

9/18/20

Sometimes when you are sorting through “stuff,” you find the perfect thing at the perfect time ...

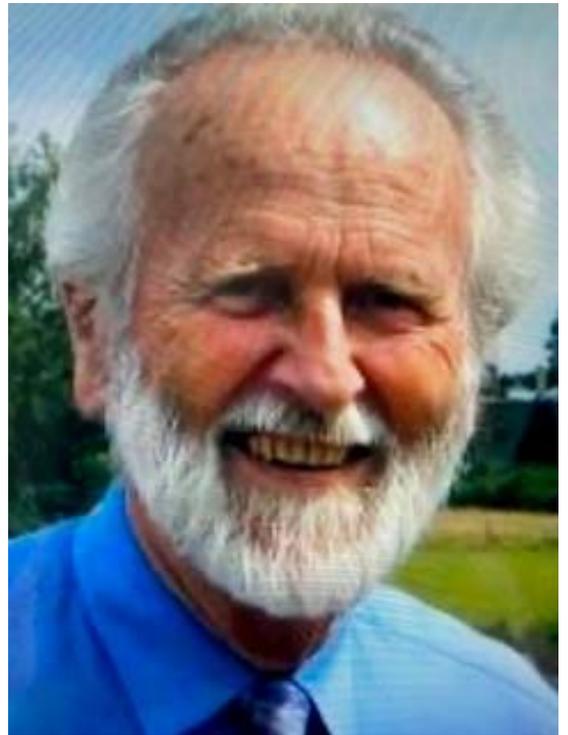
Upon lifting the lid of an old trunk (which I hadn't opened in YEARS!) I spotted a paper with words to a hymn called “The Present Tense”. It begins:

“Thank you, O Lord, for the time that is NOW; For all the newness your minutes allow”

It was the very first thing I saw – almost as if it were placed so I couldn't avoid reading it. A God - message, maybe?

Its author, Fred Kaan, pastor of the Pilgrim Church in Plymouth, England was credited with being part of the hymn -writing “explosion” back in the 1960's and '70's. When a parishioner declared he was leaving the church because the music was STALE AND UNINTERESTING (!) Kaan- along with several others - began writing hymns in “modern” language designed to help the soul catch fire!! His hymns connect the gospel to the struggles we face in our own lives, our communities, and in the world –especially addressing challenges of peace and justice.

Interestingly, he never set foot in a church until his late teens. Born in Haarlem, in the Netherlands, he lived through the Nazi occupation and witnessed the death of three of his grandparents from starvation. His parents, though not churchgoers, harbored refugees at their own peril and were deeply involved in the resistance movement. All this had a profound influence on Kaan who became a pacifist and began attending church in 1947.



The Rev. Fred Kaan (1929 - 2009)

A “pen relationship” with a British Congregationalist ultimately evolved into ministerial training and pastoral ministry in England and Wales – AND hymn writing on a grand scale... his hymns have been translated into more than 15 languages.

So.... what is the message from this hymn? – and why now?

DO YOURSELF A FAVOR AND READ THESE WORDS – perhaps as a prayer ...

The text continues :

“Make us alert with your presence of mind,  
Keep us alert to the claims of (hu)mankind.

Thank you, O Lord, for the time that is past,  
For all the values and thoughts that will last,  
May we all stagnant tradition ignore,  
Leaving behind things that matter no more.

Thank you for hope of the day that will come,  
For all the change that will happen in time;  
Lord, for the future our spirits prepare,  
Hallow our doubts and redeem us from fear.

Make us afraid of the thoughts that delay,  
Faithful in all the affairs of today;  
Keep us, O God, from playing it safe,  
Thank you that now is the time of our life!”

The perfect message for NOW.... As we are all continuing to experience chaos surrounding us from all sides, Kaan’s message from a half century ago is just as relevant today as ever.

It is SO easy to get stuck in the past .... or in worry about what tomorrow or the next months will look like. But— as we (hopefully) glean wisdom from the past and devote our hearts to working for a better future, the only time actually to live is ..... NOW.

Thank you , God, for all the minutes of today!