



Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour (Titus 3:5-6)

In complete spirit of the occasion of Lent, this hymn is very like a Funeral Dirge admitting the sober and solemn sentiments of the Season. The lyrics were composed by Isaac Williams in 1842, and the tune is *St. Philip (Holy Spirit)*. Hymns are designed to coincide with the Church Liturgical Calendar, and this hymn does so admirably in reflecting the beginning of Lent. It is a sad fact that most non-liturgical churches do not observe a church calendar or a lectionary such as that established by the great Reformers; however, they are at a loss of the great biblical treasures of a scheduled and deliberate teaching of the Life of Christ throughout the church Year. Each Season represents the very steps of Christ during His earthly ministry. The Church Calendar forces us to consider the whole ministry of Christ and not simply the whims of the minister, or his congregation.

Lent is a season of solemn reflection upon the life of Christ and His final walk toward that looming and ghastly cross at Calvary's Mount. The Season begins on Ash Wednesday – a name invented by the ancient church to signify mourning, but not the kind of mourning symbolized by the mere touch of ashes on the forehead for all to see; but the kind of mourning of ancient days of dressing in sackcloth and actually rolling in ashes. Of course, the moderns would prefer to suffer only the prideful indignity of an ash cross on the forehead so that their friends and neighbors will see that they are 'mourning.' *Moreover when ye fast, be not, as the hypocrites, of a sad countenance: for they disfigure their faces* (perhaps with ashes?), *that they may appear unto men to fast. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. But thou, when thou fastest, anoint thine head, and wash thy face; That thou appear not unto men to fast, but unto thy Father which is in secret: and thy Father, which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* (Matt 6:16-18) Of course such fadishes and fetishes is simply a return to Roman idolatry in opposition to which our beloved Reformers were martyred.

In days past, I have been accused of oversimplification in quoting the above Words of our Lord. Perhaps I am, and I am happy for it since His Gospel is clear and simple¹. How differently would any rational human being interpret those verses?

Lord, in This Thy Mercy's Day

Lord, in this thy mercy's day,
ere for us it pass away,
on our knees we fall and pray.

Holy Jesus, grant us tears,
fill us with heart-searching fears,
ere that awful doom appears.

Lord, on us thy Spirit pour,
kneeling lowly at thy door,
ere it close forevermore.

By thy night of agony,
by thy supplicating cry,
by thy willingness to die,

By thy tears of bitter woe,
for Jerusalem below,
let us not thy peace forego.

Judge and Savior of our race,
when we thee see thy face,
grant us 'neath thy wings a place.

Lord, in this thy mercy's day, ere for us it pass away, on our knees we fall and pray. Which is the most opportune moment to receive Christ as Lord and Savior – is it subject to planning and calculation? Absolutely NOT, for today is the day. The moment is NOW or perhaps never. *For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation.* (2 Cor 6:2) It is the Lord who calls and chooses – best hear His Voice and answer with immediate dispatch! We fall on our knees in contrition – not only on the beginning of repentance, but at every moment of solemn worship. I wonder when was the last time that Christians of the modern church fell upon their knees to pray. In the Anglican and Reformed churches, it is a part and parcel of our worship.

Holy Jesus, grant us tears, fill us with heart-searching fears, ere that awful doom appears. First of all, do we acknowledge that our Lord Jesus is HOLY and must be revered as such. Why do we so often presume to call Him by His common name? Would it blind us to call Him our Lord Jesus Christ? Those heart-searching fears referred to in this line are the common fears of every sinner. Have I truly repented, and do I now repent, of all of my sins and offenses against my Sovereign Lord? That awful doom is the gaping jaws of Hell at the end of the Broad and well-travelled way that leads DOWN to destruction whereon many travelers are descending. *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat.* (Matt 7:13)

Lord, on us thy Spirit pour, kneeling lowly at thy door, ere it close forevermore.

¹ Look what Jesus says of complex and deep interpretation of simple language and its clearly intended meaning in Matthew 10:15 *Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein.*

If we are not drawn as a fish to shore by the Holy Spirit, we cannot become the Master's catch. The Cross of Christ, too, is a powerful Magnet to draw His elect unto Himself! *And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.* (John 12:32) Note that an iron magnet will not draw copper or brass, or aluminum – it only draws metal of its own nature (Iron). So must we accept the Mind of Christ and surrender our wills that are in bondage to Satan for His Will. Then, and only then, can we claim a FREE will.

Which Door is it that may close forever ere we gain admittance? It is the same door that God Himself closed on the Ark to bar the unbelievers from entering the Ark of Noah, and that door is symbolic of the Lord Jesus Christ. *Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep. All that ever came before me are thieves and robbers: but the sheep did not hear them. I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.* (John 10:7-9) The day will come when the scroll of Heaven will part, and we shall see the King of Glory descending with His armies riding astride a White Horse. At that time, there will no longer be opportunity to enter in at the Door if we have not done so already. Or, perhaps as you are driving home today, you are in a terrible accident and the Door will have closed for you at that time, friend. It is best to make our election sure while the sunlight gleams. *Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall: For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.* (2 Peter 1:10-11)

By thy night of agony, by thy supplicating cry, by thy willingness to die, Many may be under the false conclusion that the cross was of no account to Christ, or to us; but it was a terror to Him and a great humiliation. He knew the terrible agony of the torture instrument called a cross. It is well described in Psalm 22:1-21. But above all of this, it was the reality of assuming the sin-debt of the world upon His virtuous Person. He was a Man of modesty, yet He allowed Himself to be publicly stripped naked and beaten with man stripes, a crown of thorns placed on His head digging grooves of flesh from His fair brow, and spit upon and ridiculed by the very people for whom He came to suffer. You and I were there in force, my friend. His night of agony in the Garden at Gethsemane was followed by all that He knew was to transpire. His closest friends, save the courageous women disciples and John, deserted Him on that great night of agony and treachery. One apostle betrayed his Master with the seal of a traitor's KISS. But remember this: He never turned back from going the distance for you and me. Once He set His face to go to Jerusalem, He never wavered. *And it came to pass, when the time was come that he should be received up, he stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem.* (Luke 9:51)

By thy tears of bitter woe, for Jerusalem below, let us not thy peace forego. Jesus lamented over Jerusalem as we should do when we consider her sins and her depravity today (Luke 13:34); but He did not withhold His Hand of Judgment on the city some 35 years later when it was destroyed by Roman forces under General Titus. We may weep over the depraved little real estate called Jerusalem on earth, but we must rejoice at the New and Heavenly Jerusalem which shall be our abode at our journey's end.

Judge and Savior of our race, when we thee see thy face, grant us 'neath thy wings a place. Would we prefer the Lord Jesus Christ as our Judge, or as our Savior? He will surely cover us with His broad, outstretched wings as an Eagle covers her babies, if we claim Him as Lord and Savior in truth. (see Matt 23:37 & Psalms 63:7) We shall indeed rejoice under the shadow of His wings on that great Jubilation morning. But beginning today, we will be sober and reverent in contemplation of that great sacrifice that was made for us on Good Friday two thousand years ago.