Ulrich Zwingli (1484-1531) was the newly appointed People’s Priest, or Leutpriestertum, at Zurich’s Groosmünster church. While visiting the Swiss town of Bad Pfäfers in September 1519 he learned of a new wave of plague devastating Zurich and immediately returned home. Zwingli ministered to the city’s afflicted and himself fell ill. His brother, Andreas, would perish from the disease, along with an estimated quarter to half of all Zurich’s citizens.

Zwingli’s song shows him falling sick, battling the disease, and convalescing. The words speak to his acceptance of divine providence (“Do what Thou wilt; me nothing lacks. Thy vessel am I; to make or break altogether”) and promise a future of faithful acts (“my lips must thy praise and teaching bespeak more than ever before, however it may go”). As a Reformation leader Zwingli went on to oppose longstanding church practices that contradicted his understanding of the Bible, including the veneration of saints and statues, priestly celibacy, and the sale of indulgences.

Although he didn’t write the Plague Song to be performed during worship services, the text can be found in many sixteenth and seventeenth century Protestant hymnals. Zwingli’s words remind us 500 years later that a commitment to others and even personal tribulation can lead to a renewed state of grace.

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The Presbyterian Historical Society joins this effort by sharing Zwingli’s Plague Song in English on page 2 of this insert or at www.history.pcusa.org/rs

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VI

A Christian Song Written by Huldreich Zwingli when he was Attacked by the Pestilence

(End of 1519)

[In this trouble, I think Death is at the door. Stand before me, Christ; For thou hast overcome him! To thee I cry: If it is Thy will, Take out the durt, Which wounds me Nor let me have an hour's Rest or reposeth Will's Thou however That Death take me In the midst of my days,]

I.—At the Beginning of the Illness.

Help, Lord God, help In this trouble! I think Death is at the door. Stand before me, Christ; For thou hast overcome him! To thee I cry: If it is Thy will, Take out the durt, Which wounds me Nor let me have an hour's Rest or reposeth Will's Thou however That Death take me In the midst of my days,

1 In the sense of "protect." 2 The words may also mean equally well, "nothing shall be too much for me." 3 "It's," i.e., my spirit.

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Song Written when Attacked with Pestilence

II.—In the Midst of His Illness.

Console me, Lord God, console me! The illness increases, Pain and fear seize My soul and body. Come to me then, With Thy grace, O my only consolation! It will surely save Everyone, who His heart's desire And hopes sets On Thee, and who besides Despises all gain and loss. Now all is up.

My tongue is dumb, It cannot speak a word. My senses are all blighted. Therefore is it time That Thou my fight Conductest hereafter; Since I am not So strong, that I Can bravery Make respite To the Devil's wiles and treacherous hand. Still will my spirit Constantly abide by Thee, however he rages.

1 f.e., if I had died this time.

III.—During Convalescence.

Sound, Lord God, sound! I think I am Already coming back. Yes, if it please Thee, That no spark of sin Rule me longer on earth Then my lips must Thy praise and teaching Bespeak more Than ever before, However it may go, In simplicity and with no danger. Although I must The punishment of death

1 f.e., to health, to myself.

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