

***Wondrous Love***  
Palm & Passion Sunday  
Sunday, April 05, 2009  
Philippians 2:5-11  
Mark 14:1-15:47  
by Dr. Frank Trotter

“If then there is any encouragement in Christ, any consolation from love, any sharing in the Spirit, any compassion and sympathy, make my joy complete: be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility regard others as better than yourselves. Let each of you look not to your own interests, but to the interests of others. Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”

- St. Paul (Philippians 2:5-11)

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Although most contemporary church musicians – let alone most Americans – have ever heard of it, William Walker’s *The Southern Harmony and Musical Companion* is perhaps the most popular “tunebook” (or “hymnal”) ever printed. It was first published in 1835 at a time in the nineteenth century when advertising was mainly by word of mouth or relatively sedate displays in weekly and monthly papers. It is remarkable to note that *Southern Harmony* sold about six hundred thousand copies – perhaps the most of any book of its time other than the Bible. Its longevity is also remarkable: it is still being used and sung from with loving care almost 175 years after its first edition. It is virtually unparalleled as a repository of the musical idioms current in the early nineteenth century, as well as of earlier idioms that were already becoming rare at the time of its publication.

The origin of *The Southern Harmony* lies in the story of two young South Carolina gentlemen, William Walker and Benjamin Franklin White, who married sisters in the Golightly Family and became brothers-in-law in the bargain. The story most frequently told about the hymnal's origins is that the two men compiled it following Walker's travels through Appalachia in the early 1800's. As he traveled by horseback to all kinds of small towns and communities, he listened to the hymns that he heard the church people sing – many of which he had never heard before and most of which had never been published. In the process he developed a method of musical notation which helped him accurately record the tunes and the meter of the hymns.

After several years of collecting these hymns, William Walker gathered them all together, recorded the tunes and the words, and collaborated with his brother, Benjamin Franklin White, with the editing. Walker then took the precious manuscript north for publication. But when the hymnal made its first appearance, the family was astounded that Walker had credited himself alone as the author and had omitted his brother-in-law, Benjamin Franklin White, altogether. Not only that, Walker seemed to imply that he was the author of many of the hymns that he had heard across Appalachia.

Because of this single decision, Walker created a never-to-be-healed schism in his own family. Walker's ego seemed to grow with the years. In later life, he signed himself as "William Walker, A.S.H." (the "A.S.H." stood for "Author of *Southern Harmony*"); it is clear that he took great pride in his compilation.

One of hymns that appeared in *Southern Harmony* was the haunting Lenten hymn, "What Wondrous Love Is This."

[Play the tune, "Wondrous Love."]

What seems clear is that the sound and harmony of the tune is clearly from Appalachia, from the area that also gave us the tune for the hymn "Amazing Grace". When I grew up in East Tennessee, we called "Wondrous Love" one of the "Smokey Mountain hymns" whose origins are as ephemeral as the foggy mists which surround the mountains.

If William Walker seemed to give himself credit for the words to the hymn, many musical historians attribute them to the Rev. Alexander Means – an

eminent Methodist preacher, physician, and scientist who also served briefly as the President of Emory University in Atlanta.<sup>1</sup> Likewise, if Walker seemed to claim authorship of the tune we know as “Wondrous Love”, some historians credit it to an obscure composer by the name of Robert Hunt.

When “What Wondrous Love Is This” first appeared in a Methodist hymnal – *The Book of Hymns* published in 1964, the editors determined that its authorship could not be verified beyond the shadow of a doubt. Rather than attributing it to William Walker, Alexander Means, Robert Hunt, or any other, the editors in their wisdom called it simply an “American folk hymn.” When *The United Methodist Hymnal* was published in 1989, the editors agreed and left the simple designation as it was – “American folk hymn.”

Perhaps the main reason that *Southern Harmony* and its collection of wonderful hymns like “Wondrous Love” survived is because of the tremendous religious fervor rising along the Kentucky-Tennessee border, which was expressed in the camp meetings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These great assemblies sometimes brought together thousands of people for extended periods; they needed just the kind of religious music that was being discarded along the seaboard. Happily for the participants - and for the musical historian - the music, the hymns, and the notation seem to have been considered an entity, for all were warmly embraced in the camp meetings.

If my search for the origins of “Wondrous Love” have led me to an uncertain end, what is clear is that its author or authors found their inspiration in the “greatest story ever told” – the ancient narrative of how Jesus, because of God’s great love, became incarnate among us and died for us upon the cross.

