

4th June 2020

Singing

"How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?"

Bible, Psalm 137:4

Our home is full of singing. My wife sings in the Edinburgh International Festival Chorus, and two other choirs, *Jubilo* and *Songbirds*. We both sing in the church choir and often do duets at home. One of our rooms is a mixture of a dining room, sewing room and music room. I play guitar – and sing! So singing, in one way or another, is integral to our lives.

The Psalmist voices the struggle of his people to sing their song, to make sense of life and faith, when all is against them. Where, then, are *our* songs, for the Lord or for any other purpose, in our strange land of lockdown, social distancing and restrictions? Can *we* still sing? Will we find a new song? The answer is that that we must, for if not, all is lost.

In 1868 *The New York Observer* published the lyrics of a new hymn, *How can I keep from singing*, by an American Baptist Minister, Robert Wadsworth Lowry. This hymn has become so familiar in religious and popular culture that it's labelled "traditional", as if it had emerged from the mists of time. That's because Lowry captures the basic need to find and sing our new song, in whatever strange land we find ourselves.

*My life flows on in endless song above earth's lamentation:
I catch the sweet, though far off, hymn, that hails a new creation.
No storm can shake my inmost calm while to that Rock I'm clinging.
Since love is Lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing?*

I can add little to that. Wherever your Rock is, I hope you can cling to it in your storm. Whatever your lamentation, I hope your life can flow from it in a positive way. However much you struggle to sing in *your* strange land, I hope you will find that "since love is Lord of heaven and earth", nothing can keep you – *and* me – from your singing our songs.

A prayer for today

Lord, give me a new song to sing even in this strange land.

Guide me to hear and to learn what may once have been a far-off hymn.

And, whatever that song may be, help me to keep singing, no matter what. Amen

An original reflection by © Tom Gordon

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