

Introduction to “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief”

by Bonnie Heidenreich

June 27, 1844 was a day of significance for members of the Church. It was the day of the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum in Carthage, Illinois. Only moments before his death, the prophet asked John Taylor, a dear friend and fellow prisoner, to sing one of his favorite hymns, “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief.”

In the quiet of the hot summer afternoon, Elder Taylor’s voice drifted across the room. Something in the song touched the prophet and seemed to calm his spirit. Perhaps it was the gently moving melody which lingered like a lullaby in the air.

Or perhaps Joseph identified with this poor wayfaring man of grief who encountered so many trials in so few verses of song. What man more than the prophet could empathize with someone who was thirsty and perishing for want of bread; or who had been stripped, wounded and beaten nigh unto death; or, so hauntingly familiar, was in prison, condemned to meet a traitor’s doom because of lying tongues.

But perhaps the part that touched him most deeply came in the last verse as the stranger removes his disguise. It is the Savior. The Lord stands face to face with the one who stood by Him, immovable, through all adversity.

“He spake and my poor name he named.
Of me thou has not been ashamed.”

All the persecution, the hatred, the ridicule fade to seeming trivia for Joseph at the prospect of these few blessed words from the Savior. (pause)

The prophet sits calmly in a small jail in Carthage and knows that his time is near. But he is prepared to meet his God. “Oh, sing it again, Brother Taylor. Just once more....please...”

*Soloist begins singing arrangement of “A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief.”
Duet and SATB are available through Chapel Music on
sacredsheetsmusic.org*