



Farewell I Gladly Bid Thee

Text: Valerius Herberger (1562-1627)

Tune: Melchoir Teschner (1584-1635)

One theme that looms large in these last weeks of the Church Year is that of dissatisfaction with the world and an eagerness to be with Jesus. This is also a common theme in good funeral hymnody. The two events cannot be separated. We confess that at our death our soul is safe with the Lord in heaven, while our bodies wait for the resurrection of the dead. For this reason, many good funeral hymns or hymns that prepare the faithful Christian for death are at home in these last weeks of the Church Year.



Valerius Herberger

Valerius Herberger, a German Lutheran Pastor, gave the Church a hymn which fits this time perfectly. Valerius was the son of Martin Herberger, a furrier and poet at Fraustadt, Posen. He was born April 21, 1562. He studied theology at the Universities of Frankfurt and Leipzig. In 1584 he returned to Fraustadt and was appointed master of the lower grades of the school there. In 1590 he was made deacon of St. Mary's Church, Fraustadt, and in 1599 he became the church's Pastor. However, in 1604 he and his flock were ousted from the church by King Sigismund III of Poland, who wanted to appease the Roman Catholics of Fraustadt. They were forced to meet in a house near the town gate, and held their first service there on Christmas Eve, 1604. They named the house *Kripplein Christi*, the Manger of Christ.

In Herberger's life, he published two sets of sermons, one on the appointed Gospels (*Evangelische Herzpostille*) and another on the Epistles (*Epistolische Herzpostille*). His most famous work was an

eight volume work, the *Magnolia Dei*, in which he set about showing that the entire Old Testament pointed to Christ. However, he only made it through the Book of Ruth.

As a Pastor, he worked unweariedly for the good of his people, especially during the time of the great pestilence (1613-1630) and during the troubles of the early part of the Thirty Years' War. "Farewell I Gladly Bid Thee" was part of his work for his members. He wrote it in 1613 and titled "The Farewell of Valerius Herberger that he gave to this world in the autumn of the year 1613 when he every hour saw death before his eyes, but mercifully and also as wonderfully as three men in the furnace at Babylon was nevertheless spared." In this pestilence 2,135 citizens of Fraustadt died. In commenting on this hymn, he called it "a devout prayer" for the Lutheran citizens of Fraustadt and also "a hymn of consolation in which a pious heart bids farewell to this world."

The tune written for this hymn is a familiar one. However, it is most immediately associated with "All Glory, Laud, and Honor." Despite that association, Melchoir Teschner wrote the tune for "Farewell I Gladly Bid Thee." It was not until this hymn and its tune became popular that the tune was applied to numerous other hymns.

This hymn breathes an air of longing for heaven and of disdain for everything the world has to offer. Stanza one speaks of the world being "false" and "evil" and its life as "vain and sinful." Sorrows and crosses are the norm for this life for the Christian, as he strives to remain faithful. In all of these trials we pray that Jesus would be our Stay and lead us with His good counsel (st. 2). As death draws near, we pray that the cross of Jesus Christ would shine brighter as everything else fades (st. 3). As we revisit our life and all we have done, we cherish the image of Christ on the cross, dying to forgive every sin. He hides our soul deep in His wounded side. We find our perfect healing and rest in Him as we reach heaven above (st. 4). It is not until stanza five, when we sing of heaven, that happy images abound. There we "bloom and flourish" because we are free of everything that stole our joy here. Forever we will sing of the faithfulness of Jesus' love with all true believers where joy is rife, free forever from sin and evil.