

In 1873 famed hymnist Frances Havergal, had a spiritual experience that re-started her faith. She wrote, “Yes, it was on Advent Sunday when I first saw clearly the blessedness of true consecration. I saw it as a flash of electric light, and what you see you can never un-see. There must be full surrender before there can be full blessedness.”¹

It was through this experience that the seeds for this beloved hymn were planted.

Shortly thereafter she had the chance to host a number of friends in her home, some who were Christians and some who were not. While they were with her, she prayed that those who were not would be able to know and experience Jesus as she did. By the end of their stay with her, all in the house had done so and desired to be Christians.

It was that night that the seeds of her consecration hymn sprouted and she wrote “Take My Life And Let It Be” all in one sitting.

Now, if you’re like me, you don’t use the word “consecration” all that often in everyday life so you might be needing a bit of definition. This is what I came up with: to consecrate something is to make or declare it for divine purpose.

Even just saying that gives me shivers, because when I read that definition I think about how God made each of us for a divine purpose. Jeremiah 29:11 says, “I know the plans I have for you, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.” Each of us has a divine purpose. And our holy task is discovering what that purpose is throughout our lives.

¹ Then Sings My Soul: 150 of the World’s Greatest Hymn Stories, Robert J. Morgan

Frances Havergal also knew this, because for her consecration was not a one time thing. It was repeated over and over again throughout her life. We often talk about becoming a Christian as something that happens overnight, or in a powerful altar call, or at the time of our baptism. But becoming a Christian and living faithfully as a Christian look pretty different. It takes returning to God, over and over again, rededicating, repenting, re-consecrating to live this faith journey as we ought.

Frances Havergal not only wrote this hymn, but she lived it. She returned to it often throughout her life, especially during Advent each year, and pondered how she herself might be ever more consecrated to God's purposes for her.

Sometimes it was a specific verse- one year she felt compelled to study "Take my voice and let me sing...." And found that she was no longer wanting to sing secular concerts. Her beautiful voice was in demand, but she decided to sing only church music after that. On another occasion she studied, "Take my silver and my gold" and considered her jewelry collection. She decided to sell almost all of it for the Missionary Society. She packed off about 50 articles to the jeweler for sale! Writing to a friend, she wrote, "I don't think I need to tell you I never packed a box with such pleasure."

For Frances, consecration became a process and a journey. It may have been inspired by a specific event but she continued to live her hymn throughout her life in a variety of ways. It inspired her to live ever more simply throughout her life, even though she was born into wealth; to give more and more of her time to God's purposes; to use her talents more and more for the sake of the gospel. I'm

inspired by her example not only of writing this amazing hymn, but living it throughout her life.

As I meditated on this hymn, there were two scriptures that came to mind.

The first is our scripture that we read earlier. This is one of my favorite scriptures and I always have a hard time explaining why. Perhaps it's the joy with which the farmer discovers the treasure. Perhaps it's the total devotion with which the farmer sells all he has and purchases the field. I'm not sure. But I think God wanted me to pair these texts, the farmer and the field with our hymn of the day, for a reason.

I imagine that consecration is like this farmer and the field. It might begin with a huge discovery, but it demands much of us following the discovery. We must sell all that we own. We must give our lives completely to God. And then we must be willing to receive the treasure that God has set aside for us. And sometimes that treasure, that holy purpose with which we are created, is not all that glamorous. And at the end of the day, the farmer still has this one field which needs tending and care and hard, sweaty work. Like I said earlier, it's a process.

This week our youth participated in that process on mission trip, and I hope they began to discover their purpose in life. We worked hard and sweated in the sun, doing the unglamorous work of weeding, spreading manure, turning compost, and tilling ground. We spread gravel and tamped it down so that a picnic area in RMNP became handicap accessible. We considered how blessed we were when we made an entire meal out of leftovers on our last night of mission trip. We considered all week long how we can cultivate a heart for God's creation: to protect and preserve it and share it with others. We spent a week living Frances'

hymn, “take our lives, take our feet, take our hands, take our voices, take our lips, take our love.”

The second scripture that came to mind when I meditated on this hymn turns us toward the communion table. I haven’t been able to get the word “take” out of my mind. So often it can be a harsh word. “I’m gonna take what’s yours” or “Here, take it.” It can be a selfish word when we take for ourselves without concern for others. But what about when we offer ourselves for God to take and use? Is that not a more generous and holy act of consecration? Our scriptures offer an example of how we are to live our lives when we see Jesus at the table when he breaks bread and says, “Take. Eat. This is my body for you.”

We are to offer ourselves to God by giving ourselves to others. This is how we consecrate our lives. By giving them away. May we so live our lives this week. Amen.