



Lead Me to Calvary

A Collection of Hymns

compiled by
Richella J. Parham

Dear friend,

If you're like me, Ash Wednesday always finds you ready and willing to enter into a Lenten journey with Jesus, a time of intense preparation for Holy Week.

Alas, though, if you're like me, you may find that your Lenten intentions sometimes fall far short of your needs.

As I approach the latter days of Holy Week, I am nearly overwhelmed by emotion. The heaviness of Maundy Thursday, the darkness of Good Friday, the bleakness of Holy Saturday threaten to swamp me—and then the glorious light of Easter nearly blinds me with its brightness.

In order to be awakened and astounded rather than engulfed and crushed by my emotions, I find myself consulting some old friends: the hymns of the church.

Those who know me best will not be surprised to learn that the hymns are where I turn to find succor. I grew up in a church-going family. Sunday morning, Sunday night, Wednesday night—those were just the first three times each week that found us in some sort of church service or activity. If the doors of the church building were open, we were usually there.

Hands down, the best part of all those church activities was the singing. My faith tradition emphasized congregational singing, and everyone took part. We sang joyfully in four-part harmony, and to this day I know every word of hundreds of hymns.

So I've put together a collection of some of my favorite hymns to accompany me on these holy days. If you also are a lover of hymns, some of these may be very familiar to you. If you don't know many hymns, the poetry of these words may touch your heart in profound ways.

I pray that these words will be a helpful companion on your journey with Jesus.

With every blessing,

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Why did my Savior come to earth
And to the humble go?
Why did he choose a lowly birth?
Because He loved me so!

Why did he drink the bitter cup
Of sorrow, pain, and woe?
Why on the cross be lifted up?
Because he loved me so!

And now He bids me look and live,
And by His grace to know,
A home in glory He will give,
Because He loved me so!

Till Jesus comes, I'll sing His praise,
And then to glory go;
And reign with Him thro' endless days,
Because He loved me so.

—J.G. Dailey, late 19th century

No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. (John 15:13)

When my love to Christ grows weak,
When for deeper faith I seek,
Then in thought I go to thee,
Garden of Gethsemane.

There I walk amid the shades
While the lingering twilight fades,
See that suffering, friendless one,
Weeping, praying there alone.

When my love for man grows weak,
When for stronger faith I seek,
Hill of Calvary! I go
To thy scenes of fear and woe.

There behold his agony
Suffered on the bitter tree,
See his anguish, see his faith—
Love triumphant still in death.

Then to life I turn again,
Learning all the worth of pain,
Learning all the might that lies
In a full self-sacrifice.

—John R. Wreford, 1837

We love because he first loved us. (I John 4:19)

Tis midnight, and on Olive's brow
The star is dimmed that lately shone.
Tis midnight; in the garden now
The suff'ring Savior prays alone

Tis midnight, and from all removed,
Immanuel wrestles 'lone with fears.
E'en that disciple whom he loved
Heeds not his Master's grief and tears.

Tis midnight, and for others' guilt
The Man of sorrows weeps in blood.
Yet he who hath in anguish knelt
Is not forsaken by his God.

Tis midnight, and from ether plains
Is borne the song that angels know;
Unheard by mortals are the strains
That sweetly soothe the savior's woe.

—William B. Tappan, 1822

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." (Mark 14:32-38)

Night, with ebon pinion*, brooded o'er the vale;
All around was silent, save the night wind's wail,
When Christ, the Man of Sorrows,
In tears, and sweat, and blood,
Prostrate in the garden, raised his voice to God.

Smitten for offenses which were not his own,
He, for our transgressions, had to weep alone;
No friend with words to comfort,
Nor hand to help was there,
When the meek and lowly humbly bowed in prayer.

Abba, Father, Father, if indeed it may,
Let this cup of anguish pass from me, I pray;
Yet, if it must be suffered, by me, thine only son,
Abba, Father, Father, let thy will be done.

—Love H. Jameson, 1854

*Note: "ebon pinion" means "black wing" or "wing of darkness," a metaphor for the deepest darkness.

In his anguish he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat became like great drops of blood falling down on the ground. (Luke 22:44)

King of my life I crown thee now—
Thine shall the glory be;
Lest I forget thy thorn-crowned brow,
Lead me to Calvary.

