

In the name of ✝ Jesus.

Tonight, as always is our focus, we look to Jesus and to His cross, but tonight we gaze upon it in all its uncomfortable detail. Last night it was the blood; tonight we see our Savior hanging on a cross. He is the Son of God, very God, holy and just, and yet He is mortal. And so we see the streams of blood flowing from His head, His hands, His feet, His side. We see the loss of blood and of breath that leads to death. We look at Him, and most of us quickly divert our eyes. It's hard to witness. Only the three Marys and the beloved disciple John stayed to the end.

Who could do such a thing to Him in whom was no guilt? The Jews? The Romans? We look at Him, and the blood drains from us when we realize ... not just they, but we did it.

Tonight we see the torment of the beloved Son of God. We see Him brutalized and ridiculed. We see Him nailed and hanging from a cross, and we realize, it's because of us. On account of us, He is tormented. On account of our sins, He cries out that God has forsaken Him. We look as the sinless Son of God is pierced and we realize, it's for our transgressions. We watch as He is crushed and we realize, it's for our iniquities.

Oh unfaithful vineyard, planted in a fertile garden. He planted a good vineyard with choice vines. He tended it, yet we yielded no good fruit. He leads us graciously through the valley of the shadow of death, and yet we delivered Him up to the chief priests; we led Him to the judgment hall of Pilate. He feeds us with the bread of life, and yet we struck Him with blows and scourges; we smote His head with the reed. He has promised us a royal scepter, yet we placed on His head a crown of thorns; we hung Him on the gallows of the cross. He gives us to drink of the water of life, and yet we gave Him gall and vinegar to drink when thirsty.

Oh, how the fire of God's wrath should have consumed us, dead, dry trees with unfruitful branches. But it does not. Rather, His wrath is poured out on the Green tree instead.

Oh, how great is the thanks we owe to our Jesus, most godly, that taking upon Himself our sins, He willed also to take upon Himself their penalties: the Father's Divine wrath. How great is the fire of His love that persuaded Him to plunge into the sea of that suffering for us, wretches that we are, so miserable, so ungrateful!

Oh, the depth of Jesus' mercy and the earnestness of His love. Though by our sins His enemy, yet He loves us as a friend, loving us with the greatest of loves, laying down His life for us. Out of this unspeakable love, our gracious Jesus descended to the prison of this world. He clothed Himself with the tent of our

flesh. He took on the form of a servant, and willingly took upon Himself what we justly deserved. To be sure, the fire of God's wrath was meted out on Jesus, but it was the fire of His love that consumed Him on the altar of the cross, a fire that sets us free from the unceasing, scorching, flames of hell.

Oh love, how deep, how broad, how high — the love of our Lord Jesus, our Savior, our Redeemer and Mediator, sacrificed on the tree of the Cross. By this Savior, by His love, by His cross, joy has come to the whole world. By this tree He bestows life.

O cross, most blessed, yet most horrible. O gibbet of torture and death, you are the instrument of our salvation; we do not gaze upon you tonight with despair, for what was accomplished on you gives us hope.

O Son, disfigured, despised, rejected, although it is painful to us, let not our eyes be diverted from You, but let us gaze upon You with a faith that confesses: by Your wounds are we healed, by Your innocent death do You account us righteous. O man of sorrows, lift up our sinking spirits that we may look to You with awe and thanksgiving. You have made intercession for us transgressors. Help us ever, dear Jesus, both to admit our sins and to look to You alone and trust in You and no other, that we may be saved and live, and that we may join with all the saints in praise to You for eternity.

In the name of the Father and of the ✝ Son and of the Holy Spirit.