

Hymn 68 – *Alone Thou Goest Forth O Lord* – 9 April 2019, Anno Domini (In the Year of our Lord)



THE God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go. ¹⁴ But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; ¹⁵ And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. (Acts 3:13-15)

Quite appropriate for the season is the hymn by *Peter Abelard* on the love of Christ. It was written for the nocturnal service of Good Friday. Written in 1129 AD The tune is, BANGOR, which is the composition of *William Tan'sur* in 1734 and is the tune in which the 11th Psalm is sung. According to a story in *THE HYMNAL 1940 COMPANION*, the citizens of an important city in Maine sent *Rev Seth Noble* to Boston to submit the required paperwork for incorporation of their city. As the minister waited for the clerk to fill out the paperwork, he stood by quietly humming. When the clerk asked for the name, the minister absentmindedly replied, *BANGOR*, and thus was the city named. The city itself claims this to have been the origin of its name.

Alone Thou Goest Forth, O Lord

*Alone thou goest forth, O Lord,
in sacrifice to die;
is this thy sorrow naught to us
who pass unheeding by?*

*Our sins, not thine, thou bearest, Lord;
make us thy sorrow feel,
till through our pity and our shame
love answers love's appeal.*

*This is earth's darkest hour,
but thou dost light and life restore;
then let all praise be given thee
who livest evermore!*

*Give us compassion for thee, Lord,
that, as we share this hour,
thy cross may bring us to thy joy
and resurrection power.*

Alone thou goest forth, O Lord, in sacrifice to die; is this thy sorrow naught to us who pass unheeding by? We have never gotten used to that condition of being alone, have we? Yet, in a sense, we are forever alone except for the unfailing presence of our Lord. We are born alone. We are the only souls to be brought into the sun of life within our bodies. We live our lives alone. Any pretended companionship is limited by time, space, and spirit. We do not walk this world alone, however, if our trust is in the One who walked up Calvary's Mount alone for us, and died alone in our place. You may object that there were two who died on either side of our Lord. True; however, each of them died individually and alone because death is personal and individual. In Christ, and all who trust in His grace are in Him, there is no death – only a rite of passage from this physical sphere to the celestial. The 'One who is the WAY' made it possible for us to travel that WAY with Him. Are we made sad to recall that sacrifice made for us? We should be made sad – not for our Lord (because He was victorious over death) – but for our sins that compelled Him to suffer. That great old hymn, *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*, reminds us of the attitude we must take in considering that cross. And the grace and mercy of God is extended, as a result, to us alone and apart from the world and others. The only remnant of mankind that do not walk this world alone are those who walk with Christ. Because He walked that Way alone, we can have His company there.

Our sins, not thine, thou bearest, Lord; make us thy sorrow feel, till through our pity and our shame love answers love's appeal. Why could a fellow such as mighty Caesar, or Washington, or even the Apostle Peter die for our sins and save the Lord the agony? It is because these were all sinners no unlike you and me. In order to stand in our stead for the verdict of death, the one standing must be guiltless of our crimes – and Christ is the only One who was guiltless of any sin or crime. *For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit.* (1 Peter 3:18) It is also true God is just, and He will not brood sin in His midst. How is that Love and Justice reconciled? It is by the means of mercy and grace. God allowed His only Begotten Son to suffer the pains of death in our place. We cannot earn that grace, and we would never choose righteousness on our own volition. We are born sinners. None are worthy of Heaven. It is the grace and election of God alone that imputes that same righteousness of Christ upon the lover of God.

This is earth's darkest hour, but thou dost light and life restore; then let all praise be given thee who livest evermore! The world has forever dwelt in spiritual darkness. It is the dark planet since it is the only planet in which it is possible to sin and reject God. But, my I remind you, there are points of light scattered throughout which help to disperse the darkness in areas where faith is real. Before our Lord came to us, there were no orphanages in the world. There were no public schools or hospitals. There was almost no charity anywhere. Women were viewed as chattel, and children were used and abused freely. But the Gospel of Christ changed all of that. Oh, there are still places where the Gospel has not been received, or preached by a faithful church, that these things still exist. In muslim countries where darkness rules, women are still considered chattel, and even little girls are forced into marriage. Charity is rare, and so are orphanages. But the Light of Christ is shed abroad in the hearts of His people, and society in general has been enlightened by that truth wherever faith and belief exist. Because our Lord died once, the just for the unjust, He has made a way for His people to live forever as well. We do not sleep forever, but only for a brief interlude. When the trumpet voice of the Lord sounds, we shall hear and arise just as He did two thousand

years

ago.

Give us compassion for thee, Lord, that, as we share this hour, thy cross may bring us to thy joy and resurrection power. Compassion! What does this word mean? It means to suffer together with the afflicted soul. If you see a youth famished and starving for a bite of bread, you, too, should feel his pain and sorrow – but how much should you feel it? Enough to be compelled to action in satisfying the want of the impoverished child. Compassion compels ACTION. And it was the COMPASSION of the Lord for us that compelled Him to the cross. Do we love Him as well as He has loved us? Is that possible? No. In fact, we could not love the Lord if He had not first loved us. *We love him, because he first loved us.* (1 John 4:19) We can claim no merit for ourselves in even our love for Christ, because all love is generated by the heart of God. We can never share the full agony Christ felt on the cross; but we can take up our own smaller crosses and follow Him – not just to the pleasant interludes at the shores of Galilee, or by the Brook Kidron, or even at the home of His dear friends in Bethany. No, we must follow hard on the steps He took – all of them – even to Calvary and to the open tomb. Our lives are a process of dying to self, and living for others through Christ; for He died and lived for us.

Dying does not need to be alone for the Christian. Remember the death of the beggar Lazarus. *And It came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;* (Luke 16:22) What blessing to have an angelic escort at the moment of death for the believer. For the Christian, death is only a door leading from pain, suffering, and injustice into the halls of a glorious Kingdom. It is alike unto a dream. Remember, every dream has only one observer – and it is an experience observed ALONE. The words of the great poet, Wm Wadsworth Longfellow seem appropriate:

*And the night shall be filled with music
And the cares, that infest the day,
Shall fold their tents, like the Arabs,
And as silently steal away.*

Steal away . . . steal away home to Jesus.
(negro spiritual)