

Easter Sunday
April 16, 2017

What Wondrous Love Is This

By: American Folk Hymn

What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this, O my soul!
What wondrous love is this
That caused the Lord of bliss
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul, for my soul,
To bear the dreadful curse for my soul!
When I was sinking down, sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down, sinking down,
When I was sinking down
Beneath God's righteous frown,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul for my soul,
Christ laid aside His crown for my soul.
To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb,
Who is the great I AM,
While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing,
While millions join the theme, I will sing.
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on;
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free
I'll sing His love for me,
And through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
And through eternity I'll sing on.

This Holy week, I have been stuck on the American Folk Hymn, "What Wondrous Love is this, oh my soul, oh my soul." It has been on my lips and in my heart and in my sermons!
And today, we join with millions of Christians worldwide who can sing:

***To God and to the Lamb I will sing, I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb I will sing;
To God and to the Lamb,
Who is the great I AM,
While millions join the theme, I will sing, I will sing,
While millions join the theme, I will sing.***

***And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on;
And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free
I'll sing His love for me,***

***And through eternity I'll sing on, I'll sing on,
And through eternity I'll sing on.***

When Mary goes to the tomb on that first Easter morning she does so with a heavy heart. Her Master, her teacher, her friend has died a terrible death. All of her life was now in doubt, her dreams & her hopes. She stands at the entrance to that tomb weeping. And then she meets someone she supposes to be the gardener and then the gardener calls her by name. "Mary," he says.

Can you imagine the look in her eyes and she turns and looks into his. Do you remember what she says? The joy of that first Easter can be found in her one word response, "Rabboni!" She yells. "Teacher!" And from what John tells us she tries to leap into his arms.

When those crowds in Jerusalem cried out: as Jesus hung on the cross: "save yourself – rescue yourself – come down from the cross – save yourself!"

Little did they know that what Jesus was doing was actually saving the world!

"What wondrous love is this!"

Little did even His closest followers know that THE TOMB WOULD BE EMPTY, for He is risen and so shall we be raised also.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on;

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.

And when from death I'm free

John Donne wrote of the impact of the resurrection upon humankind: "The Resurrection is an enormous answer to the problem of death. The idea is that the Christian goes with Christ through death to everlasting life. Death becomes an event, like birth, that is lived through."

What a magnificent statement of faith. Death is merely another event in the ongoing process of life – something one lives through with Christ. [Frank Lyman, April Sky]

This empty tomb encouraged and empowered a small group of people we would call "pretty near-do-well" men and women to change the world forever.

If you wish to see a photo of God is like, it is an empty tomb.

It is an empty tomb – made empty so that we can also be raised with him and eternal death no longer has dominion over us.

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on, I'll sing on;

And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.

And when from death I'm free

Most of our problems with the resurrection are not that we do not believe in Christ's resurrection but that we take it almost for granted without being affected by its wonder and splendor.

The story is told that Martin Luther once spent three days in a black depression over something that had gone wrong.

On the third day his wife came downstairs dressed in mourning clothes. "Who's dead?" he asked her. "God," she replied.

Luther rebuked her, saying, "What do you mean, God is dead? God cannot die."

"Well," she replied, "the way you've been acting I was sure He had!"

Many of us have been caught in that trap. [Ray C. Stedman, The Incredible Hope]

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What wondrous love is this
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And when from death I'm free, I'll sing on.
And when from death I'm free

If we are not still surprised by the Easter miracle, it is because it has become a routine in our lives to speak of the resurrection without being awed, without being bewildered and without being changed by it.

I ran across a beautiful story recently about a woman named Rosemary who works in the Alzheimer's Unit of a nursing home.

Rosemary and a colleague named Arlene brought the residents of the home together one Good Friday afternoon to view Franco Zeffirelli's acclaimed production Jesus of Nazareth.

They wondered whether these elderly Alzheimer's patients would even know what was going on, but they thought it might be worth the effort.

When they finally succeeded in getting everyone into position, they started the video.

Rosemary was pleasantly surprised at the quiet attention being paid to the screen.

At last came the scene where Mary Magdalene arrives at the empty tomb and sees that Jesus' body is not there.

An unknown man, in reality the risen Christ, asks Mary why she is looking for the living among the dead.

Mary runs as fast as she can back to the disciples and tells Peter and the rest with breathless excitement, "He's alive! I saw Him, I tell you! He's alive."

The doubt in their eyes causes Mary to pull back. "You don't believe me . . . You don't believe me!"

From somewhere in the crowd of Alzheimer's patients came the clear, resolute voice of Esther, one of the patients. "WE BELIEVE YOU," she said, "WE BELIEVE YOU!" [Rosemary Kadrmas in Jeff Cavins, et.al, *Amazing Grace for the Catholic Heart* (West Chester, PA: Ascension Press, LLC, 2003), pp. 211-212., adapted by King Duncan]

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May you live into the joy of an empty tomb, for it truly is wondrous love!