidents, even penning poems in their honor on occasion, and she was influential on the spiritual life of or a friend to Presidents Martin Van Buren (8th), John Tyler (10th), James K. Polk (11th), and Grover Cleveland (22nd and 24th). She addressed a joint session of Congress on the topic of education for the blind.

The popular song reflects Crosby's walk of faith, as expressed in these scripture passages: by the apostle Paul in Philippians 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (ESV). The refrain calls us to "prais[e]. . . my Savior all the day long," echoing I Thessalonians 5:17, "Pray without ceasing." And from the Hebrew scripture, "Every day will I bless thee; and I will praise thy name for ever and ever." -Psalm 145:2

Tune: *Assurance*

Written by Phoebe Palmer Knapp, a composer who wrote over 500 gospel songs and tunes, and worked with Fanny Crosby on many hymns. Phoebe was the daughter of a doctor and a very famous evangelist mother, Dr. Walter C. and Phoebe Palmer. She married Joseph Fairchild Knapp at the age of sixteen and enjoyed a wealthy lifestyle in New York City, living at the Savoy Hotel after the death of her husband. She was not only a musician, but a philanthropist and social activist also.

1 Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine!  
O what a foretaste of glory divine!  
Heir of salvation, purchase of God,  
Born of His spirit, washed in His blood.

***Refrain:***

This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my savior all the day long;  
This is my story, this is my song,  
Praising my savior all the day long.

2 Perfect submission, perfect delight,  
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight;  
Angels descending, bring from above  
Echoes of mercy, whispers of love. ***Refrain:***

3 Perfect submission, all is at rest,  
I in my savior am happy and blest;  
Watching and waiting, looking above,  
Filled with His goodness, lost in His love. ***Refrain:***



**Recessional: #679 “Surely it is God who saves me”**

**Tune: *Thomas Merton***

*A favorite of Janet Weidman.*

This much beloved hymn is a recent addition to the world of church music. Unfortunately, the history of the hymn is not available; however, there is much information about the composer of the text as well as the tune for they both are well-known contemporary musicians.

Renown composer and Episcopal priest, Carl P. Daw, Jr.’s metrical paraphrase of the First Song of Isaiah is well-known and appears in many hymnals. He is Curator of Hymnological Collections and Adjunct Professor of Hymnology at Boston University School of Theology, and was Executive Director of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada from 1996 to 2009.

Born in 1944, the son of a Baptist pastor, he moved frequently with his father throughout Tennessee during his youth. He obtained his B.A. at Rice University, his M.A. and Ph. D. from the University of Virginia and taught English at the College of William and Mary for eight years before entering the seminary for his M.Div. at the University of the South. After ordination, he served at various parishes throughout the Eastern United States before he began work on hymns.

In addition to his experience as a parish priest and university chaplain, Dr. Daw has served as a retreat leader, speaker, workshop leader, and guest lecturer at many conferences and seminaries throughout the United States. He has been successively Secretary and Chair of the Standing

Commission on Church Music of the Episcopal Church and was a consultant member of the Text Committee for The Hymnal 1982, to which he contributed a number of translations, metrical paraphrases, and original hymns. His texts have subsequently appeared in most denominational and ecumenical hymnals published in the United States and Canada. They also can be found in hymnals in the United Kingdom, Australia, and New Zealand and have been translated into Spanish, German, Chinese, Korean, and Japanese. (In conjunction with his lecture tour of Japan in 2002, the United Church of Christ in Japan published a collection of 25 of his hymns in Japanese.) Anthem settings of approximately seventy of his texts are currently in print. He was a member of the Editorial Advisory Committee for The Hymnal 1982 Companion and wrote the essay on "The Spirituality of Anglican Hymnody" in Volume I and numerous text commentaries in Volume III.

Tune: *Thomas Merton*

Born in 1950, Dr. Ray Urwin is one of the most distinguished church musicians in the United States. He is the composer of two of the most popular hymns in the Hymnal 1982 (679, "Surely It is God Who Saves Me," and S169, "My Flesh is Food Indeed"). He is nationally recognized for his other compositions, which are published by Oxford University Press, Boosey and Hawkes and others.

Surely it is God who saves me;  
    Trusting him, I shall not fear.  
For the Lord defends and shields me  
    and his saving help is near.  
So rejoice as you draw water  
    from salvation's living spring;  
in the day of your deliverance  
    thank the Lord, his mercies sing.

Make his deeds known to the peoples:  
    tell out his exalted Name.  
Praise the Lord, who has done great things;  
    all his works his might proclaim.  
Zion, lift your voice in singing;  
    for with you has come to dwell,  
in your very midst the great and  
    Holy One of Israel.