Show me the tomb where thou wast laid,
Tenderly mourned and wept;
Angels in robes of light arrayed
Guarded thee whilst thou slept.

Let me like Mary, thru the gloom,
Come with a gift to thee;
Show to me now the empty tomb-
Lead me to Calvary.

May I be willing, Lord, to bear
Daily my cross for thee;
Even thy cup of grief to share-
Thou hast borne all for me.

Lest I forget Gethsemane,
Lest I forget thine agony,
Lest I forget thy love for me,
Lead me to Calvary.

—Jennie Evelyn Hussie, 1921

He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wound you have been healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

Majestic sweetness sits enthroned
Upon the Savior's brow;
His head with radiant glories crowned,
His lips with grace o'erflow.

No mortal can with him compare,
Among the sons of men;
Fairer is he than all the fair
Who fill the heav'nly train.

He saw me plunged in deep distress,
And flew to my relief;
For me he bore the shameful cross,
And carried all my grief,

To Him I owe my life and breath,
And all the joys I have;
He makes me triumph over death,
And saves me from the grave,

—Samuel Stennett, 1787

We do see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Hebrews 2:9)

There is a fountain filled with blood
Drawn from Emmanuel's veins;
And sinners plunged beneath that flood
Lose all their guilty stains.

The dying thief rejoiced to see
That fountain in his day;
And there may I, though vile as he,
Wash all my sins away.

Dear dying Lamb, thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power
Till all the ransomed church of God
Be saved, to sin no more.

E'er since, by faith, I saw the stream
Thy flowing wounds supply,
Redeeming love has been my theme,
And shall be till I die.

—William Cowper, 1771

On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity. (Zechariah 13:1)

O sacred head, now wounded,
With grief and shame weighed down,
Now scornfully surrounded
With thorns, thine only crown;
How art thou pale with anguish,
With sore abuse and scorn;
How doth that visage languish
Which once was bright as morn.

What Thou, my Lord, hast suffered,
Was all for sinners' gain;
Mine, mine was the transgression,
But thine the deadly pain.
Lo, here I fall, my Savior!
Tis I deserve thy place;
Look on me with thy favor,
Vouchsafe me to thy grace.

What language shall I borrow
To thank thee, dearest Friend,
For this, thy dying sorrow,
Thy pity without end?
Oh, make me thine forever,
and should I fainting be,
Lord, let me never, never
Outlive my love to thee.

—attributed to Bernard of Clairvaux, 12th century

After twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on his head. They put a reed in his right hand and knelt before him and mocked him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews! (Matthew 27:29)

On a hill far away stood an old rugged cross,
The emblem of suffering and shame;
And I love that old cross where the dearest and best
For a world of lost sinners was slain.

O that old rugged cross, so despised by the world,
Has a wondrous attraction for me;
For the dear Lamb of God left his glory above
To bear it to dark Calvary.

In that old rugged cross, stained with blood so divine,
A wondrous beauty I see,
For 'twas on that old cross Jesus suffered and died,
To pardon and sanctify me.

To that old rugged cross I will ever be true,
Its shame and reproach gladly bear;
Then he'll call me some day to my home far away,
Where his glory forever I'll share.

So I'll cherish the old rugged cross,
Till my trophies at last I lay down;
I will cling to the old rugged cross,
And exchange it some day for a crown.

—George Bernard, 1913

“Fellow Israelites, listen to these words! Jesus the Nazarene was a man whose credentials God proved to you through miracles, wonders, and signs, which God performed through him among you. You yourselves know this. In accordance with God’s established plan and foreknowledge, he was betrayed. You, with the help of wicked men, had Jesus killed by nailing him to a cross. God raised him up! God freed him from death’s dreadful grip, since it was impossible for death to hang on to him. (Acts 2:22-24, CEB)

When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast
Save in the death of Christ, my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them through his blood.

See, from his head, his hands, his feet,
Sorrow and love flow mingled down.
Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so rich a crown?

Were the whole realm of nature mine,
that were a present far too small.
Love so amazing, so divine,
demands my soul, my life, my all.

—Isaac Watts, 1707

Whatever gains I had, these I have come to regard as loss because of Christ. More than that, I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. (Philippians 3:7-8)

Beneath the cross of Jesus
I fain would take my stand,
The shadow of a mighty Rock
Within a weary land;
A home within the wilderness,
A rest upon the way,
From the burning of the noontide heat
And the burden of the day.

