

Upon the Cross Extended

Isaiah 53:4

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

During this lenten season we have been taking an in depth look at some familiar lenten hymns. The hymn before us this evening is *Upon the Cross Extended* written by Paul Gerhardt.

First some background about Paul Gerhardt. He not only wrote this hymn, he also wrote 125 other hymns, 18 of which are included in our current hymnal. Some of the other well-known hymns he wrote include:

O Lord How Shall I Meet You
O Jesus Christ, Your Manger Is
Come, Your Hearts and Voices Raising
A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth
I Will Sing My Maker's Praises
Lord, When Your Glory I Shall See
If God Himself Be for Me
Now Rest Beneath Night's Shadow, and others

He is one of the most prolifically included hymn writers in Lutheran hymnody.

Let's learn a little about him. He was born March 12, 1607 (his 402nd birthday was just last week) in Gräfenhainichen, a small village a few miles south of Wittenberg, Germany. His father was a town mayor who died when Paul was very young. His mother was the daughter of a pastor, whose father was also a pastor. From 1622-1627 he attended the elector's school in Grimma. The school's stated aim was to instill in student's "Gottesfurcht und gute Sitte" ("the fear of God and good manners or morals").

From 1628 until 1634 he attended Wittenberg University, where Luther has once taught. In 1637, amid the horrors of the Thirty Years' War, he witnessed his own home, four hundred buildings and the town church burned to ashes by the Swedish army. This was done in spite of the fact that the town had raised the 3,000 gulden the enemy has demanded. Later that summer the plague killed over 300 townspeople.

He was in Wittenberg until 1642 or 1643 poised for the ministry but no assignment came. He lived in Berlin for 8 or 9 years where he was a tutor for a wealthy attorney's children. He married Anna Maria Barthold in 1655. Of course now all grown up, she had been one of the children he had tutored.

It was in Berlin when he began writing hymns. Here he also met Johann Crüger, another prolific Lutheran hymn writer. Crüger was the first to publish some of Gerhardt's hymns.

Shortly before he was married he was ordained and received his first position in the ministry at Mittenwalde near Berlin. After six years at his first church, he was called in 1657 to St. Nickolaskirche in Berlin where he became a very popular and influential preacher. He was deposed 9 years later because of a controversy with Emperor Frederick William I, who was a Calvinist. The controversy stemmed from the fact that Gerhardt would not sign a document promising to abstain from all references in sermons to doctrinal differences between Lutherans and Calvinists.

Paul Gerhardt called this time his "Berlin martyrdom." He later wrote he was "willing

and ready to seal with my blood the evangelical truth, and, like my namesake, St. Paul, to offer my neck to the sword.” During this time he was without regular employment and became very poor, surviving only by the charitable contributions of Lutheran laypeople who sympathized with his cause and his plight. During this time, sorrow also befell the family. Having already lost four children, his wife died after a long illness, leaving him with only one son, Paul Friedrich, age 6.

In 1669 he became a pastor in Saxe-Merseburg where he served for 7 years until his death in 1676.

Many of his hymns were very long with lots of stanzas. In fact, the hymn before us this evening *Upon the Cross Extended* was originally 16 verses long!

This hymn, especially verses 3 and 4, speak about Jesus as our substitute on the cross. Jesus offered himself to receive the punishment that we deserved. Jesus is the one who took our place under the wrath and punishment of God.

That’s exactly what our Scripture text tonight has to say to us.

Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows,
yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

Look at verse 3 with me.

‘Tis I who should be smitten, My doom should here be written:
Bound hand and foot in hell. The fetters and the scourging,
The floods around you surging, ‘Tis I who have deserved them well.

We are guilty. Jesus was innocent. In our Passion History Reading this evening we heard Pontius Pilate declare time and again that Jesus was innocent of any wrongdoing. He was certainly not guilty of anything deserving the death penalty according to Pilate’s view of the matter. Yet in the end Jesus was punished, crucified and died. Why? For us and on account of our sin.

Now let’s look at verse 4.

A crown of thorns you’re wearing, My shame and scorn you’re bearing
That I might ransomed be. My bondsman, ever willing,
(Jesus was willing to “post bond” for us by offering himself in our place.)
My place with patience filling, From sin and guilt has made me free.

Jesus bore our infirmities and carried our sorrows. Christ died FOR US. He gave his life on the cross for me.

One of the verses that’s not in our hymnal I think says it best. And with this we will close.

Into death’s jaws Thou springest Deliv’rance to me bringest
From such a monster dire My death away thou takest
Thy grave its grave Thou makest:

Did you catch that? Jesus took our death and buried it in the grave with him! His death was the death of our death. What a unique way to put it! And the verse closes:

Of love, O unexampled fire! – All because Christ loved us. Amen.