

## Dear Friends of the Foundation:

One of my favorite hymns is **“Now Thank We All Our God.”**

Now thank we all our God With heart and hands and voices,  
Who wondrous things hath done, In whom His world rejoices;  
Who, from our mothers' arms, Hath blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love, And still is ours today.

O may this bounteous God Through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts And blessed peace to cheer us;  
And keep us in His grace, And guide us when perplexed,  
And free us from all ills In this world and the next!

All praise and thanks to God The Father now be given,  
The Son, and Him Who reigns With Them in highest heaven,  
The one eternal God, Whom earth and heaven adore;  
For thus it was, is now, And shall be evermore.

It was written by Martin Rinkart. I understand that he composed the first two stanzas to be sung as a blessing for a meal. The third stanza is a Trinitarian doxology. Altogether, this hymn is the best expression of thanksgiving of which I know.

You may not know that Martin Rinkart was a Lutheran pastor who served in his hometown of Eilenburg, Saxony, or northern Germany, from his ordination in 1617 until his death in 1649. Those thirty-two years included entirely the Thirty Years War, which embroiled Europe from 1618 to 1648. That war was the context of his entire ministry, of all his preaching, teaching, and caring for the people, of all the hymns he wrote.

The effects of the war are almost incomprehensible. For instance, during that thirty years the population of Germany fell from sixteen-million to six-million. The city of Eilenburg was not spared. It was a walled city, to which thousands of people who had lost everything fled in order to seek protection. But the war, overcrowding, hunger, and disease pursued them even there.

The year of 1637, nineteen years into the war but still eleven years before it was over, was particularly brutal. A pestilence, probably the bubonic plague, devastated Eilenburg. As many as 8,000 people died. The other two remaining ministers died. Martin Rinkart was left there alone to serve the city. That one year he performed 4,480 funerals, sometimes 50 a day. This included the funeral of his wife.

Here was a man who loved and cared for others. Here was a man who lived his Christian faith in actions. Here was a man who served through terrible suffering. Here was a man who bravely pleaded for the well-being of his people before various attackers. Here is the man of such faith that he could write “Now Thank We All Our God.”

I tell you this today, because I yearn for us to be the kind of Christians who keep the faith and who actively love others even under the most difficult and adverse circumstances. We live in a time when our faith may be tested as it has never been tested before. We might learn from those who have gone before us, such as Martin Rinkart.

Grace and Peace,

Dr. James C. Goodloe IV, *Executive Director*

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