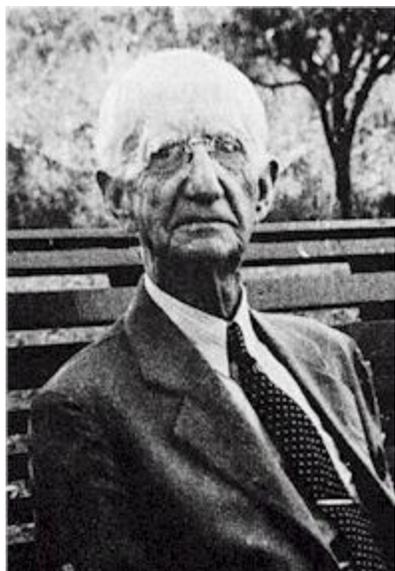


MUSIC NOTES FOR SUNDAY, JANUARY 24, 2021

This Sunday, Eric VanHoven will sing “Great is Thy Faithfulness” as the offertory solo. The poem was written by Thomas Chisholm. This well-known hymn has an interesting story concerning its composition.



A native of the small Kentucky town of Franklin, Thomas Obediah Chisholm (1866-1960) was born in a log cabin. He lacked formal education. Nevertheless, he became a teacher at age sixteen and the associate editor of his hometown weekly newspaper at age twenty-one.

In 1893 Chisholm became a Christian and was ordained a Methodist minister in 1903, he served only a single, brief appointment at Scottsville, Kentucky, due to ill health. Chisholm relocated his family to Winona Lake, Indiana, to recover, and then to Vineland, New Jersey, in 1916 where he sold insurance. He retired in 1953 and spent his remaining years in a Methodist retirement community in Ocean Grove, New Jersey.

By the time of his retirement, he had written more than 1200 poems, 800 of which were published. Many of these were set to music. Chisholm had sent many of his poems to the Rev. William H. Runyan a Methodist minister and musician. Concerning “Great is Thy Faithfulness”, Runyan wrote of the hymn: “This particular poem held such an appeal that I prayed most earnestly that my tune might carry over its message in a worthy way, and the subsequent history of its use indicates that God answered prayer. It was written in 1923.” It was slow to catch on in churches across the United States until Billy Graham began to include the hymn in his crusades.

Looking back on the writing of the hymn, Chisholm recalled in 1941, “My income has not been large at any time due to impaired health in the earlier years which has followed me on until now. Although I must not fail to record here the unfailing faithfulness of a covenant keeping God and that He has given me many wonderful displays of His providing care, for which I am filled with astonishing gratefulness.”

The hymn's first verse is a simple expression of God's unchanging faithfulness, based on Lamentations 3:22 (KJV): “It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.” Verse two continues with an expression of God's faithfulness to us in the natural world He created—the changing of the seasons, the movements of the celestial bodies—all joining together in praise to their Creator. The hymn culminates in the final verse with the testimony of peace that comes through redemption, God's abiding presence in our daily lives, and the blessed hope of heaven. The refrain echoes the infinite faithfulness of God to extend mercy and compassion: “They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lamentations 3:23, KJV).