

6<sup>th</sup> September 2020

## Hymns

**“It is singing to the praise of God ... If you sing, and praise no God, you utter no hymn. If you praise anything which does not pertain to praise God, though in singing you praise, you utter no hymn.”**

*St Augustine of Hippo, Defining a Hymn*

William Kethe's name first appears in the records of the Marian Exiles in Frankfurt in the 1550s, though it's believed he was born in Scotland. He helped translate the Geneva Bible in 1560 and contributed many Psalms to the Geneva Psalter of 1561. The best known of these remains his version of Psalm 100, *All People That on Earth Do Dwell*. Most often sung to the wonderful tune, *The Old Hundredth*, the first verse of Kethe's Psalm reads:

*All people that on earth do dwell,  
Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice,  
Him serve with fear, his praise forth tell,  
Come ye before him and rejoice.*

As churches begin to reopen for worship in Scotland, there are many procedures to be followed – social distancing; the wearing of masks; no Orders of Service. But perhaps the most difficult is the regulation that there is to be no singing. There are good scientific reasons for this, but, goodness, it's hard to bear! Isn't praising integral to our worship? How can we "sing to the Lord with cheerful voice" if there's to be no singing? Can we "serve him with fear (or 'mirth', as it's more often sung), his praise forth tell", if we're unable to sing our hymns, and psalms and modern songs?

For the beginning of an answer we go to St Augustine of Hippo from the 5<sup>th</sup> century, who suggests praise is much more than singing. We can sing, but if isn't from the heart, is it praise? If we praise God sincerely without a hymn, does that diminish our worship?

So let's sing with the cheerful voices of our hearts if not our mouths. Let's praise God by the way we live as much as by the hymns we would sing. Let's come before him, in church and street, home and countryside, public and private, and rejoice, by making sure we offer the depth and sincerity of our praise, even when regulations say we can "utter no hymn".

### **A prayer for today**

*"Praise, laud and bless his name always, for it is seemly so to do." Amen.*

*An original reflection by © Tom Gordon*

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