

All Saints Church, Boyne Hill Maidenhead
Sounds of Worship

Easter 4

In my introduction to the first Sounds of Worship, I mentioned that all sorts of sounds other than the usual church music can create associations with worship. For Easter 4, some of the music I will be discussing has associations outside of worship which raises the difficulty of experiencing the music without getting side-tracked by the other associations it might evoke.

The gospel theme relates to the parable of the shepherd being the gate keeper to the sheepfold. Jesus tells his listeners that he is the Good Shepherd who protects and knows each of his flock personally.

This imagery of the shepherd would have been very familiar to his disciples because of their knowledge of the Psalms, particularly, Psalm 23.

The Lord himself is my shepherd,
What more could anyone ask!

In green meadows he pastures me,
To quiet waters he leads me
There he restores my strength.

He guides me by paths of virtue
for love of his name.

I fear nothing lurking
In the dark ravine,
With your weighted crook beside me
To encourage me.

You prepare a banquet for me
Under my enemies' eyes;
You perfume my head with oil
And fill my cup.

Yea, goodness and kindness pursue me
Every day of my life;
My home, the house of the Lord
As long as I live!

This version of the psalm is a translation of the original Hebrew text prepared for The New Jerusalem Bible for reading and recitation. We are more accustomed to either the King James Bible or various metrical settings used in hymns.

It might be useful at this point, to say a few words about the origins of the Psalms themselves.

The Psalms as they have come down to us are a collection of 150 poems compiled from various smaller collections. Often referred to as the Psalms of David they were not composed by or specifically for David (the shepherd king) but rather for the use in the Temple at Jerusalem. Initially by the kings of the house of David in the First Temple built by King Solomon c966 B.C. The majority of the Psalms were written during the period 931-587 B.C. although more added up to a few

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decades before the birth of Christ. This initial period which concludes with the destruction of the first Temple in 587 B.C. (A second Temple was founded in 520 B.C.).

Psalms were used for a variety of rites and rituals in the first Temple which was not entirely for the exclusive use of the King because it was open to the public.

These earlier Davidic Psalms cover the various aspects of the Covenant between God (Yahweh) and his chosen people. Psalm 23 expresses confidence in Yahweh as the shepherd of the faithful in the first three stanzas and as a host at the meal associated with the thanksgiving sacrifice in the Temple in the last 2 stanzas.

I will focus on two settings of Psalm 23 which we would have used on this Sunday. The first is "The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want." AM 800. This version is a shortened paraphrase by Stuart Townend.

1. The Lord's my shepherd, I'll not want.
He makes me lie in pastures green.
He leads me by the still, still waters,
his goodness restores my soul.

*And I will trust in you alone,
and I will trust in you alone,
for your endless mercy follows me,
your goodness will lead me home.*

2. He guides my ways in righteousness,
and he anoints my head with oil,
and my cup, it overflows with joy,
I fest on his pure delights
3. And though I walk the darkest path,
I will not fear the evil one,
For you are with me, and your rod and staff
Are the comfort I need to know.

We encountered Stuart Townend a couple of weeks ago as the author of "In Christ alone". On this occasion, Townend is both author and composer and this song pre-dates "In Christ alone" by 4 or 5 years. Unlike the more familiar traditional versions of Psalm 23 which tend to be verse-by-verse metrical translations, Townend has inserted a repeated refrain which emphasises spiritual protection rather than physical protection. The verses themselves also truncate reorder of the sections of the Psalm. The result is a song with a gentle and calming demeanour to it.

The Lord's my shepherd Townend:



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The second setting of Psalm 23 is an anthem version by Howard Goodall. It too is a paraphrase of the Psalm but retains the basic order of the words. The challenge of listening to this piece is to do so without the associations of the Vicar of Dibley and to hear for what it is, a very effective setting of words which covers the mood changes from the opening calm to the threat of evil and return to peace and protection.



Figure 1 "The Lord is my Shepherd" Howard Goodall

What both these settings illustrate is the enduring power of the Psalms, written nearly 3,000 years ago. They speak to us as much today as they did then. Especially so in the case of Psalm 23, as we live in times where protection, physical and spiritual, is a key concern. Also, the way in which the musical treatment of these words continues to inspire and evolve.

My second hymn is "I will sing the wondrous story" AM 671.

I will sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
How He left His home in glory
For the cross of Calvary.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it in the light of glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.

I was lost, but Jesus found me,
Found the sheep that went astray,
Threw His loving arms around me,
back into the narrow way.
Days of darkness still come o'er me,
Sorrow's paths I often tread,
But the Saviour still is with me;
By his guiding hand I'm led.

He will keep me till the river,
Rolls its waters at my feet,
Then he'll bear me safely over,
Made by grace for glory meet.
Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story
Of the Christ who died for me,
Sing it in the light of glory,
Gathered by the crystal sea.

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The words of this hymn link the passion, Easter hope and the good shepherd theme although instead of still waters the metaphor is of a flowing river carrying the soul to safety of heaven. The author is Francis Harold Rowley (1854-1952) who was an American Baptist Minister. He wrote this hymn in 1886 and it was originally set to music by Peter Bilhorn the organist at Rowley's Church. Rowley and Bilhorn gave the hymn to Ira Sankey as a gift who published it in the 1887 edition of "Gospel Hymns and Sacred Songs and Solos" after which it achieved recognition by a wide audience. Having made it to these shores, the words have undergone various changes, presumably to be more acceptable to C of E congregations and uses tune Hyfrydol. This tune was composed by Rowland Huw Prichard (1811-1887) a Welsh musician who was a native of Graienyn, near Bala. He lived most of his life in the area, serving for a time as a loom tender's assistant in Holywell, where he died. In 1844 Prichard published Cyfaill y Cantorion (The Singer's Friend), a song book intended for children in which the tune Hyfrydol first appeared.

Hyfrydol, of course, will be very familiar because it is used with the hymn "Hallelujah, Sing to Jesus", but, as is becoming increasingly frequent, is the interchangeability of tunes and words in hymn books which creates new associations as well as evoking old ones.



Figure 2 "I will sing the wondrous story" AM 671