

Passiontide- The Raising of Lazarus

The hymn ends in the triumph of love and the reign of God throughout all time and place. It juxtaposes sorrow and healing, mercy and shame, mockery and loving embrace. It also refers back to the Garden of Eden – naked shame- which is replaced by God's loving embrace and reminds me of Psalm 91 He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his ... Let me dwell in Your tent forever and take refuge in the shelter of Your wings.

The writer uses the repetition of the phrase '*they could not know*' perhaps to reflect Jesus words from the cross 'Father forgive them for they know not what they do.' But also to emphasise the point that they could not know, but we do! We are therefore encouraged to act differently in the light of God's loving reign.

Praying a hymn

One way of 'reading hymns' is to actually pray them. Say them aloud slowly and intentionally in the presence of God. I used the following questions to help me understand and pray the hymn that Malcom had chosen for Passion Sunday, allowing God to speak to me through it. Why not try praying with one of your favourites?

- What patterns do you notice, in the hymn, that draw your attention?
- What symbols in the hymn do you notice from the Bible? Why have these been chosen? Which speak to you?
- How is the hymn appropriate for the church and society today?
- Spend some time in prayer talking to God about what you notice. Let God speak to you through the hymn!
- Look up the hymn on You Tube or hum it.. How does the tune help you to understand the emphasis of the hymn?



John Reilly

**Her eyes are homes of silent prayer,
Nor other thought her mind admits
But, he was dead, and there he sits,
And he that brought him back is there.**

**Then one deep love doth supersede
All other, when her ardent gaze
Roves from the living brother's face,
And rests upon the Life indeed.**

**All subtle thought, all curious fears,
Borne down by gladness so complete,
She bows, she bathes the Saviour's feet
With costly spikenard and with tears.**

**Thrice blest whose lives are faithful prayers,
Whose loves in higher love endure;
What souls possess themselves so pure,
Or is there blessedness like theirs?**

Excerpts from Tennyson – In Memoriam

Readings: John 11 v 1-45 Romans 8 v 6-11

Passiontide is just the beginning of the drama of the last weeks of Jesus life and we are reminded of the need for our own daily conversion to God's grace. We enter deeper through the sorrow to find Easter Joy- Lazarus dies and is raised. Have you stood, sat or knelt in sorrow with others? Have you shared in the pain of a dying loved one? Have you been touched held or embraced by another's love or pain? These are all precious for we are rooted and grounded in bodily existence. Lazarus means God helps. Jesus oneness with God is the source of Lazarus raised body. He demonstrates with thanksgiving his authority. It is the last of the signs in John's gospel and a foreshadowing of his own Resurrection.

'Lazarus' resuscitation, stands for the community's daring affirmation that it is belief in Jesus as Messiah and Son of God, the Logos of God, that enables them to claim their right to abundant life, that is, to full participation in the life of God's reign. (Osvaldo Vena)

PASSION SUNDAY HYMN

To mock your reign, O dearest Lord,
they made a crown of thorns;
set you with taunts along that road
from which no-one returns.
They could not know, as we do now,
how glorious is that crown:
that thorns would flower upon your brow,
your sorrows heal our own.

In mock acclaim, O gracious Lord,
they snatched a purple cloak;
your passion turned, for all they cared,
into a soldier's joke.

They could not know, as we do now,
that, though we merit blame,
you will your robe of mercy throw
around our naked shame.

A sceptred reed, O patient Lord,
they thrust into your hand,
and acted out their grim charade
to its appointed end.

They could not know, as we do now,
though empires rise and fall,
Your kingdom will not cease to grow
till love embraces all.

There are several wonderful hymns about the Passion, including possibly the greatest of them all, *When I survey the wondrous Cross*. Here is a modern one you may not have met yet. Fred Pratt Green (1903 - 2000) was a Methodist minister who wrote many hymns. There is a whole library in his memory at Durham University, consisting only of books of, and about, hymns. It is a big library. These beautiful and sensible words are sung to a tune 500 years older, by Thomas Tallis. Malcolm Sturgess.

Revd Becky's reflection on the hymn.

The first verse of this hymn begins with *Dearest Lord*.. It highlights the difference between how precious God is and how destructively God was treated. The phrases could deliberately emphasise the love of the hymn writer for our Lord and set the tone for worshipful love. I wonder whether the phrase was a device often used in hymn writing of that era such as in 'Dear Lord and Father' similar to how we may say Loving God or Precious Lord.

The hymn is about sacrificial missional love. It begins with God's reign being mocked at the time of the crucifixion in the first line – the mockery is symbolised with the crown of thorns, royal cloak and sceptre reed.