

Fifth Sunday in Lent

“My Song is Love Unknown” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #430)

Of all of the seasons of the Church Year, in many ways Lent is the most intensely personal. While there may be some times throughout the year when we view the work of Jesus in a more general way, recalling that His mission on earth was to bring salvation to all mankind, in the weeks focusing on the Passion of our Lord our perspective narrows. Jesus has come to suffer and die not only for everybody but for my body—for me! It is no surprise that some of the best known and loved Lenten hymns have the “first person pronoun” repeated frequently as part of the devotional content of the verse. With faith-filled appreciation for the sacrificial work of Christ on our behalf we sing “When I survey the wondrous cross” and “My faith looks up to Thee, Thou Lamb of Calvary.” And, with British hymn writer Samuel Crossman in another great hymn of Lent we sing “My song is love unknown.”

Although written more than three centuries ago by a British clergyman who served as chaplain to the King of England for a number of years, the text has a contemporary sense to it. Each of us has a song to sing in our lives and with our lives. That song may be all about ourselves and our abilities, deeds and accomplishments, a song of self-praise that begins and ends with us. But that kind of empty song soon fades away amid the noise and clamor of earthly life and soon ends in silence. With well-chosen and humble words, Samuel Crossman serves as our chaplain and brings to us a song that is very much ours, but is not all about us. He shares with us the song of “love unknown,” that is the wondrous love of Jesus our Savior, who left His heavenly throne to bring us the gift of salvation and a renewed positive relationship with His heavenly Father.

In commenting on the verses by Crossman, Dr. Fred Precht, a noted Lutheran hymn scholar, described the hymn as “This beautiful Lenten text, with its strong, naïve directness and charm....” When Samuel Crossman writes of the saving work of Jesus as “love unknown” he is stating the reality that in truth the work of Jesus for me and for us is nearly beyond comprehension. Such love was not known on

earth before Jesus came here as the divine offering to pay the price of sins and such love has never been known since. But by the working of the Holy Spirit we know that amazing, forgiving and everlasting love. By God's grace that song of love unknown is our song for time and for eternity!

Rev. Gregory J. Wismar

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My song is love unknown, my Savior's love to me,  
love to the loveless shown that they might lovely be.  
Oh, who am I that for my sake  
my Lord should take frail flesh and die?

He came from his blest throne salvation to bestow;  
But men made strange, and none the longed-for Christ would know.  
But, oh, my friend, my friend indeed,  
who at my need his life did spend!

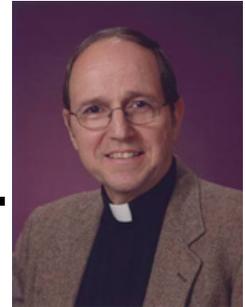
Sometimes they strew his way and his sweet praises sing;  
resounding all the day hosannas to their King.  
Then "Crucify!" is all their breath,  
And for his death they thirst and cry.

Why, what hath my Lord done? What makes this rage and spite?  
He made the lame to run, he gave the blind their sight.  
Sweet injuries! Yet they at these  
themselves displease and 'gainst him rise.

They rise and needs will have my dear Lord made away;  
A murderer they save, the Prince of Life they slay.  
Yet cheerful he to suff-ring goes  
that he his foes from thence might free.

In life no house, no home, my Lord on earth might have;  
in death no friendly tomb but what a stranger gave.  
What may I say? Heav'n was his home  
But mine the tomb wherein he lay.

Here might I stay and sing, no story so divine!



Never was love, dear King, never was grief like thine.  
This is my friend, in whose sweet praise  
I all my days could gladly spend!

Text: Samuel Crossman, c. 1624-83 The text is in the public domain.

[This devotion was prepared for the website for the Center for Church Music. It may be downloaded and replicated for local use.]