



In between these readings today, we have been asking you to sing verses of the hymn “Ah, Holy Jesus,” but I want to draw your attention to a name on the bottom of that page in the hymnal: the one responsible for the words written nearly four hundred years ago in Johann Heermann, considered one of the greatest Lutheran hymn-writers in our history. But, safe to say, Johann faced more, more than his fair share of life instances of wondering if it was all finished for him.

For starters, he was the youngest of five, but none of his older siblings survived childhood. And Johann dealt with his own health issues from the youngest of age, leading his mother, who went through the most unbearable pain that I cannot even begin to imagine, to turn to God in desperation, praying that if her fifth and only living child survived, she would ensure that he would go into ministry in the church.

Soon enough, he served congregations in Germany, but he would have to stop preaching altogether after a severe throat condition, which further led him into writing the hymns that would be sung for generations to come, three of which are in our red hymnals to this day.

But part of the reason he kept pouring out his heart into these poetic songs is because of even more hardship that must have made him wonder if it was indeed all finished for him. His wife died far too young in the midst of the Thirty Years War in Europe, where it wasn’t only about opposing armies plundering through towns and setting them ablaze, but also the plague that killed half the population of the town where Johann continued to serve.

He had more than enough reasons throughout his life to believe, “It is finished.” He had plenty of reasons to give up entirely, including wondering where could God possibly be with the most tragic life story. But for some reason, Johann still clung to hope. Johann was under the impression that no matter what he and his family endured, that God was never going to leave them to fend for themselves. It led him to write in the fifth verse that we will sing here next, of an “unswerving love” of Jesus Christ.

It is because of that unswerving love that it is, in fact, not finished. Something is about to happen. Something is about to happen to ensure that childhood death or chronic illness or wars or epidemics: that none of it will be able to tell humanity that “it is finished.” Something is about to happen to say that eternal life will be the finale. It is not finished for our Lord, because his unswerving love will not allow him to stay on the cross or in the tomb forever. His unswerving love will instead insist on being with the Johanns of centuries past and those who wonder if it is all finished for them now. The unswerving love of Christ says otherwise. It is not finished. It is just beginning. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed! Amen!