

The hymn, “He Lives” was composed in 1933 by Alfred Henry Ackley. Alfred Ackley was born on January 21, 1887. His father was a Methodist Minister who provided a strong foundation for him in music. He played the piano and cello.

As a young man, he began composing songs. He felt called to the pastorate and graduated from Westminster Theological Seminary in Maryland. He was ordained as a Presbyterian Minister in 1914. He pastored churches in Pennsylvania and California. He often composed with his brother, Bentley DeForest Ackley. Alfred Ackley even worked alongside evangelist, Billy Sunday for a while.

Compared to many Easter hymns, “He Lives” does not recount the biblical narrative of witnesses to the risen Christ, such as Mary or the disciples on the Road to Emmaus. Neither does the hymn explore classic theological themes of the Resurrection such as Christ the victor over death: “Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?”

There is a strong declamation in the present tense reiterated again and again that “He lives” – six times each the refrain is sung (eight, if you count the echo “He lives” in the men’s voices), a total of eighteen times (or twenty-four with the men’s echo added)! Other forms of this central theme are scattered throughout the song: the participial form in stanza one – “He is living” – and the subject of the pronoun “He” in the refrain – “Christ Jesus lives today.” This is a hallmark of the gospel song. The ultimate confirmation of the song’s central message is not in an intellectual argument, but in a heart-felt faith – “He lives within my heart.”

Rev. Ackley, in telling the story later, said that he preached that Easter Sunday quite differently than he had ever preached before, but at the end of the day, still felt that he had not yet said everything he wanted to say! It was then that his wife encouraged him to do something about it.

He turned to the passage in Mark that described Christ’s resurrection. The words “He Lives” in the passage stuck out to Ackley. He then began to write, as the words flowed from him. In moments, he was at the piano adding music to the words he’d been inspired to write.

The hymn first appeared in Triumphant Service Songs, a hymnal published by the Rodeheaver Company in 1933. It has been a favorite with evangelical congregations since that time.”

Alfred Ackley died on July 3, 1960 in Los Angeles, California. He wrote over 1500 hymns and secular songs in his lifetime.

April 2, 2023

## Psalm 118:14-29

<sup>14</sup> The LORD is my strength and my power;  
the Lord has become my salvation.

<sup>15</sup> **There are joyous songs of victory  
in the tents of the righteous:**

“The right hand of the LORD does valiantly;

<sup>16</sup> the right hand of the LORD is exalted;  
**the right hand of the LORD does valiantly.”**

<sup>17</sup> I shall not die, but I shall live  
and recount the deeds of the LORD.

<sup>18</sup> **The LORD has chastened me sorely,  
but has not given me over to death.**

<sup>19</sup> Open to me the gates of righteousness  
that I may enter through them  
and give thanks to the LORD.

<sup>20</sup> **This is the gate of the LORD;  
the righteous shall enter through it.**

<sup>21</sup> I thank you that you have answered me  
and have become my salvation.

<sup>22</sup> **The stone which the builders rejected  
has become the cornerstone.**

<sup>23</sup> This is the LORD’s doing;  
it is marvelous in our eyes.

<sup>24</sup> **This is the day that the LORD has made;  
let us rejoice and be glad in it.**

<sup>25</sup> Save us, we beseech you, O LORD!

**O LORD, we beseech you, give us success!**

<sup>26</sup> Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the LORD.  
**We bless you from the house of the LORD.**

<sup>27</sup> The LORD is God,  
who has given us light.

**Lead the festal procession with branches,  
up to the horns of the altar.**

<sup>28</sup> You are my God, and I will give thanks to you;  
you are my God; I will extol you.

<sup>29</sup> **O give thanks to the LORD, who is good,  
for God's steadfast love endures forever.**

### **St John 20: 1-18**

Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. <sup>2</sup> Then she ran and came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple, whom Jesus loved, and said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him."

<sup>3</sup> Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. <sup>4</sup> So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. <sup>5</sup> And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. <sup>6</sup> Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, <sup>7</sup> and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. <sup>8</sup> Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. <sup>9</sup> For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. <sup>10</sup> Then the disciples went away again to their own homes.

<sup>11</sup> But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. <sup>12</sup> And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at

the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. <sup>13</sup> Then they said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

She said to them, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him."

<sup>14</sup> Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>15</sup> Jesus said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?"

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, "Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away."

<sup>16</sup> Jesus said to her, "Mary!"

She turned and said to Him, "Rabboni!" (which is to say, Teacher).

<sup>17</sup> Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' "

<sup>18</sup> Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.