

We're Marching to Zion



We who love the Lord are to journey together. We are to assemble together for worship. We are to dry each other's tears and bear each other's burdens. Jesus prayed for this unity among his followers in John, chapter 17. But our first order of business seems too often to being clear about what divides us. This is not news. But each time we sing this hymn, with or without its "Marching to Zion" refrain, we are called, again to the unity that was so important to Jesus. It is unity that will let our joys happen and then be known, unity that is, as Isaac Watts termed it, "sweet accord."

Then comes the line that each of the camps in our disunity loves so much: "Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God." It is tempting to use that line as verification that we singers or we singers of our song are the ones who know the Lord. If someone is not singing in worship, we wonder if they know our God. If someone sings a style of music different from ours, we wonder about the validity of their worship. These are not the thoughts of those who issue the call to joy and sweet accord. Neither are these the right readings of this hymn.

Children of the Heavenly King are to speak their joys. This hymn is a call to unity in our diversity and joy in our combined journey. The criterion for joining the journey, for joining the march, is simply to love the Lord. The upward climb of our journey, the hill of Zion yields a thousand sacred sweets and each one of them will produce songs of its particular joy. The number of marchers and singers and songs increases as we move up the hill. Let these diverse songs of joy abound, says Watts, and let every tear be dry. We are to dry each other's tears, not cause them. We are marching over ground and up a hill that belongs to the One whose name is God with us...with us. Each time someone joins the march, each time a new song is added to the journey repertory, we learn more about the God who is with us. Evidently, the fairer worlds will have more people and songs than we have at this level.

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