

Music Blurbs 3-31-2019 - Amazing Grace

News and Notes

This week we'll sing "Love divine, all loves excelling," and top hymn of all time "Amazing grace." At 10:30 we'll also sing an old revival favorite "Blessed assurance," and the choir will sing another Richard Farrant anthem, "Hide not thou thy face from us, O Lord." And there's more organ music by Brahms!

Sunday Bulletins

I am amazed that the quintessential American hymn, "Amazing Grace," did not appear in an Episcopal hymnal until the present 1982 edition! The text and tune have appeared in American hymnals for over 150 years. Our hymnal companion points out that "there is an incredible poignancy in the fact that the author, John Newton, was once a slave-ship captain and that this hymn continues to be sung with intensity by the descendants of those who were shipped as cargo in slave ships like Newton's, as well as by descendants of the ships owners."

The text first appeared in *Olney Hymns* in 1779. Like many of Newton's texts, there is an autobiographical element making reference to his conversion to Christ and turning away from his sinful life of which being a slave trader was just a part, and thanking God's guiding grace in his life.

The tune now associated with this text first appeared in a shape note book *Columbia Harmony* (Cincinnati, 1829). It continued to appear in many of the "Harmony" books so popular in the early 19th century. In 1835 the text and tune appeared together for the first time in the *Southern Harmony* published in the northern city of New Haven Connecticut and given the name NEW BRITAIN, another city in Connecticut, just 40 miles north of New Haven. Ever since it has been in every denominational hymnal in the US (except ours until 1982), it has been translated into many languages, adapted to many cultural styles, been sung and recorded by major artists across generations, and the subject of documentaries. It is probably, I would hazard a guess, one of the top iconic hymns of all time.