Upon the cross of Jesus
Mine eye at times can see
The very dying form of One
Who suffered there for me:
And from my stricken heart with tears
Two wonders I confess,
The wonders of redeeming love
And my unworthiness.

I take, O cross, thy shadow
For my abiding place:
I ask no other sunshine than
The sunshine of his face;
Content to let the world go by,
To know no gain nor loss;
My sinful self my only shame,
My glory all the cross.

—Elizabeth C. Clephane, 1868

May I never boast of anything except the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. (Galatians 6:14)

Low in the grave he lay, Jesus my Savior,
Waiting the coming day, Jesus my Lord!

Vainly they watch his bed, Jesus my Savior,
Vainly they seal the dead, Jesus my Lord.

Death cannot keep its prey, Jesus my Savior;
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!

Up from the grave he arose;
With a mighty triumph o'er his foes;
He arose a victor from the dark domain,
And he lives forever, with his saints to reign.
He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!

—Robert Lowry, 1874

And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. (Matthew 28:2)

Christ the Lord is risen today, Alleluia!
Earth and heaven in chorus say, Alleluia!
Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia!
Sing, ye heavens, and earth reply, Alleluia!

Love's redeeming work is done, Alleluia!
Fought the fight, the battle won, Alleluia!
Death in vain forbids him rise, Alleluia!
Christ has opened paradise, Alleluia!

Lives again our glorious King, Alleluia!
Where, O death, is now thy sting? Alleluia!
Once he died our souls to save, Alleluia!
Where's thy victory, boasting grave? Alleluia!

Soar we now where Christ has led, Alleluia!
Following our exalted Head, Alleluia!
Made like him, like him we rise, Alleluia!
Ours the cross, the grave, the skies, Alleluia!

—Charles Wesley, 1739

After the sabbath, as the first day of the week was dawning, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary went to see the tomb. And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it. His appearance was like lightning, and his clothing white as snow. For fear of him the guards shook and became like dead men. But the angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay. Then go quickly and tell his disciples, 'He has been raised from the dead, and indeed he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him.' This is my message for you." So they left the tomb quickly with fear and great joy, and ran to tell his disciples. (Matthew 28:1-8)

Thine is the glory, risen, conquering son,
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won.
Angels in bright raiment rolled the stone away,
Kept the folded graveclothes where thy body lay.

Lo! Jesus meet thee, risen from the tomb;
Lovingly he greets thee, scatters fear and gloom.
Let his church with gladness hymns of triumph sing,
For her Lord now liveth; death hath lost its sting.

No more we doubt thee, glorious prince of life!
Life is naught without thee; aid us in our strife.
Make us more than conquerors through thy deathless love;
Bring us safe through Jordan to thy home above.

Thine is the glory, risen, conquering son,
Endless is the victory thou o'er death hast won!

—Edmond L. Budry, 1888

He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said. Come, see the place where he lay.
(Matthew 28:6)

Crown him with many crowns, the Lamb upon his throne.
Hark! how the heavenly anthem drowns all music but its own.
Awake, my soul, and sing of him who died for thee,
And hail him as thy matchless king through all eternity.

Crown him the Lord of life, who triumphed o'er the grave,
And rose victorious in the strife for those he came to save;
His glories now we sing who died and rose on high,
Who died eternal life to bring, and lives that death may die.

Crown him the Lord of love; behold his hands and side,
Rich wounds, yet visible above, in beauty glorified;
No angels in the sky can fully bear that sight,
But downward bends their burning eye at mysteries so bright.

Crown him the Lord of peace whose power a scepter sways
From pole to pole, that wars may cease, and all be prayer and praise!
His reign shall know no end and round his pierced feet
Fair flowers of paradise extend, their fragrance ever sweet.

Crown him the Lord of heaven, one with the father known,
And the blest Spirit, through him given from yonder glorious throne!
All hail, Redeemer, hail! for thou hast died for me;
Thy praise shall never, never fail throughout eternity.

—Matthew Bridges, 1851, and Godfrey Thring, 1874

His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems; and he has a name inscribed that no one knows but himself. (Revelation 19:12)