

Second Sunday in Lent

“Lord, Thee I Love with All My Heart” (*Lutheran Service Book*, #708)

(Dedicated to the memory of Thomas Gieschen
at whose memorial service this hymn found rich expression.)

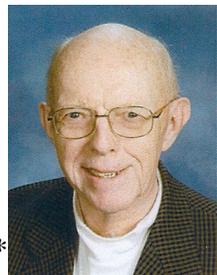
“Why did you marry me,” she asks. “So that we would not, neither of us, be lonely any more” he answers. Not all that romantic; but all the more true. And through the years they grew to love and to like each other. Except in those times when champions of her favorite professor and champions of his favorite professor were at odds with each other. While their professors had been great friends (the elder learning from and mentoring the younger) and had worked together lovingly to develop an appropriate balance of Law and Gospel in their efforts to disciple and to discipline themselves and those for whom they felt responsible, those who championed them had grown apart and the alienation was a real burden to them!

A look at Martin Schalling’s resume’ suggests that something like that might have been the dynamic in his ministries that moved him to write this hymn. When it wasn’t Calvinist leaning nobles in their regulation of the clergy, it was the issue of his not signing the *Formula of Concord* in support of those who championed the work of his beloved Melancthon that may have led Schalling to sing: “And should my heart for sorrow break” (stanza one) or “Let no false doctrine me beguile; let Satan not my soul defile” (stanza three). What love was needed in times like that!

From where might such abiding love come? It is recognized that Psalms 18:2-3 and 73:26 informed Pastor Schalling’s singing, “Herzlich lieb hab’ ich dich, o Herr” in lines eight and nine of stanza one in the German the “marvelous piling up of images of divine protection and deliverance” (“mein’ Zuversicht, mein Teil und meines Herzens Trost) echo Psalm 18:2 and celebrate with stanza three, as it were, I am “erloest” SET FREE. And all this (in lines ten and eleven) through the blood of Christ! LSB editors chose to associate 1 John 4:19, “We love because God first loved us” with this hymn. There we have it! Such is the abiding love by which we truly live.

Stanza three has led “Herzlich lieb” to be regarded as a *Sterbelied* (song for the dying), and if you have ever sung it (or heard it sung) in the Hassler double-choir setting, you may well have felt transported, as it were, with the angels to the heights. Still, the first two stanzas beg to be sung, I believe, as living response to that great love seen in the texts for the day in the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. For this reason “I will praise God without end” and invite you to do the same.

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Notes: Among the many recordings available, *Heirs of the Reformation: Treasures of the Singing Church* has the double choir setting by Hans Leo Hassler as well as the whole hymn in a setting by Donald Busarow. Bach used the tune as a trumpet obbligato in the tenor aria in Cantata BWV 19; in BWV 149, 174, & 245 (St. John Passion); and on the stand-alone chorale BWV 340 & organ setting BWV 1115 .

I am indebted to the meticulous editorial assistance of Dr. Lia C. Gerken; and to Prof. Dr. William J. Urbrock for helping me to connect the German of Psalms 18 and 73 with the German text of the hymn.

Lord, thee I love with all my heart; I pray thee, ne'er from me depart,
with tender mercy cheer me.
Earth has no pleasure I would share. Yea, heav'n itself were void and bare
if thou, Lord, wert not near me.
And should my heart for sorrow break, my trust in thee can nothing shake.
Thou art the portion I have sought; thy precious blood my soul has bought.
Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and Lord,
forsake me not! I trust thy Word.

Yea, Lord, 'twas thy rich bounty gave my body, soul, and all I have
in this poor life of labor.
Lord, grant that I in ev'ry place may glorify thy lavish grace
and help and serve my neighbor.
Let no false doctrine me beguile; let Satan not my soul defile,
give strength and patience unto me to bear my cross and follow thee.
Lord Jesus Christ, my God and Lord, my God and Lord,
in death thy comfort still afford.

Lord, let at last thine angels come, to Abr'ham's bosom bear me home,
that I may die unfearing;
and in its narrow chamber keep my body safe in peaceful sleep
until thy reappearing.
And then from death awaken me, that these mine eyes with joy may see,
O Son of God, thy glorious face, my Savior and my fount of grace.
Lord Jesus Christ, my prayer attend, my prayer attend,
and I will praise thee without end.

Text: Martin Schalling, 1532-1608; English translation by Catherine Winkworth.
Tune: HERZLICH LIEB

Both text and tune are in the public domain.

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