

All Saints Church, Boyne Hill Maidenhead
Sounds of Worship

Easter 3

The Gospel reading for Easter 3 describes the road to Emmaus where Jesus appears to Cleopas and another, unnamed disciple who fail to recognise him. They tell this apparent stranger about their despondency at the death of Jesus and that his tomb was found to be empty. Jesus, then tells the two disciples about the fulfilment of the scriptures. After they three of them reach the village of Emmaus, Cleopas invites their companion to join all the disciples for a meal together, at which, Jesus is revealed as his true self and the disciples greet the resurrected Lord.

This event illustrates the ministry of Jesus, meeting people on their journeys of faith, learning about their needs, teaching the power of his Word and sharing hospitality.

We had chosen, to sing “One is the body and one is the Head” AM 501 as the gradual hymn. The words of this hymn are based on Ephesians 4. V11-16 which expresses the theme that we all have gifts and talents which if there are used in the service of Jesus create a united sense of purpose and community. This nicely reflects the gospel theme of power of the Word and sense of a new Jesus-led community.

The words and music are by John Bell, who two years ago led a day-long workshop at All Saints on singing the psalms. John Bell’s hymns have become a rich source for congregational worship because of the expertly crafted words and unpretentious melodies.

1. One is the body and one is the Head,
One is the Spirit by whom we are led;
One God and Father,
One faith and one call for all.

2. Christ who ascended to heaven above
Is the same Jesus whose nature is love,
Who once descended
To bring to this earth new birth.

3. Gifts have been given well-suited to each,
Some to be prophets, to pastor or preach,
Some, through the gospel,
To challenge, to convert and teach.

4. Called to his service are women and men
So that his body might ever again
Witness through worship,
Through deed and through word
To Christ our Lord.

In verse 1, Bell reinforces the oneness of purpose and community by repeating the word “one” 6 times. There is also a subtle rhyming scheme, not only the obvious one at the end of the first and second lines in each verse but also in the first two verses, the final three words of the final line (v1 “call for all”, v2 “earth new birth”)

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These technical features in his writing contribute to the metrical flow of the words and cleverly encapsulate the meaning and mood of the message.

The Emmaus story is a very intimate one. It involves three people in quiet discussion as they walk and concludes with an evening meal. Unlike the Last supper, just a few days before, which was imbued with a sense of foreboding, this meal is a sudden and dramatic confirmation of the resurrection.

“One is the body” captures the sense of intimacy with the very simple melody that John Bell has written for his words. The piece has the feel of a psalm chant to it, with a very limited range of notes and simple harmonies.

More generally, John Bell draws on folk melodies from around the world, especially from Africa and South America. These influences are very apparent in the easy to learn, direct and memorable qualities of his own music.



Figure 1 "One is the body and one is the Head" AM 501

To reflect the eucharistic theme of the gospel we had chosen “Sweet sacrament divine” AM 464

The words and music are by Francis Stanfield (1835-1914). He was an English Catholic priest who worked in the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Westminster. He was a son of the painter, and friend of Charles Dickens, Clarkson Frederick Stanfield. Given the large number of hymns written by non-conformist writers that have transferred into main-stream hymn books it is important to recognise this contribution by a Roman Catholic priest. The quality and craftsmanship of the writing is excellent. Features like the subtle shift of the final word of the first line of each verse which sets the course of each verse and the rhyming scheme. The consonance created by use of “s” throughout is notable and lends a subdued sense and sound to the hymn.

Like the John Bell hymn above, the author is also the composer of the tune. It has a classic melodic structure consisting of the basic initial melody for the first two lines of words (Melody A), which is repeated with a slight variation for lines three and four (Melody: A¹). Then a contrasting melody for lines five and six (Melody B) and a final variation of melody A to conclude. This is similar to the melodic structure of “Christ alone” (A; A; B; A) which was included in last week’s Sounds of Worship. Stanfield’s melody has an enduring quality that enables it to sustain the multiple repetitions inherent in such a structure, which, of course, also reinforces its memorability.



Figure 2 "Sweet sacrament divine" AM 464

1. SWEET Sacrament divine,
Hid in thine earthly home,
Lo, round thy lowly shrine,

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With suppliant hearts we come;
Jesus, to thee our voice we raise
In songs of love and heartfelt praise:
Sweet Sacrament divine.

2. Sweet Sacrament of peace,
Dear home for every heart,
Where restless yearnings cease
And sorrows all depart;
There in thine ear all trustfully
We tell our tale of misery:
Sweet Sacrament of peace.
3. Sweet Sacrament of rest,
Ark from the ocean's roar,
Within thy shelter blest
Soon may we reach the shore;
Save us, for still the tempest raves,
Save, lest we sink beneath the waves:
Sweet Sacrament of rest.
4. Sweet Sacrament divine,
Earth's light and jubilee,
In thy far depths doth shine
The Godhead's majesty;
Sweet light, so shine on us, we pray
That earthly joys may fade away:
Sweet Sacrament divine.

Last week, I included the Menuet from "Suite Gothique" by Leon B Boëllmann (1862-1897) as my concluding voluntary.

This week I conclude with the toccata from this suite. I have used a recording of a performance by Olivier Latry on the organ of Notre Dame, Paris not only because this is a very exciting performance but as a reminder that it is one year ago (15th April) that Notre Dame was engulfed in flames.

The piece starts quietly and mysteriously. It builds towards a big triumphant conclusion which expresses, for me, the progression from the first encounter with the mysterious stranger on the Emmaus Road, to the realisation by the disciples that he was indeed their resurrected Lord.



Figure 3 "Toccata" from Suite Gothique, by Leo Boellmann