Beside the Lake: Meaning, Scripture, and History

A companion guide to the worship song for Elk Creek Baptist Church, Mineral, Virginia

The Song

Hook: The spring became the lake, and You are here.

Verse 1 They raised a house of wood where the cemetery lies, Then fired their own brick beneath Louisa skies. They crossed the road for water at the spring, Gave the land in pieces as the church grew in. Now the farms and fields lie quiet, deep and wide, And we're singing where they carried buckets, side by side.

Pre-Chorus Light through the glass, and leaves along the shore, A cross above the water and an open door.

Chorus The spring became the lake, and You are here, Jesus on the shore through every year. From the meeting house to the lakeside, You've never left Your people's side. Let the water tell what grace has done: Down to die and rise in the Son. The spring became the lake, and You are here.

Verse 2 They dammed the creek in eighteen thirty-four To wade each new believer to the shore. Then came the bigger dam in nineteen seventy-two, Planned for three years, and eighteen months came through. Now steps go down the dock into the blue, And the water's waiting still for someone new.

Bridge Jesus, You never waited for us at the door, You met us where we were, along the shore. Two hundred miles of shoreline, and the radio carries through, Boats drift in to listen, and those who'd never come can hear You too. The lake is young, the Lord is older, Every stone behind us says You kept Your word. What You began beside the creek, You'll finish by the shore.

Outro The spring became the lake... Before the lake, You were here... Jesus, You are here.

The Big Idea

The song tells one story at three scales: a small spring that became a large lake, a small meeting house that became a congregation of more than a century and a half, and a small seed of faith that becomes a new life in Christ. In each, the surprise is the same. What began small ended up larger than anyone planned, and the Lord was present at every stage.

Five Meanings in the Song

1. Small beginnings, large grace

The church's own history says its spring "is now a part of Lake Anna." The spring across the road, where members once drew water for long meetings, lies under the lake they now worship beside. The lake itself was expected to take about three years to fill and filled in roughly eighteen months. The song treats this as a picture of grace that arrives faster and fuller than planned.

- **Scripture:** Ephesians 3:20 speaks of God doing "immeasurably more" than we ask or imagine. John 4:14 pictures the water Jesus gives as a spring welling up to eternal life.

2. Baptism: dying and rising

The chorus's closing couplet, "Down to die and rise in the Son," follows your Articles of Faith, which describe baptism as signifying "our dying to sin and our being raised into new life in Christ." The history shows how seriously the church has taken water for baptism: a temporary dam across Elk Creek in 1834, a prepared place in 1853, farm ponds, a borrowed pool, and now steps on the lakeside dock. The brand's blue wave also stands for baptism.

- **Scripture:** Romans 6:3-10 (cited in Article 6 of the Constitution); Romans 10:9; Matthew 28:19, where baptism is in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

3. Welcome and mission: meeting people where they are

The 1814 deed gave the meeting house land "for all and duly ministers of the gospel of every denomination to preach in." Today the lakeside service reaches boats anchored offshore, which tune in by radio, and people online through the Mixlr stream. The mission statement speaks of "all the people of the Lake Anna area and surrounding communities." The bridge turns the song outward: Jesus did not wait at the door but met people along the shore.

- **Scripture:** Luke 5:1-3, where Jesus teaches the crowd on the shore from a boat, the same shape as a service with people on the bank and boats nearby. John 21:4, where the risen Jesus stands on the shore at daybreak. Isaiah 55:1, "Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters." Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before others," which the brand document uses. Revelation 3:8, an open door.

4. Remembrance: stones that witness

"Every stone behind us says You kept Your word" points at the cemetery, where the church's members rest, including fifteen Civil War soldiers whose markers are decorated each Veterans Day, and at the brick sanctuary raised in 1848-49. It also echoes the church's long habit of recording its story: the clerks' minute books, the 1988 history, and the 2013 bicentennial history.

- **Scripture:** Joshua 4:6-7 and 4:21-24, where stones set up beside a crossing are a memorial so children will ask what they mean. Hebrews 12:1, a great cloud of witnesses.

5. The Lord is older than the lake

The church was organized in 1813. Lake Anna was built in the early 1970s. The song says plainly that the lake is the newcomer and that the Lord was here first and will be here last. This gives the congregation confidence that their faith does not depend on the setting, however beautiful.

