



Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake

Text: Johann Scheffler (1624-77)

Tune: Johann Hermann Schein (1586-1630)

In the weeks after Trinity there is a focus on how the Christian conducts himself. The Epistle readings often highlight Christian conduct while Our Lord speaks and acts in ways that show what the Christian Church is about. Hymns like “Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake” fit perfectly into this time in the life of the Church. We sing the admonition of Christ and the Apostles to flee from darkness and whatever else would threaten our salvation and to walk with one another in kindness and love.



Johann Scheffler

This shift in hymnody, from the sturdy, doctrinal hymns of Luther and the sixteenth century, to the hymns teaching the Christian life in the seventeenth century took place by the pen of writers such as Johann Scheffler. Scheffler was born in 1624 in Breslau (today Wrocław, Poland). Trained as a doctor, Scheffler received his M.D. in 1648 from the University of Padua. His life took him far from his Polish homeland because of his adherence to Lutheranism, because Poland was hostile to Lutheranism at the time. After completing his education he returned home to serve as court doctor for Duke Sylvius Nimrod of Württemberg-Oels. The Duke was a staunch Lutheran, but Scheffler soon found his personal theology at odds with Lutheran theology. While studying he became familiar with the writings of Jakob Böhme, whose theology was heavily mystic. Mysticism is the desire to have knowledge of God by personal experiences, such as trances, visions, and speaking in tongues. A majority of theologians in that era denied mysticism, but some embraced it. Eventually

Scheffler left the Lutheran Church and in 1652 was officially received into the Roman Catholic Church and changed his name to Angelus Silesius. He became a priest in 1661, and in 1671 retired to the monastery of St. Matthias in Breslau, where he died in 1677.

Scheffler’s hymns found wider acceptance and use among Lutherans than Roman Catholics. His hymns were some of the finest poetry of the time. Scheffler wrote several hymns, many of which are included in *The Lutheran Hymnal* and other major Lutheran hymnals. Scheffler’s hymns were published in several hymnals in his lifetime, many of which he released himself. However, the most notable hymnal he produced was *Heilige Seelenlust*, “Holy Desires of the Soul.” Most of his hymns, at least of those in wide use, seem to be written before his ventures into mysticism, and focus heavily on the person and work of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

“Come, Follow Me, the Savior Spake” is widely known as a five stanza hymn. However, the version in *The Lutheran Hymnal* omits two stanzas, between what we have as four and five:

But if too hot you find the fray,	Who seeks to find his soul’s welfare
I, at your side, stand ready;	Without Me, he shall lose it;
I fight Myself, I lead the way,	But who to lose it may appear,
At all times firm and steady.	In God shall introduce it.
A coward he who will not heed	Who bears no cross nor follows hard
When the chief Captain takes the lead.	Deserves not Me nor My reward.

The primary voice in this hymn is that of Jesus. He tells us what He does for us. While it may sound like we sing of what we must do, it is really what Our Lord does for us. In stanza two when He tells us to “walk as in the day,” He does not leave us to do it but tells us, “I keep your feet from straying.” Similarly, in stanzas three and four He tells us of His “gracious Words” which give strength and comfort while He “[leads] you to your heavenly goal.” Though we do sing also of what we must do, all of these actions are the response of faith. Our following of Christ Our Lord is only possible because by His Means of Grace (Word and Sacrament) we are strengthened in faith towards Him and fervent love for one another. With Jesus’ strength we bear the battle’s strain undaunted because His Word sustains us and His love supports us.