



23 Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. 24 They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did. 25 Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Cleophas, and Mary Magdalene. 26 When Jesus therefore saw his mother, and the disciple standing by, whom he loved, he saith unto his mother, *Woman, behold thy son!* 27 Then saith he to the disciple, *Behold thy mother!* And from that hour that disciple took her unto his own home. 28 After this, Jesus knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the scripture might be fulfilled, saith, *I thirst.* 29 Now there was set a vessel full of vinegar: and they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it upon hyssop, and put it to his mouth. 30 When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar, he said, *It is finished:* and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost. (John 19:23-30)

This is an old hymn first published in 1737 whose lyrics have evolved through various versions until we have it in its present form. We can firmly aver that the last two lines were the composition of William Cooke in 1874. The tune is Batty which is included in Johann Thommen's *Musicalischer Christenschatz* (1745) adapted from an older Moravian manuscript.

Sweet the Moments, Rich in Blessing

Sweet the moments, rich in blessing,
which before the cross we spend,
life and health and peace possessing
from the sinner's dying Friend.

Here I stay, forever viewing
mercy streaming in his blood;
precious drops, my soul bedewing,
plead and claim my peace with God.

Truly blessed is the station,
low before his cross to lie,
while I see divine compassion
floating in his languid eye.

Lord, in ceaseless contemplation
fix our hearts and eyes on thee,
till we taste thy full salvation,
and thine unveiled glory see.

Sweet the moments, rich in blessing, which before the cross we spend, life and health and peace possessing from the sinner's dying Friend. At the foot of the cross could be found a variety of personalities – you and I were definitely represented among those gathered. There was the mother of Jesus, other women (including Mary Magdalene); John the Beloved Apostle; ruthless Roman soldiers; hypocritical Scribes, Pharisees, and Jewish rulers; and those who had a casual desire to witness pain and suffering. But these were not the only ones present at the crucifixion. Beside the Lord, there were two thieves crucified on either side of Jesus. We all spend the days of our lives being represented by one or more of those characters present on that awful day – awful to God, and sadly joyous for us. Some sinners are incorrigibly wicked and spend their days leering and ridiculing all things Holy. Others are greedy and covetous of the wealth of others – the thieves. Still others are those false preachers and religionists who deal in false teaching for filthy lucre. One of the thieves died in his state of unforgiveness, but the other died as a forgiven and redeemed sinner. To keep his soul.

He died with a Great Friend to keep his soul. The latter may represent you or me. Or we may happily be represented by the Beloved disciple who – above all others – remained steadfast in loyalty and love until the very end. He risked his life in casting his lot with Christ openly. Then, there were the blessed women whose courage exceeded that of Peter and others of the disciples. They remained at the cross, not only until the end, but until the body was removed. They then followed to see where it would be buried. Which of these represent us – for we were there, you can be certain. We all remain at some point at the foot of the cross.

Here I stay, forever viewing mercy streaming in his blood; precious drops, my soul bedewing, plead and claim my peace with God. Though the event occurred two thousand years ago, and is marked by all world calendars as witness thereof, our Lord died then, but also in our present moment, for He is the great I AM. His mercy drops stream from the open wounds of a once and sufficient sacrifice for all men who hear His voice and are called to follow. His profuse flow of blood 'bedews' our souls with the Water of Life each day of our earthly pilgrimage. It is His blood that bears testimony to the Father that we are One with Him, and with one another in His Church.

Truly blessed is the station, low before his cross to lie, while I see divine compassion floating in his languid eye. How much do we humble ourselves before the Lord? How low do we lie before His cross? The entire being of our Lord was a personification of Grace, Love, and Mercy. Even on the cross, He expressed His desire that those who committed the greatest crime of eternity in crucifying the Lord of Love

should be forgiven. It was not the place of the Lord to forgive those who crucified Him, but rather the Father's role. Why is this? The Father was sacrificing His greatest love and possession in sending His Son to redeem us of our sins. The sin was not only against our Lord, but God the Father as well. So, Christ asked, *Father, forgive them for they know not what they do*. The compassionate heart of Jesus expressed, in the very moments of His parting, His love and concern for His dear Mother, Mary, and for John. Love is courageous and overcomes fear and excruciating pain as well.

Lord, in ceaseless contemplation fix our hearts and eyes on thee, till we taste thy full salvation, and thine unveiled glory see. Our Lord understands that we are frail and weak. He understood the failure of Peter to disregard the turbid waters and winds of the sea and focus on Him alone. When Peter sank, the Lord heard his prayer of three words, *Lord, save me*. He hears our prayers, regardless the brevity in which they are uttered out of desperation. *3 Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee. 4 Trust ye in the Lord for ever: for in the Lord JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.* (Isaiah 26:3-4) It may not be the billows of a stormy sea that diverts your attention from the Lord. It may be financial problems, war, pestilence, famine, sickness, or even approaching death. But our weakness is not in any of these – it is in our inattention to the things of the Lord. If our hearts and minds are stayed on Him, no evil, though it hiss and harass, cannot harm us truly. All who know and trust in God are the called according to His purpose though they may not know how they came to be so. We taste His full salvation from the very moment that we are aware of our election in Christ. We are not healed of our sins partially or piecemeal, but altogether at once.

The saint of God is blessed to gather glimpses of His unveiled glory at moments of seeming random meditation on His Word. The presence of the Holy Spirit may open our eyes to a truth of Scripture known to the mind, but only presently discovered in the sanctuary of our hearts. He whispers gentle beauty to ears keen to hear and hearts thirsty for truth. He is altogether lovely, and He deems us so when we seek His face in earnest pursuit. The world can never understand the mysteries that are revealed to His elect. To the world, such matters are foolishness. An illustration of this truth comes to mind of two Lutheran priests who were driving a sign into the ground beside a rural road in Iowa. The sign read, Don't continue on the path you are heading. Turn around before it is too late! A drunken carload of boys sped by laughing at the two priests, and shouted, Why don't you Christians mind your own business and quit trying to tell others how to live! AS the car continued full speed ahead, one of the priests looked at the other and said, Ole, maybe we should change the wording of the sign to simply read, 'Bridge our ahead!'