

Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
March 13, 2011

Isaiah 53:7

Hymn 100: A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining
Forth

Hymns: 108 – 102– 100—114 vv 1-3

All Scripture quotations from the NIV

***He was oppressed and afflicted,
yet he did not open his mouth;
he was led like a lamb to the slaughter,
and as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
so he did not open his mouth.*** Isaiah 53:7

The Lutheran hymn is like a sermon. To the sarcastic person (and I know we have some of those people here), what might that statement mean? It is long; the verses sometimes go on forever. It is boring; the pace is often slow. It isn't relevant; many were written years, even centuries ago. It isn't much fun; most don't have me jumping in the pews.

Ok, let's put away that cynical side and I'll say it again: The Lutheran hymn is like a sermon. What does that statement ideally mean? We know that it is based on God's Word. The Lutheran hymn and sermon both will undoubtedly bring the sting of the Law. They will also joyfully sing the good news of the Gospel. The Holy Spirit always works through its proclamation. They stir emotions and they build and strengthen faith.

The simple fact that our minds might travel to those earlier descriptions first shows us why these messages on the Sundays in Lent can be so beneficial. As I hear it, no other part of the service comes under scrutiny more than the hymns. Why is that? I could probably go on for a long time with the reasons why, but very simply it is the devil at work. His number one goal is to curtail the proclamation of the Gospel message. And while you probably can't

remember a sermon that you heard as a child, I'd be willing to bet that a good number of hymns are stored up in your memory banks. Songs are memorable. The tunes get stuck in our heads, and the lyrics follow shortly after. So, if the devil can fluff them up or water them down or disparage their use, he is gaining a victory.

So our focus during these Sundays in Lent is not to debate what style of music we prefer, rather it is to look at some of the Lenten "classics" and see the wealth of doctrinal truth that is made memorable as it is attached to a tune. I hope that we can grow in our appreciation of the words and look at all songs with the same eye for growing in knowledge and insight of the Scriptures.

The first hymn we want to look at this Lenten season is Hymn 100, *A Lamb Goes Uncomplaining Forth*. It was written by a German pastor named Paul Gerhardt. He actually wrote the words to this hymn nearly 400 years ago. Gerhardt wrote so many hymns that he is often called "the father of Lutheran hymnody." This didn't just mean that he wrote long hymns, though that was often the case. He wrote many of his hymns as a pastor would write a sermon, often with specific members and their situations in life in mind. As a preacher would pick a text, lay out its teaching and expand and apply it; that is what Gerhardt would do with his hymns. In this Lenten sermon of his, Gerhardt picked a can't miss verse – Isaiah 53:7, which says, ***"He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth."***

If you knew nothing of the Bible, you would assume that Isaiah wrote this verse about a person who had already lived and died. He speaks with detail of this man who had suffered like a lamb. And he tells us three things in that verse about this man. He was afflicted. He was innocent. Yet, he suffered w/o complaint. In his first verse, Gerhardt expands on those 3 things, focusing on Isaiah's description of a lamb. What is interesting in this first verse is that Gerhardt does not identify who the Lamb is; instead he focuses on what the Lamb does. While we know that this hymn is about Jesus, it helps us to focus solely on how he did what he did.

First, we focus on this lamb's affliction. Christ's oppression and affliction began with his birth. He was born in a barn. When the wise men from the East stopped in Jerusalem and inquired, "Where is he that is born King of the Jews?" Herod became disturbed and determined to find this baby and kill it. In order to spare his life, Joseph moved the young child away from his homeland and his livelihood and fled to Egypt as a refugee. From there, Jesus' oppression and affliction never really ceased. He lived under the constant animosity of the religious leaders who pursued him from town to town. They attacked him, looking for the tiniest crack in character or flaw in living. They attacked his ministry, picking apart every word and teaching. They attacked his followers, laying seeds of doubt and stirring up hardships.

