

## Come, O Thou Traveler Unknown

The United Methodist Hymnal, No. 387

Come, O thou Traveler unknown, who still I hold, but cannot see! My company before is gone, and I am left alone with thee; with thee all night I mean to stay and wrestle till the break of day.

I need not tell thee who I am, my misery and sin declare; thyself hast called me by my name, look on thy hands and read it there. But who, I ask thee, who are thou? Tell me thy name, and tell me now.

In vain thou strugglest to get free, I never will unloose my hold; art thou the man that died for me? The secret of thy love unfold; wrestling, I will not let thee go till I thy name, thy nature know.

Wilt thou not yet to me reveal thy new, unutterable name? Tell me, I still beseech thee, tell, to know it now resolved I am; wrestling, I will not let thee go till I thy name, thy nature know.

'Tis all in vain to hold thy tongue or touch the hollow of my thigh; though every sinew be unstrung, out of my arms thou shalt not fly; wrestling I will not let thee go till I thy name, thy nature know.

What though my shrinking flesh complain and murmur to contend so long? I rise superior to my pain: when I am weak then I am strong, and when my all of strength shall fail I shall with the God-man prevail.

Contended now upon my thigh I halt, till life's short journey end; all helplessness, all weakness I on thee alone for strength depend; nor have I power from thee to move: thy nature, and thy name is Love.

John Wesley ended his obituary tribute to his brother Charles at the Methodist Conference in 1788. "His leas praise was, his talent for poetry: although Dr. Isaac Watts did not scruple to say that 'that single poem, Wrestling Jacob, was worth all the verses he himself had written.'" A little over two weeks after his brother's death, John Wesley tried to teach the hymn at Bolton, but broke down when he came to the lines "my company before is gone, and I am left alone with thee." The poem was first published in the brothers' *Hymns and Sacred Poems* of 1742, expounding Genesis 32:24-32, influenced by Matthew Henry's exposition.

My strength is gone, my nature dies, I sink beneath thy weighty hand, faint to revive, and fall to rise; I fall, and yet by faith I stand; I stand and will not let thee go till I thy name, thy nature know.

Yield to me now—for I am weak but confident in self-despair! Speak to my heart, in blessing speak, be conquered by my instant prayer: speak, or thou never hence shalt move, and tell me if thy name is Love.

'Tis Love! 'tis Love! Thou diedst for me, I hear thy whisper in my heart. The morning breaks, the shadows flee, pure Universal Love thou art: to me, to all, thy mercies move— thy nature, and thy name is Love.

My prayer hath power with God; the grace unspeakable I now receive; through faith I see thee face to face, I see thee face to face, and live! In vain I have not wept and strove— thy nature, and thy name is Love.

I know thee, Savior, who thou art, Jesus, the feeble sinner's friend; nor wilt thou with the night depart, but stay and love me to the end: thy mercies never shall remove, thy nature, and thy name is Love.

The Sun of Righteousness on me hath risen with healing in his wings: withered my nature's strength; from thee my soul its life and succor brings; my help is all laid up above; thy nature, and thy name is Love.

Lame as I am, I take the prey, hell, earth, and sin with ease overcome; I leap for joy, pursue my way, and as a bounding hart fly home, though all eternity to prove thy nature, and thy name is Love.

## **Spiritual Practices and Exercises**

1. Perhaps you have come from a religious background that has, in an unhealthy way emphasized submission, weakness, guilt and self-blame, even self-loathing. Let the story of Jacob's striving, prevailing with God be a liberating word for you.
2. Perhaps you have been in a destructive, hurtful relationship that has torn away at your self-esteem. Hear the word of Joshua 1:9: "Be strong and courageous! Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go."
3. The next time you are in church, open the hymnal to page 363, and read the great Charles Wesley hymn: "And Can It Be That I Should Gain." Here is verse 5: "No condemnation now I dread; Jesus, and all in him, is mine; alive in him, my living Head, and clothed in righteousness divine, bold I approach th'eternal throne, and claim the crown, through Christ my own."
4. Reflect on this quote by L. Kass: "In all intimate struggles - especially within the family - one does not really seek a decisive victory, but rather respect..." What about your latest two arguments, did one party "go for victory?" If so, wasn't it a hollow victory? Family struggles are okay, especially if their goal is greater understanding and greater respect.
5. Jacob said at Bethel, after the ladder experience: "Surely God was in this place and I never knew it. How awesome is this place!" Have we as a culture lost a sense of awe? How might you regain that sense of God's presence "in this place?"
6. Pray for your church, that "Jacob's ladder" might extend down to us each day, and that our entire congregation might be aware of "how awesome is this place!"
7. Give your day to God in prayer; ask Him to guide you through each meeting, each conversation, each appointment, each encounter.
8. The next time you find yourself really, really upset at someone, stop long enough to ask yourself, "Is it possible that the thing I'm upset in her/him, is exactly what's in me that bothers me a lot?"
9. Be aware of the limits of your own self-sufficiency; remember when you turned to God for help because you simply could not do "it" on your own, and be grateful.
10. Pray for the people who are devastated by the hurricane Katrina.