

“The Lamb Goes Forth Willingly”

Have you ever noticed how the language of the Apostles' Creed – and I'm talking about the Second Article of the Creed which confesses God the Son and His work of redemption – how it begins with passive verbs, but concludes with active verbs?

Jesus Christ, the Son of God, WAS conceived, WAS born, endured suffering, WAS crucified – death came to Him – and He WAS buried. All these verbs – all this action – happens TO Jesus. And then, the active verbs – Jesus is doing the action – HE descends, HE rose, HE ascended, HE sits, and HE will come again and HE will judge.

Tonight, hearing the Passion of our Lord from St. John chapters 18 & 19 – it all seems very passive to us – we hear about all of these things DONE TO Jesus ... and we mourn. We mourn our sins which have brought all this suffering on our innocent Lord.

Mourn, we should – but there is relief, even joy, in the midst of our Lord's suffering and death – a Paschal joy. As you will sing in the Hymn of the Day – “The Prince of Life from heaven Himself has freely given To shame and blows and bitter death.” (LSB 453.1) And as you sing in another hymn – “A Lamb goes uncomplaining forth, The guilt of sinners bearing ...” (LSB 438.1)

The Lord willingly suffers all this for you. He is willingly led like a lamb to the slaughter. He willingly does all of this for your salvation – for He earnestly desires the salvation of the whole world.

As the band of soldiers and Judas come to get Jesus, St. John tells us that – “Jesus, knowing all that would happen to Him, came forward ...” Jesus steps forward, not just to save the disciples from their swords and clubs – but to save you. “I am He,” He says, over and over again. I'm the One you want. Indeed, He's the One we want to be arrested and taken away – for His blood alone atones for sin.

Peter is not about to LET THIS HAPPEN TO Jesus. He too steps forward – but Jesus actively puts Peter in his place. “Put your sword into its sheath; shall I not drink the cup that the Father has give me?”

Like the lamb led to slaughter, prophesied by Isaiah, Jesus is bound and led away. He “opened not His mouth” (Is. 53:7) – yet, before the high priest He opens His mouth – just as He has openly taught “in synagogues and in the temple.” He is transparent – He speaks openly, and actively.

Peter on the other hand, is not transparent. He speaks openly – but not willingly. When forced, he opens his mouth and lies – denying His Lord – trying to keep his discipleship a secret. He too will mourn his sin, as we do our sins of denial.

Again, Jesus is led – bound like a criminal – to stand before Pilate – surrounded by the hypocrisy of His fellow Jews. They don’t want to enter the Gentile’s headquarters because they don’t want to be defiled, and therefore cut off from God – but they have no qualms about falsely accusing God-in-the-flesh-Jesus, stopping at nothing, until He is dead and gone.

The Lamb who at times is passively silent, at other times actively opens His mouth. He stands before Pilate and bears witness to the truth. He is a King – but not like the ones Pilate has in mind. His rule is different – He rules by opening His mouth, by preaching, preaching the truth.

“What is truth?”, Pilate asks. Does Pilate have any clue what the truth is? He does in certain matters – and maybe the most important matter – that Jesus is innocent. Three times Pilate declares what is truth – “I find no guilt in him.”

What a stark contrast to Barabbas, the guilty one. What a stark contrast to you and me – notorious sinners – guilty, one and all. And yet, Jesus willingly swaps places – the innocent One sentenced to death, so that the guilty ones may go free.

Jesus is sentenced, and delivered over to death – but not before receiving the blows, the spitting and the mockery of the soldiers. He’s stripped of the kingly attire given to Him by man, and His own clothes are put on Him – and a cross is laid upon Him. But St. John records this in an active way – that Jesus actively bears His own cross – He takes it up, He carries it – for you, for the whole world.

Jesus is on the receiving end of so much more. He's numbered with the transgressors – as if He is just one more guilty criminal deserving of death. A mocking title is nailed to the cross above His head. He's surrounded by swarms of people who look upon this scene and wag their heads.

Jesus is deserving of none of this. He who knew no sin should not be treated this way – but He doesn't scream "injustice!" and play the victim. No, He willingly suffers all this – because He actively desires the salvation of all – the betrayers, deniers, traitors, unjust ones, spineless ones, the brute squad and the executioners, the guilty mockers – and you.

Jesus has you and the whole world's salvation in mind – while the crucifying soldiers are piddling with His scrapes of clothing – casting lots to see who will get His tunic. While the world piddles around, Jesus takes care of important things – important for this life, and for life everlasting.

He takes care of His mother, giving His disciple responsibility for her – to love and care for her, even as Jesus does. "And from that hour, the disciple took her" – literally – "into his own things." Hanging from a cross – Jesus actively takes care of all things – temporal and eternal things – all your needs of body and soul.

Because of all that Jesus passively endures, He thirsts – but He actively speaks forth so that all the Scriptures might be fulfilled in Him. All of it is fulfilled. "It is finished" He boldly preaches. Everything necessary for your redemption and eternal salvation has been accomplished by Jesus.

He bows His head. He gives up the spirit. Jesus willingly dies ... for you.

Jesus is placed into a tomb – leaving us to hang on His "it is finished" Gospel. All that the Father requires for the salvation of sinners has been accomplished – all the work is done – and the benefits are received, passively, by faith.

The One who willingly and actively suffered and died for you – continues to be at work for you. For where there is the forgiveness of sins, there is life and salvation. Amen.