

Week 9: Passion of Christ

Ah, Holy Jesus

Text: Johann Heermann (1585–1657), 1630

- Eldest surviving child in a German Lutheran family, born in Silesia, part of modern-day Poland
- Studied under a variety of tutors between intermittent bouts of severe illness
- Eventually employed as a private tutor for the son of theologian Valerius Herberger, who recognized Heermann's poetic talent and encouraged him to publish and study at university
- Studies cut short by more health issues, in 1611 he returned home and was appointed deacon to a nearby church in Köben whose pastor was old and infirm
- A week after beginning work, the pastor died and Heermann took over as interim pastor for the congregation, then made permanent shortly after and remained there for over 20 years
- During his tenure, he saw the town hit by the black plague, a massive fire, and ransacking during the Thirty Years' War, in addition to the death of his wife, loss of possessions, and continued ill spells
- While his early poetry was in Latin, this text is from a later collection of German devotional poems titled *Devoti musica cordis*
- Originally 15 verses, it was based on a Latin meditation written by John of Fécamp, an abbot in Normandy in the 11th century (though sometimes attributed to St. Augustine)
- This translation into English is by Robert Bridges in 1897, though one by Catherine Winkworth ("O dearest Jesus, what law hast Thou broken") is also popular

Tune: Johann Crüger (1598–1662), 1640

- Son of an innkeeper, born in Groß Breesen, which today is directly on the German-Polish border
- Studied both music and theology, first in Berlin and then later at the University of Wittenberg
- Worked first as a tutor, then as a schoolteacher and choirmaster at the Nikolaikirche (St. Nicholas' Church, founded around AD 1220, the oldest in Berlin)
- Also known as composer of the chorale tune for "Now Thank We All Our God", and edited a number of influential Lutheran hymnals
- This tune HERZLIEBSTER JESU comes from his first edited hymnal, containing 248 hymns total
- Later popularized by Johann Sebastian Bach who used it three times in his "St. Matthew Passion" and twice in the "St. John Passion"

1. What stands out as unique about this hymn, compared to other "passion" hymns? What particular insight or perspective does it give you?
 - a. The use of sapphic meter (11.11.11.5) is uncommon, but not unprecedented
 - b. Takes an individual, personal view of the passion
 - i. Emphasizes personal culpability in Christ's death: "my treason", "I crucified thee"
 - ii. Similarly, Christ's sacrifice is given to us personally: "for me ... was thy incarnation", "for my salvation"
 - iii. Also necessitates a personal response: "I do adore thee, and will ever pray thee"
 - c. The leading word "ah" instead of the more common "O" gives a unique flavor
 - i. No other well-known hymn starts with "ah" in the first line (though there are lesser-known examples from both Watts and Wesley)
 - ii. Feels much like the German "ach", although it is not present in the original

I Cannot Tell

Text: William Young Fullerton (1857–1932), 1920

- Born in Belfast, Ireland, influenced as a young adult by the preaching of English Baptist Charles Spurgeon
- Spurgeon later became a friend and mentor, and Fullerton helped prepare his manuscripts for publication
- Prominent in the Baptist church, Fullerton compiled hymnals and wrote a number of books in addition to serving as secretary of the Baptist Missionary Union, and later president of the Baptist Union
- Better known for biographies (of Spurgeon, John Bunyan, and others), this is his only hymn in common use

Tune: Traditional Irish

- An Irish folk tune, its name LONDONDERRY AIR comes from the Irish county where it was first collected by one Jane Ross
- Since no other folk tune collectors had recorded the tune independently, scholars believe Ross was fooled by the use of rubato and mistakenly transcribed the tune in 4/4 rather than 3/4 time
- If that is true, the tune appears to be a derivative of a much older tune “Aisling an Óigfhir”
- Most will recognize the tune as commonly used with the lyrics “O Danny Boy”, written in 1910
- Other hymns using this tune include texts written by Timothy Dudley-Smith, Kristyn Getty, and more

1. What stands out as unique about this hymn, compared to other “passion” hymns? What particular insight or perspective does it give you?
 - a. Not simply a “passion” hymn, gives a full view of God’s plan from incarnation to sacrifice to second coming
 - b. Acknowledges the presence of the unknown in the Christian life: “I cannot tell ... but this I know ...”
 - i. The things we “know” are rooted both in scripture and in personal experience

My Song Is Love Unknown

Text: Samuel Crossman (1624–1684), 1664

- An Anglican minister, interestingly he pastored two congregations: one Anglican, one Puritan
- Sympathetic to Puritan ideas, he attended the Savoy Conference of 1661, attempting to revise the *Book of Common Prayer* to serve both Anglicans and Puritans
- With the conference unsuccessful, the 1662 Act of Uniformity expelled Crossman and 2,000 other ministers from the Anglican church
- Crossman later renounced Puritan theology and in 1665 was reinstated to a chaplaincy in Bristol
- This text was written during his time outside the Church of England, and published in his poetry collection *The Young Man's Meditation*
- It shows clear influence, even borrowing some key phrases, from George Herbert's poem "The Sacrifice" from his poetry collection titled *The Temple*
- However, it wasn't used as a hymn until after his death, appearing in the *Anglican Hymn Book* of 1686

Tune: John Ireland (1879–1962), 1919

- Although of Scottish ancestry, Ireland was born and raised in Cheshire, England
- His father was 70 years old at the time of his birth, and though his mother was 30 years younger, both had died before he turned 16
- Trained at the Royal College of Music studying composition under Charles Villiers Stanford, he later returned to teach from 1923 to 1939
- Best known for his secular piano and chamber music, but particularly his song cycles on texts by English poets Shakespeare, Blake, Hardy, and others
- His tune LOVE UNKNOWN was written specifically for this text in *The Public School Hymn Book* of 1919
- Reportedly, after receiving the request from hymnal editor Geoffrey Shaw, he wrote the tune in 15 minutes on a scrap of paper

1. What stands out as unique about this hymn, compared to other "passion" hymns? What particular insight or perspective does it give you?
 - a. The meter 6.6.6.6.4.4.4.4 is somewhat unusual, with the only other popular example being "Rejoice, the Lord is King"
 - i. Unlike "Rejoice", whose last two lines are a constant refrain, "My Song" has an inverted double rhyme in the last two lines of each stanza
 - b. The primary focus is on the dichotomy of the crucifixion:
 - i. "love to the loveless shown"
 - ii. "none the longed-for Christ would know"
 - iii. "a murderer they save / the Prince of Life they slay"
 - iv. "cheerful he to suffering goes"
 - c. The text is emotional, but not in the typical sadness and gratefulness we normally find; astonishment, disbelief show in questions and exclamations:
 - i. "O who am I ...?"
 - ii. "Oh my Friend, my Friend indeed ...!"
 - iii. "Sweet injuries!"
 - iv. "Why, what hath my Lord done?"
 - v. "What may I say?"