- **Scripture:** Psalm 90:2, "from everlasting to everlasting you are God." Hebrews 13:8, Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Philippians 1:6, the One who began a good work will complete it, which is the song's last line.

Line-by-Line: Where Each Image Comes From

Verse 1

- **"A house of wood where the cemetery lies":** The history says the first wooden meeting house stood in the area of the present cemetery, and the brochure agrees.
- **"Fired their own brick":** In 1848, the church was granted leave to make brick on neighboring land for the new sanctuary, built 1848-49.
- **"Crossed the road for water at the spring":** The church spring and spring house sat across the road, and the sexton maintained them.
- **"Gave the land in pieces":** The brochure says the property was donated in pieces as the church grew. Deeds in 1814, 1848, 1899, 1975, and 1984 record it. (Romans 12:6-8, which the brochure quotes on gifts and generosity, is the scriptural echo.)
- **"Farms and fields lie quiet":** The history's conclusion notes that much of the area of the old plantations is now covered by the waters of Lake Anna.
- **"Carried buckets":** The minutes record water buckets bought for the long protracted meetings.

Pre-Chorus

- **"Light through the glass":** The sanctuary's stained glass window, added around 1914 in memory of B. F. Vaughan, is the source of the brand's colors.
- **"Leaves along the shore":** The lakefront trees, and the green in the logo.
- **"A cross above the water":** The logo's cross rises above the lettering. The cross draped in white cloth at the lakefront appears in both the brochure and the 2013 history.
- **"An open door":** The 1814 deed's welcome to ministers of every denomination, and the church's mission to everyone around the lake.

Chorus

- **"From the meeting house to the lakeside":** The two homes of the congregation, the 1813 Elk Creek Meeting House and the Lakeside Chapel, where services began on June 1, 2005.
- **"Jesus on the shore":** The risen Lord in John 21, and the brochure's mission to share the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Verse 2

- **"Dammed the creek in eighteen thirty-four":** The minutes show the deacons were ordered to make a temporary dam across Elk Creek for baptism.
- **"The bigger dam in nineteen seventy-two":** North Anna Dam, which created Lake Anna. The lake was expected to take three years to fill and filled in about eighteen months.
- **"Steps go down the dock":** The history records steps added to the dock so baptisms can take place in the lake. An 8-slip pier was built in 2007 and steps and a path in 2009.

Bridge

- **"Two hundred miles of shoreline":** The lake's shoreline length, from the Lake Anna history. About 120 communities surround it.

- **"The radio carries through, boats drift in":** The brochure says a radio signal is broadcast so boats just off shore can tune in.
- **"Began beside the creek, finish by the shore":** Elk Creek, the origin of the church's name, and the lakeside where it worships today.

What the Song Leaves Out, and Why

A worship song can carry a handful of images. It cannot carry the whole record, and the 2013 history includes difficult material that deserves its own treatment: the church's early rules limiting votes to free-born male members, the nearly 200 Black members who attended before the Civil War and who left in 1867 and 1869 to form Laurel Hill Baptist Church, and the period of church discipline. The song's "open door" is a hope and a promise for today. It is more honest and more credible when the congregation also knows the whole story, including that the words "free born" were erased from Article 3 in 1886. If the church wants, a teaching time or a bulletin insert could connect the song to those sections.

The song also leaves out the nuclear station, the dam's engineering, and the fish, which are accurate but would pull attention away from worship.

Notes for Worship Leaders

- **Feel:** Mid-tempo, around 82 BPM, acoustic guitar and keys with drums entering at the pre-chorus.
- **Key and range:** G major, roughly C to A. The verses sit low; the chorus lifts on the hook.
- **Participation:** The hook is eight syllables and returns three times in the chorus. The outro can be sung from memory with the band dropping out.
- **Seasonal use:** The song works at the lakeside from May through September and indoors in the sanctuary in winter. The dock and baptism verse suits a baptism service.

Sources

- *History of Elk Creek Baptist Church, 1813-2013* (originally by Claudia A. and Louis P. Chisholm, 1988; updated by Betty Harris Claveloux and Penny Jenkins, 2013).
- Elk Creek Baptist Church brochure.
- *Constitution and By-laws, Revision #8 (April 2021)*.
- "Do We Need a Church Brand?" (the church's brand document).
- "Lake Anna," Wikipedia.