And beyond that of course, there is the affliction and oppression that we probably first think of when we hear this verse. These are the events that we will hear about in detail in a few short weeks. There is the rejection by his own people, the condemnation from the church leaders, the abandonment by his own disciples. There are the thorns, the whips, the jeers. There are the nails, the agony, the death. All of this affliction came upon the lamb at the hands of the men that he came to save, but that isn't where the affliction ended. In this same chapter of Isaiah, the prophet also writes, "**The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all,**" and again, "**It was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer.**" Literally, it says there in the Hebrew that it please the Lord to do this. It wasn't just the rejection of man that Jesus faced. That was something that, as God, he was used to. Here we are also told that God afflicted him. As he took on the sins of earth, there was no one who could help him, no one who could share in this curse from God. He received the ultimate in affliction.

And that is made all the more amazing as Isaiah and hymn writer focus on the fact that he was as innocent as a lamb being brought to the slaughter. His life was spotless. Even Pilate agreed with this sentiment as he washed his hands and said, "I find no fault in the man."

And that is what makes the word in the title of this hymn so amazing, "Uncomplaining." A few weeks ago, I was watching *Shawshank Redemption* as I

often do when it is on TV. There is a sequence towards the beginning of Andy's stay in prison where he asks Red what he did to get in there. Of course, Red answered, "Don't you know that everyone in here is innocent?" Even for those who are guilty, there is a natural voice that wants to cry out, "I'm innocent." Yet, with this lamb, we are reminded over and over that he went uncomplaining. He was silent. He did not open his mouth. Though he had every right to put it to a stop, he went on willingly. When he passed through Jericho for the last time, he knew what would happen in Jerusalem. He told his disciples, "The Son of Man will be delivered to the Gentiles. They will mock him, insult him, spit on him, flog him and kill him." Yet he went up to Jerusalem. As he prayed in the Garden of Gethsemane, even though he knew Judas was bringing a mob to capture him, he willingly met them and permitted them to tie him. As you follow him the next few weeks in the courts of Caiaphas, Pilate and Herod – in every place you won't see a bitter, vengeful, shouting criminal, but you will see a quiet, gentle, patient servant as he waits for his condemnation and crucifixion so that his mission might be accomplished. He bears all this and only says, "Willing all this I suffer."

Why would all of this be taken on willingly? We get to sing out the answer in verse two and three. Like John the Baptist pointing, "Look the lamb of God," we identify, "This lamb as Christ," and we describe him as the "soul's great friend." He would take all this on willingly because it was his Father's will. God the Father told his Son that all of his children needed to be freed from the guilt of their sin. Here in this verse we remember that our sins were the cause for that affliction described in verse one of the hymn. The wrath of corporal Roman punishment would pierce Jesus' hands and feet instead of ours. The repeated stripes of a coarse whip beat his back instead of ours. It was the Father's will that man's sin would be punished. It was the Father's will have all men would share in the fruit of salvation won. Such willingness on the part of Father and Son could only ever be motivated by love. Only the love of God would be able to sacrifice so much. So often we focus on the greatness of Jesus' love in dying on the cross, but Gerhardt in this 3rd verse speaks from the Father's side, "**O wondrous love, what have you done! The Father offers up his Son, desiring our salvation. O love, how strong you are to save! You**

make his bed within the grave who built the earth's foundation." Imagine the great pain that God the Father felt as he abandoned his Son on the cross and let him die. There on the cross, the love of the Son is seen; the love of the Father is seen. It couldn't have happened if it were lacking from either party.

As we sing of this wondrous love, how can we not be joyful to join Gerhardt in singing, **"From morn to eve in all I do, I'll praise you Christ, my treasure. To sacrifice myself for you shall be my aim and pleasure. My stream of life shall ever be a current flowing ceaselessly, your constant praise outpouring. I'll treasure in my memory, O Lord, all you have done for me, your gracious love adoring."** The life described in this verse rightly can only come after the magnitude of God's love is first seen and understood. Only after hearing of the willing sacrifice of the lamb could we ever be motivated to sacrifice for Christ.

As we proceed through Lent, take every opportunity to marvel at the lengths that the Savior was willing to go to in order to accomplish what our Father so desperately wanted, to share in the Son's salvation. Amen.