

Thursday in the Third Week of Lent

March 11, 2021

By the Reverend Stephen Gerth

*Jeremiah 7:21–28**; *Psalms 95:6–11*; *Joel 2:12–13*; *Luke 11:14–23*

We're reading Jeremiah at Morning Prayer. Today's first reading was the first lesson two days ago. It's from a section of Jeremiah where the prophet declares the unfaithfulness of the people of Judah and Jerusalem to the "LORD of hosts, the God of Israel."¹ In today's passage, Jeremiah stresses that a person's moral disposition is the foundation of his or her faithfulness to the Lord. The unfaithfulness of the northern kingdom, Israel, has already led to its conquest and the exile of its people—the lost tribes of Israel. Judah and Jerusalem will be next. They are not and will not heed the voice of their God. Jeremiah speaks in this passage of the sinfulness of humankind, not just of the actions of individuals: "But they did not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward."²

Yesterday, Father Smith, Dr. Hurd, and I began to sort out service details for Holy Week and Easter Day. One of the questions was what text for the Reproaches would be sung as the cross is unveiled for veneration. The 1976 *Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer* included the Reproaches but not the Prayer Book 1979.³ There are different translations of the text available in English. I have a service bulletin from seminary days. We used Reproaches I from the draft book, with one additional verse, the second verse of the hymn, "Ah, holy Jesus." This is the verse: "Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee? Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee. 'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee: I crucified thee."⁴

I am guilty of my share of sins, but you and I did not crucify Jesus. We

¹ Jeremiah 7:21.

² Jeremiah 7:24.

³ *The Draft Proposed Book of Common Prayer* (New York: Church Hymnal, 1976), 281–82.

⁴ *The Hymnal 1982 according to the use of The Episcopal Church* (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1985), no. 158.

know the names of a few of those involved, Judas, Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate. In Luke, Pilate sent Jesus to Herod.

The English translation of the German text, *Herzliebster Jesu*, credited to Johann Heermann, was published in 1630.⁵ The British poet laureate Robert Seymour Bridges, who died in 1930, is famous for his translation of this text and another passion hymn, “O sacred head, sore wounded.”⁶

I’m entirely comfortable and moved by what is usually our final hymn on Good Friday, “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”⁷ I know I wasn’t there, but I am deeply moved by the words and Afro-American spiritual harmonized by the Reverend Canon Charles Winfred Douglas, who was the editor of *The Hymnal 1940*. The hymn was first published in 1899 and was the first Afro-American hymn published in a hymnal not intended for Afro-American congregations.⁸

Until I read the article on “Were you there” in *The Hymnal 1940 Companion*, I didn’t realize there were three more verses. Before what I know is as the final verse, “when they laid him in the tomb,” there is, “Were you there when the sun refused to shine?” I’m sorry that our 1940 hymnal did not include it as Douglas’s harmonization is widely used. The final two verses make the text usable any time of the year, but I don’t ever expect to sing them. The tune alone is so associated with the Lord’s death that I don’t want to turn it into an Easter hymn—though I would describe myself as an Easter Christian. These are the last two verses: “Were you there when he rose from the dead?” and “Were you there when he ascended on high?”

✠ In the Name of the Father, and of the Son,
and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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⁵ *The Hymnal 1940 Companion*, 3rd rev. ed. (New York: Church Pension Fund, 1951), 53.

⁶ *The Hymnal 1982*, no. 168.

⁷ *Ibid.*, no.172.

⁸ Horace Clarence Boyer, *The Hymnal 1982 Companion*, ed. Raymond F. Glover (New York: Church Hymnal Corporation, 1990), Vol. 3 A, no. 172, 443, 172–73.