

My Song Is Love Unknown

Lutheran Service Book 430 | study by David R. Schmitt

Introduction

Jim stands with his son at Gettysburg. They have toured the battlefields by car with a Licensed Battlefield Guide. They have visited the Civil War museums, looked at the black-and-white photographs, listened to Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, and remembered those three days in July 1863. Now they are about to leave, and Jim tells his son, once again, the story. It's what they have heard from others and what he has gleaned from history, but this time it's personal. It is his story, as a father tells his son why this place has meaning for him, not only as a student of history, but as a citizen of this country and as a father raising a

son to treasure the freedoms for which others have fought and died.

There are places in this world that evoke stories — stories that one generation passes on to another. By telling these stories, we not only remember the past, but we encourage one another to live in the present with a deeper sense of the value of life and community.

- What are some places that are important to you and to your family? Why?
- What stories do you tell to communicate the significance of those places?

Exploring the Scriptures

Just as places in our lives have significance and stories, so, too, do places in Scripture. One such place throughout Israel's history was the temple in Jerusalem.

Read about the dedication of the temple by Solomon in 1 Kings 8:12–26.

- What is the story of God's relationship to His people that Solomon tells when he dedicates the temple?
- Although God is beyond our understanding (v. 12), He promises to dwell in the temple for His covenant people. What other promise about God's dwelling among His people does Solomon recall in his prayer (vv. 25–26; see 2 Sam. 7:4–13)?

Isaiah continues this story by prophesying of a time when God will dwell among His people through a chosen servant in a mysterious way. Read Is. 52:13–53:5.

- What is strange about this servant of God?
- What does God promise to do for all people through this despised and rejected servant (Is. 53:5)?

After the death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus, Peter and John went to pray at the temple in Jerusalem. There,

Peter healed a lame man who was begging outside the temple. After the man's healing, Peter preached to the crowd. In this sermon, Peter told the story of God. It was the story of Jesus, the suffering servant, who was God (the "Author of life") and had come in the midst of His people to save them from their sins. Read Acts 3:11–26.

- How is the story of Jesus connected to the history of Israel (vv. 22–26; see Gen. 12:1–3)?
- How did God's people respond to Jesus (vv. 13–15)?
- How did God act in response to their rejection (vv. 15–16)?
- What was God now doing through Peter's preaching of the story of Jesus (v. 26)?

The history of Jesus that Peter preached was not just for others but for himself as well. Recall from memory or read about Peter's relationship with Jesus (cf. John 13:36–38; John 20:19–23; and John 21:15–19).

- How was the death and resurrection of Jesus a personal story for Peter?

Exploring the Hymn

Background

Samuel Crossman (1624–83), an Anglican priest, composed this poem in the latter part of the 17th century. It was not originally intended to be a hymn. Instead, Crossman's poem first appeared as one of a collection of nine that he attached to a conduct book he had written for young men. Here he

told religious stories and offered encouragement for godly living that children might grow in the faith.

- As you read through the stanzas of the hymn, what is the story being told? Where does it start? What happens? And where does it end?

- What are creative ways we retell this same story today to our children?

As a piece of devotional verse, Crossman's poem has much in common with the religious lyrics of earlier 17th-century poets such as John Donne and, more importantly, George Herbert. The religious lyric sought not only to communicate a religious subject but also to foster personal meditation upon it.

- Where does Crossman invite you to meditate personally upon the story of Jesus that he is telling?
- What discoveries about yourself and about God's work in Jesus happen in those moments of personal meditation?

Text

The first line of the hymn offers the major theme for devotional contemplation: God's love for us in the Passion of Jesus Christ ("My Savior's love to me") is a love that lies beyond our understanding ("is love unknown"). Each stanza of the hymn takes a different moment in the Passion of

Making the Connection

In the closing stanza of the hymn, the poet desires to stand outside the tomb of Jesus and to devote his days to telling the story of God's love in the Passion of Christ ("Here might I stay and sing, / No story so divine!"). As God's people gather in worship, we, too, join in that activity.

- What are ways in which we, as God's people, retell the story of Jesus' Passion every time we gather on Sunday morning?
- How do we do this particularly in the season of Lent?
- This story could obviously be retold as merely a fact of history. How do we proclaim that this is a personal story, a present-tense experience of God's real love for each and every one of us in Christ?

In Closing

Whether out in the world or gathered in worship, God's people have been given a story to sing. Today, we sing again that story of God's love for sinners in Jesus Christ.

- Sing or read together *LSB* 430.

Christ and ponders how that moment reveals a divine love beyond human understanding. Read stanza 1 and then read Rom. 5:6–11.

- Why is this love of God something beyond our understanding?
- How should God treat us on the basis of our actions?
- How does God treat us because of His love?
- How does the death and resurrection of Jesus relate to that strange act of divine love for the "loveless" (cf. Rom. 5:15–18)?

Choose one stanza (or more if you have time) and meditate upon the story of Jesus' Passion and its meaning for your life by answering the following questions.

- What moment in the life of Jesus does this stanza describe?
- How do we see our sin in that moment?
- How do we see God's amazing grace?

While we retell this story in worship, we also share it with others out in the world. Like the father with his son at Gettysburg, we share the meaning of this event in all aspects of our lives.

- How does God's love for us, made known in the death and resurrection of Jesus, relate to how we live and how we speak in the world?
- Think about the past week, the people you have met, the places you have been, and the things that have happened. Identify one place in this past week where you can now look back and see God's love for you and for others in Jesus Christ. Share that place and that story with one another.

Prayer

Lord God, bless Your Word wherever it is proclaimed. Make it a word of power and peace to convert those not yet Your own and to confirm those who have come to saving faith. May Your Word pass from the ear to the heart, from the heart to the lip, and from the lip to the life that, as You have promised, Your Word may achieve the purpose for which You send it; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen (For blessing on the Word, *LSB*, inside front cover).