



O Sacred Head, Now Wounded

This is one of the great Lenten hymns. “O sacred Head, now wounded, with grief and shame weighed down.” Jesus the Christ is pictured in the anguish of his suffering on the cross. There is no easy resolution offered in this hymn. No subtle winking toward the resurrection. Brutally torn apart, bleeding out, Peace has taken his last breath. Here for all to see on full display is the crushed Hope of Humanity.

There is a large resistance to staying in this tension. Jesus himself even pleaded with the Father in Gethsemane to find any other way than hanging on the cross of this tension. The cross is a place of pain, brokenness, suffering, vulnerability and ultimately death. Is it any wonder that we are quick to move beyond it?

Yet the Apostle Paul understood in Philippians 3 that he had to experience both the power of Christ’s resurrection and the fellowship of his suffering. The cross is literally a space between heaven and earth. It is an in-between place of transition and of transformation if we stay there long enough.

The second stanza is filled with grief that the Beloved Son of God has suffered on behalf of transgressing humanity. The cry “mine, mine was the transgression” is particularly visceral for many as the weight of the pain of our salvation on Christ is reflected upon. “Lo, here I fall, my Savior!” We are all overcome by the gravity of the suffering of the Son of God on our behalf.

“What language shall I borrow to thank Thee, dearest Friend...?” When we reflect on the cross we are finally speechless. This third stanza brings us to the horrors humanity has designed to inflict suffering upon one another that have been unleashed on the spotless Lamb of God. We are overcome with sorrow that we could be so cruel to anyone, let alone the Prince of Peace. Yet our Friend who sticks closer than a brother went willingly.

What needs to be put to death in my own life that I might truly live? Lent is a time where as a community we ponder this question. Lent is a season where we walk with Jesus toward the cross. As disciples of Christ, we indeed do know the rest of the story, but those first disciples initially knew only pain. Do we dare join in solidarity to drink from the bitter cup of Christ’s suffering with them?

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