Footstep #34 – Early Martyrs for the Protestant Faith

Heinrich (Henry) Voes and Johann (John) Esch were two Augustinian monks from Belgium and followers of Luther. They were executed in the market place in Brussels on July 1, 1523. Luther and his followers faced persecution and death in these first years of the Protestant Reformation. The words below were written by Martin Luther. It is a ballad that spread throughout northern Europe quickly. This is the first hymn of the Reformation and the ballad was published in the *Wittenberg Hymnal* in 1524.

A new song now shall be begun,
Lord, help us raise the banner
Of praise for all that God has done,
For which we give him honor.
At Brussels in the Netherlands
God proved Himself most truthful
And poured His gifts from open hands
On two lads, martyrs youthful
Through whom He showed His power.

One was named John, a name to show
He stood in God's high favor.
His brother Henry, well we know,
Was salt of truest savor.
This world they now have left behind
And wear bright crowns of glory.
These sons of God had fixed the mind
Upon the Gospel story,
For which they died as martyrs.

From where the Foe in ambush lay,
He send to have them taken
To force them God's Word to betray
And make their faith be shaken.
Louvain sent clever men, who came
In twisting nets to break them.
Hard played they at their crooked game,
But from faith could not shake them.
God made their tricks look foolish.

Oh, they sang sweet, and they sang sour,
They tried all their devices.
The youths stood firmly like a tow'r
And overcame each crisis.
It filled the Foe with raging hate
To know himself defeated.
By these two lads, and he so gret.
His rage flamed high, and heated
His plan to see them burning.

Their cloister-garments off they tore,
Took off their consecrations;
All this the youths were ready for,
They said Amen with patience.
They gave to God the Father thanks
That He would them deliver
From Satan's scoffing and the pranks
That make men quake and shiver
When he comes masked and raging.