

Music Blurbs for 7-29-18

News and Notes

This week and next at 8:00 a.m. our own Jim Rathvon will provide music for us. At the 10:30 service we welcome Brass Traditions, the brass quartet that is with us for our Christmas and Easter celebrations. Hymns will include "Let us break bread together," and "Guide me, O thou great Jehovah."

Bulletin

"Let us break bread together" is unique in the repertory of African-American Spirituals. According to the *Hymnal Companion*, "'Let us break bread together on our knees' addresses a religious ceremony almost totally foreign to the slave experience, unless, that is, they attended liturgical services." While Louisiana and Maryland would have had considerable numbers of slaves attending Roman Catholic services, little African-American music from the antebellum period is credited to those areas. But there were a number of slaves attending Episcopal services. In South Carolina for example the bishop had more black than white communicants. The text clearly describes an experience of Holy Communion: "Let us break bread together on our knees...When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun, Oh Lord have mercy on me." While it's not your average text for a spiritual, it is structured like one: it has a repeated first line followed by two last lines that act as an internal refrain. While our hymnal uses the most popular verses, there are others, for example: "Let us all pray together on our knees," and "Let us face the cross together on our knees." Also, almost all Anglican/Episcopal churches built before 1800 faced east, so communicants were facing the rising sun. And not only is the "Lord have mercy on me" the text of the "Kyrie eleison," but according to the *Hymnal Companion*, it also reflects the cry of blind Bartimaeus and the Canaanite woman who pleads and argues with Jesus to heal her daughter. Both were heroes in slave religion and song.

The first appearance in print of this song didn't happen until 1899 in a collection called *Old Plantation Songs*. The *Methodist Hymnal* of 1964 was the first mainline denominational hymnal to include this hymn and it first appeared in our denomination in the *Hymnal 1982*.