This morning we hear that ancient story again as we are swept back into it as if it were happening again for the first time.

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### **Lessons for Palm & Passion Sunday**

#### **The Passion Narrative – Gospel of Mark 14:1 – 15:47**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://emoryhistory.emory.edu/people/presidents/Means.htm>.

It was two days before the Passover and the festival of Unleavened Bread. The chief priests and the scribes were looking for a way to arrest Jesus by stealth and kill him; for they said, "Not during the festival, or there may be a riot among the people."

While he was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, as he sat at the table, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment of nard, and she broke open the jar and poured the ointment on his head. But some were there who said to one another in anger, "Why was the ointment wasted in this way? For this ointment could have been sold for more than three hundred denarii, and the money given to the poor." And they scolded her. But Jesus said, "Let her alone; why do you trouble her? She has performed a good service for me. For you always have the poor with you, and you can show kindness to them whenever you wish; but you will not always have me. She has done what she could; she has anointed my body beforehand for its burial. Truly I tell you, wherever the good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her."

Then Judas Iscariot, who was one of the twelve, went to the chief priests in order to betray him to them. When they heard it, they were greatly pleased, and promised to give him money. So he began to look for an opportunity to betray him.

On the first day of Unleavened Bread, when the Passover lamb is sacrificed, his disciples said to him, "Where do you want us to go and make the preparations for you to eat the Passover?" So he sent two of his disciples, saying to them, "Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you; follow him, and wherever he enters, say to the owner of the house, 'The Teacher asks, Where is my guest room where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?' He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there." So the disciples set out and went to the city, and found everything as he had told them; and they prepared the Passover meal.

When it was evening, he came with the twelve. And when they had taken their places and were eating, Jesus said, "Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me, one who is eating with me." They began to be distressed and to say to him one after another, "Surely, not I?" He said to them, "It is one of the twelve, one who is dipping bread into the bowl with me. For the Son of Man goes as it is written of him, but woe to that one by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! It would have been better for that one not to have been born."

While they were eating, he took a loaf of bread, and after blessing it he broke it, gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is my body." Then he took a cup, and after giving thanks he gave it to them, and all of them drank from it. He said to them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many. Truly I tell you, I will never again drink of the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God."

When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. And Jesus said to them, "You will all become deserters; for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.'

But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." Peter said to him, "Even though all become deserters, I will not." Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this day, this very night, before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times." But he said vehemently, "Even though I must die with you, I will not deny you." And all of them said the same.

They went to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I pray." He took with him Peter and James and John, and began to be distressed and agitated. And he said to them, "I am deeply grieved, even to death; remain here, and keep awake." And going a little farther, he threw himself on the ground and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him. He said, "Abba, Father, for you all things are possible; remove this cup from me; yet, not what I want, but what you want." He came and found them sleeping; and he said to Peter, "Simon, are you asleep? Could you not keep awake one hour? Keep awake and pray that you may not come into the time of trial; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak." And again he went away and prayed, saying the same words. And once more he came and found them sleeping, for their eyes were very heavy; and they did not know what to say to him. He came a third time and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? Enough! The hour has come; the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners. Get up, let us be going. See, my betrayer is at hand."

Immediately, while he was still speaking, Judas, one of the twelve, arrived; and with him there was a crowd with swords and clubs, from the chief priests, the scribes, and the elders. Now the betrayer had given them a sign, saying, "The one I will kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard." So when he came, he went up to him at once and said, "Rabbi!" and kissed him. Then they laid hands on him and arrested him. But one of those who stood near drew his sword and struck the slave of the high priest, cutting off his ear. Then Jesus said to them, "Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest me as though I were a bandit? Day after day I was

with you in the temple teaching, and you did not arrest me. But let the scriptures be fulfilled.” All of the disciples deserted him and fled.

A certain young man was following him, wearing nothing but a linen cloth. They caught hold of him, but he left the linen cloth and ran off naked.

Then they took Jesus to the high priest; and all the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes were assembled. Peter had followed him at a distance, right into the courtyard of the high priest; and he was sitting with the guards, warming himself at the fire. Now the chief priests and the whole council were looking for testimony against Jesus to put him to death; but they found none. For many gave false testimony against him, and their testimony did not agree. Some stood up and gave false testimony against him, saying, “We heard him say, ‘I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands.’” But even on this point their testimony did not agree. Then the high priest stood up before them and asked Jesus, “Have you no answer? What is it that they testify against you?”

