



A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth

Text: Paul Gerhardt (1607-1676)

Tune: Wolfgang Dachstein (1487-1553)

Throughout the Church Year we owe much thanks to Paul Gerhardt for his wonderful hymns that teach us the true meaning of the seasons. Lent and Holy Week is no exception. Gerhardt is the author of the masterpiece of all Passion hymns, “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth,” and is responsible for the German version of “O Sacred Head, Now Wounded.” In his hymns for this season of the Church Year we are given words that not only retell Christ’s crucifixion, but put on our lips the great comfort of His death and resurrection for us.



Paul Gerhardt

Paul Gerhardt is one of Germany’s greatest hymnwriters. His life was marked with several crosses that helped him to better understand the grace of God. At an early age, his father, Christian, died, while the Thirty Years’ War raged throughout Germany. In 1655 Gerhard married Anna Maria Berthold. Their first daughter died in infancy, and the family suffered from extreme poverty. While serving as Pastor in Berlin Gerhardt was forbidden to preach in his own church for not being willing to abandon Lutheran doctrine. While this battle was raging, Gerhardt and his wife had five more children, but three of them did not live past their first few days. After he left Berlin, another son died, and his wife became seriously ill. By Easter 1668 she died. Gerhard’s only surviving family was a six year old son. In 1669 Gerhardt was Called to serve as Pastor in Lübben, where he remained until his death.

In total Gerhardt wrote 133 hymns (21 of them are in *The Lutheran Hymnal*). However, while several other composers from his

era see declining translation into English and inclusion into hymnals, Gerhardt’s hymns are actually seeing a resurgence, and new Lutheran hymnals are translating and including more of his hymns, especially ones that were unknown.

Gerhardt penned “A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth” for Good Friday 1648. Originally this hymn had ten stanzas. The translation in *The Lutheran Hymnal* is made up of stanzas 1, 2, 3, 6, 9, and 10. Though the tune we know is well-wedded to this text, it was actually written in 1525 for a paraphrase of Psalm 137 (“By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept...”), hence the tune’s name AN WASSERFLÜSEN BABYLON.

The reason this is considered the best Passion hymn is because it brings together all the themes of Christ’s crucifixion. Stanza one reflects Christ’s willingness to go to the cross, bearing the weight of the world’s sin. It brings in John’s confession of Jesus Christ as the Lamb of God (Jn. 1:29). The comfort in this stanza is that Jesus did not go to the cross out of obligation, but in willing love.

Obedience of the Father is also a reason He went to the cross. Stanzas two and three are a conversation between the Father and the Son, much like what Luther did in “Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice.” In these stanzas, the perfect love of 1 Corinthians 13 and John 3:16 is reflected. This love shows itself in concrete action.

Stanzas four and five make a shift from God’s action to the response of the Christian to this divine love. We respond in grateful thanksgiving: “My stream of life shall ever be a current flowing ceaselessly, Thy constant praise outpouring.” As our faith takes hold of what Christ gives, we cannot help but live lives of thanksgiving (st. 4) and peace and calm in the face of this world’s evils (st. 5). We find our rest in the cross, hiding there from sin, death, and the devil, like we hide from noon’s heat under a large, leafy tree.

Finally, we confess that even in death we have nothing to fear. We need not hide ourselves on the Last Day because we have Christ’s Blood as our robe and His righteousness as our crown. We await the Day of the Lord when we will forever stand in joy before Him.