

THE CALL

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life:
Such a Way, as gives us breath:
Such a Truth, as ends all strife:
Such a Life, as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength: 5
Such a Light, as shows a feast:
Such a Feast, as mends in length:
Such a Strength, as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart:
Such a Joy, as none can move: 10
Such a Love, as none can part:
Such a Heart, as joys in love.

The Big Picture

This is a petition of pure praise and joy. Usually Christians think of “call” as something initiated by God. Here, the opposite is true. This is a “call” to Jesus to come to the speaker in all of the ways described in the poem.

The Parts of the Picture

Stanza 1. Jesus is addressed in the manner in which he describes himself in John 14:6. Then (as in each stanza) each of the descriptive elements in the first line is given further comment.

Stanza 2. Here are more biblical allusions to Jesus as Light (John 8:12), Feast (probably John 6:53-59), and Strength (possibly John 6:57; Matthew 7:24-25, and/or I Peter 2:4-9). The “Feast” is the centerpiece of this stanza. It is not only a reference to Jesus as the Bread of Life but also to the Eucharist. It is referred to in three of the four lines of the stanza. Jesus as Light reveals the Feast; this Feast “mends” (or makes whole) “in length” or in its lengthening or extending of itself; and it “makes” Strength for the guest of Jesus or the one who partakes of the Feast or the Eucharist. F. E. Hutchinson describes the action here as “the divine light sets off the festival scene; it is a feast which improves as it goes on... and the Eucharistic feast is for ‘the strengthening and refreshing of our souls.’”⁴⁹

Stanza 3. Biblical allusions are here, also. Jesus is Joy which cannot be taken away (John 16:22). Jesus is the Father's expression of Love (John 3:16, among others) from which the speaker cannot be parted (John 10:28-30 and Romans 8:38-39). Jesus is also the speaker's Heart, his centerpiece and the wellspring that enables him to find joy in love. Throughout this stanza, there is an interweaving of Joy and Love as they are mentioned separately in lines 10 and 11 and brought together in line 12. And here, also, is an emphasis on the permanency of the relationship with Jesus that cannot be moved or parted (lines 10 and 11).

The Parts of the Picture Come Together

The poem is remarkable for its sustained focus on Jesus. Every word in this poem is directed to Jesus. He is called ("Come"); he is claimed ("my"); he is characterized (Way, Truth, Life, etc.); and he is praised ("gives us breath," "ends all strife," etc.).

There are at least two movements of thought. First, there is the movement within each stanza. The first line of each stanza, after calling for Jesus to come, characterizes Jesus with three nouns. This description is concentrated tightly with these three nouns that are personalized by the repetition of "my." Each element of this first line of concentrated description is then opened and extended in the next three lines. In the first stanza, for example, Way gives breath, Truth ends strife, and Life kills death. All of this movement from concentration to opening up is accomplished with a constant focus on Jesus.

The second movement of thought is from stanza to stanza. While the attention remains tightly focused on Jesus and the personalized claim on him is never relinquished throughout the poem, the emphasis on Jesus' nature is expanded with each stanza. In the first stanza, there is an emphasis on a central biblical image of Jesus as Way, Truth, and Life. In the second stanza, there are Eucharistic images of Light, Feast, and Strength. Finally, in the third stanza, experiential images of Joy, Love, and the Heart emerge and are given the quality of permanence ("none can move" and "none can part").

All of these movements and images are marvelously woven together in an invitation, a soft plea, a calling for Jesus to come. In one way, it is a Eucharistic prayer for the presence of Jesus. But in a larger way, it is a calling for the Word to become present at any place, at any time, and in a most personal manner, a manner that indeed changes things.

Reflections

1. What does this poem have to say about relationship with God?
2. What spiritual direction does it provide?
3. How do you respond to the characterizations of Jesus in this poem? Which ones are the most appealing to you?
4. This poem is a prayer “calling” Jesus to come. If you were praying such a prayer, how would you go about it? How many of the characteristics of Jesus mentioned in this poem would you use? What others would you add?

Scriptures for further reflection:

John 6:41-59

John 8:12; 12:35-36; and 12:46

John 14:5-6

John 15:1-11

Romans 8:38-39

Philippians 4:13