But he was silent and did not answer. Again the high priest asked him, “Are you the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One?” Jesus said, “I am; and ‘you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power,’ and ‘coming with the clouds of heaven.’”

Then the high priest tore his clothes and said, “Why do we still need witnesses? You have heard his blasphemy! What is your decision?” All of them condemned him as deserving death. Some began to spit on him, to blindfold him, and to strike him, saying to him, “Prophecy!” The guards also took him over and beat him.

While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant-girls of the high priest came by. When she saw Peter warming himself, she stared at him and said, “You also were with Jesus, the man from Nazareth.” But he denied it, saying, “I do not know or understand what you are talking about.” And he went out into the forecourt. Then the cock crowed. And the servant-girl, on seeing him, began again to say to the bystanders, “This man is one of them.” But again he denied it. Then after a little while the bystanders again said to Peter, “Certainly you are one of them; for you are a Galilean.” But he began to curse, and he swore an oath, “I do not know this man you are talking about.” At that moment the cock crowed for the second time. Then Peter remembered that Jesus had said to him, “Before the cock crows twice, you will deny me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

As soon as it was morning, the chief priests held a consultation with the elders and scribes and the whole council. They bound Jesus, led him away, and handed him over to Pilate. Pilate asked him, "Are you the King of the Jews?" He answered him, "You say so." Then the chief priests accused him of many things. Pilate asked him again, "Have you no answer? See how many charges they bring against you." But Jesus made no further reply, so that Pilate was amazed.

Now at the festival he used to release a prisoner for them, anyone for whom they asked. <sup>7</sup>Now a man called Barabbas was in prison with the rebels who had committed murder during the insurrection. So the crowd came and began to ask Pilate to do for them according to his custom. Then he answered them, "Do you want me to release for you the King of the Jews?" For he realized that it was out of jealousy that the chief priests had handed him over. But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have him release Barabbas for them instead. Pilate spoke to them again, "Then what do you wish me to do with the man you call the King of the Jews?" They shouted back, "Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Why, what evil has he done?" But they shouted all the more, "Crucify him!" So Pilate, wishing to satisfy the crowd, released Barabbas for them; and after flogging Jesus, he handed him over to be crucified.

Then the soldiers led him into the courtyard of the palace (that is, the governor's headquarters); and they called together the whole cohort. And they clothed him in a purple cloak; and after twisting some thorns into a crown, they put it on him. And they began saluting him, "Hail, King of the Jews!" They struck his head with a reed, spat upon him, and knelt down in homage to him. After mocking him, they stripped him of the purple cloak and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him. They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus. Then they brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means the place of a skull). And they offered him wine mixed with myrrh; but he did not take it. And they crucified him, and divided his clothes among them, casting lots to decide what each should take.

It was nine o'clock in the morning when they crucified him. The inscription of the charge against him read, "The King of the Jews." And with him they crucified two bandits, one on his right and one on his left. Those who passed by derided him, shaking their heads and saying, "Aha! You who would destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself, and come down from the cross!" In the same way the chief priests, along with the scribes,

were also mocking him among themselves and saying, “He saved others; he cannot save himself. Let the Messiah, the King of Israel, come down from the cross now, so that we may see and believe.” Those who were crucified with him also taunted him.

When it was noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” which means, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” When some of the bystanders heard it, they said, “Listen, he is calling for Elijah.” And someone ran, filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a stick, and gave it to him to drink, saying, “Wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down.” Then Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two, from top to bottom. Now when the centurion, who stood facing him, saw that in this way he breathed his last, he said, “Truly this man was God’s Son!”

There were also women looking on from a distance; among them were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Jesus, and Salome. These used to follow him and provided for him when he was in Galilee; and there were many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem.

When evening had come, and since it was the day of Preparation, that is, the day before the sabbath, Joseph of Arimathea, a respected member of the council, who was also himself waiting expectantly for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Then Pilate wondered if he were already dead; and summoning the centurion, he asked him whether he had been dead for some time. When he learned from the centurion that he was dead, he granted the body to Joseph. Then Joseph bought a linen cloth, and taking down the body, wrapped it in the linen cloth, and laid it in a tomb that had been hewn out of the rock. He then rolled a stone against the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Jesus saw where the body was laid.

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“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.”  
- Jesus (John 15:13)

Thanks be to God. Amen.

