O Sacred Head Now Wounded (LSB 450)

Good Friday

Some of the best sermons that you hear on Sundays (besides mine of course) are the hymns that you sing. These are the sermons that have withstood the trials of time and still continue to proclaim the gospel to our ears and the best part is that these biblical truths are proclaimed through your own mouths. Personally, this is what I would do when I come to church (if I am not leading worship), I would intentionally come a bit earlier and check out the hymns that we will be singing because I want to know what I am singing, what is coming out of my mouth so that I am not just a parrot, mindlessly saying things. And so today's sermon will be based on the hymn "O Sacred Head".

The hymn is actually based on one part of a medieval poem written in the 13th century, which described the 7 body parts of Christ on the cross: feet, knees, hands, side, breast, heart, and head. The poem was later translated into German in the 17th century by a Lutheran pastor and hymn writer Paul Gerhardt (17 hymns in LSB). But it's the last part of this poem concerning the head of Christ that became the famous hymn today. This hymn was then translated into English about a century later by John Gambold, which is the version that we have today. This hymn has become so popular that it's found in many hymnals today outside of Lutheran circles.

The tune on the other hand actually was a secular one, but like any sacred music, it's not the tune that makes it sacred, it's the words, the lyrics, the message that it proclaims. So what is this hymn telling us on this good Friday?

**1**

**O sacred Head, now wounded, With grief and shame weighed down,  
Now scornfully surrounded With thorns, Thine only crown.  
O sacred Head, what glory, What bliss, till now was Thine!  
Yet, though despised and gory, I joy to call Thee mine.**

Joy. This hymn is a hymn of joy. It's not a dirge or a funeral song or even a requiem. Good Friday service is not a funeral service for Jesus, for us to feel sorry for him. Certainly we feel sad that death occurred but greater is the joy because his death is our death. Jesus did not do this reluctantly, no he embraced his cross with joy because he loves us.

**2**

**How pale Thou art with anguish, With sore abuse and scorn!  
How doth Thy face now languish That once was bright as morn!  
Grim death, with cruel rigor, Hath robbed Thee of Thy life;  
Thus Thou hast lost Thy vigor, Thy strength, in this sad strife.**

The joy is in the this glory and majesty, though it's not the outward kind, which Peter misunderstood on the mount of transfiguration. Indeed, on that mountain Jesus' face was brighter than the sun, and Peter said that it is good to be here. Who would have thought that here this anguished, abused and bruised face, this suffering and dying face is more glorious and majestic? Indeed on that mountain he had Moses and Elijah on his left and right, but who would have thought that the kingdom of God actually came at his death, with thorns as crown, with criminals sitting on his right and left? But we now see it in faith and we rejoice that his kingdom has come and reigns in our hearts through his death on the cross.

**3**

**What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered Was all for sinners’ gain;  
Mine, mine was the transgression, But Thine the deadly pain.  
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!’ Tis I deserve Thy place;  
Look on me with Thy favor, And grant to me Thy grace.**

What more needs to be said after this verse but to rejoice and be glad? For this is the day that the lord has made! What is mine became his and what belongs to Christ is now ours. Luther called this the happy exchange. It's happy because Jesus was willing to do this for us, and we are happy to receive for that's all we can do.

**4**

**My Shepherd, now receive me; My Guardian, own me Thine.  
Great blessings Thou didst give me, O Source of gifts divine.  
Thy lips have often fed me With words of truth and love;  
Thy Spirit oft hath led me To heav’nly joys above.**

This is joy for the one who dies is not just a lamb, but also the good shepherd who leads still in death and through death. He is the firstfruits of the dead for we know in three days he will rise again. His is the first but not the last. He is the first one to go through death and rise again to eternal life, but we also in following this shepherd, feeding from his flesh and blood, we too will rise to newness of life to eternity.

**5**

**What language shall I borrow To thank Thee, dearest Friend,  
For this Thy dying sorrow, Thy pity without end?  
O make me Thine forever! And should I fainting be,  
Lord, let me never, never, Outlive my love for Thee.**

Here we finally understand why this is not a funeral song for Jesus. This is not about us feeling sorrow and having pity for this poor thing suffering on the cross. It is his pity, his sorrow for us. We are the pitiful ones. We are the ones that we should be sorry. We are the poor and miserable sinners. But out of pity, out of love and compassion, he is nailed to that cross, dying.

**6**

**My Savior, be Thou near me When death is at my door;  
Then let Thy presence cheer me, Forsake me nevermore!  
When soul and body languish, O leave me not alone,  
But take away mine anguish By virtue of Thine own!**

These are the words of that thief beside him. Indeed, even with faith we must still die, but we are not alone, death is no longer separation from God. This is the joy that we have in seeing his death for we are united with Christ in death and resurrection. His promise to that thief is for us also: today you will be with me in paradise.

**7**

**Be Thou my consolation, My shield, when I must die;  
Remind me of Thy passion When my last hour draws nigh.  
Mine eyes shall then behold Thee, Upon Thy cross shall dwell,  
My heart by faith enfold Thee. Who dieth thus dies well.**

The death of Jesus is joy for us for when we too must die, we have Jesus. When our eyes shall finally close, when we draw our finally breath, there he is with us, we shall see him, we shall have the breath of life. This is our joy for death no longer has power over us. Sin cannot kill us. Satan can no longer accuse us. This is the message of this hymn for Good Friday. It is to understand why Jesus was on the cross. It was for us because we are the ones who needed help, we are the ones dying. And so now is the time to repent, now is the time to look at our sins and be sorrowful, and then in faith look to the cross and see that God has dealt with us compassionately by putting his son to die for us. Lay all your sins and guilt and death upon him. Do not hide and deny your sins like our first parents, but hide in the cross of Jesus, hide in the lamb who covers us with his blood.