



# Weekly Worship Resource for Gladsmuir and Longniddry

Available in printed form and online at:  
[www.longniddrychurch.org.uk](http://www.longniddrychurch.org.uk)

Issue 85

Sunday 31st October 2021

## Today's readings

### **Psalm 44:23–26 (“National Lament and Prayer for help”)**

Rouse yourself! Why do you sleep, O Lord?

Awake, do not cast us off for ever!

Why do you hide your face?

Why do you forget our affliction and oppression?

For we sink down to the dust;

our bodies cling to the ground.

Rise up, come to our help.

Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love. Amen. *(NRSV)*

### **Psalm 100 (“All Lands Summoned to Praise God”)**

Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

Worship the Lord with gladness;

come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

Enter his gates with thanksgiving,

and his courts with praise.

Give thanks to him, bless his name.

For the Lord is good;

his steadfast love endures for ever,

and his faithfulness to all generations. Amen. *(NRSV)*

## Today's hymns

- 1 *Sing of the Lord's goodness* (CH157)
- 2 *I come with joy, a child of God* (CH:656)
- 3 *How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds* (CH:461)
- 4 *Guide me, O thou great Jehovah* (CH:167)
- 5 *Blessing and honour and glory and power* (CH:441)

# In the Name of the Father and of

**W**hat is your favourite hymn? Just to be clear, I am not looking for answers. With a large number of people gathered on a Sunday morning it might take an hour or more to draw all the responses together. Rather, take my question and answer it for yourself not just with a title, but with a reason too.

Hymns are deeply personal things with meanings that can go right back to early infancy:

**The lullaby:** The baby could not get to sleep so the tired parent started humming a melody: a quiet wee tune, and simple too, but there was a confidence about it ... as though it mattered. The little one found herself transfixed by the soft tone of the humming which broke into words in time for the chorus: “Yes, Jesus loves me ...”

**The assembly:** “We start our day,” said the primary head mistress, “with a hymn from the red book. Number four hundred and forty three. Miss Allan, if you please.” And so blasted into life a great school favourite: “Who would true valour see”, delivered with energy by all those old enough to read. Especially striking was the line about the hobgoblin and the foul fiend, two mythical beasts which are not usually allowed past the school gates.

**The wedding:** It may have been her auntie’s favourite hymn rather than her own, but she was determined to have it right at the end of the service as a big-sounding ending to the ceremony: a kind of sigh of relief that the deed had finally been done. “Now thank we all our God with heart and hands and voices.” It seemed to sum things up just right, and it set the stage for the schedule signing, the cake cutting, the big celebration to come.

**The chance meeting:** So what’s so special about this new hymn book then. Flicking through it at random it looks like they’ve gone for all the old favourites ... “Jesus loves me” ... “Who would true valour see” ... “Now thank we all our God” ... honestly, the congregation has paid hundreds of pounds for the same old same old. What a waste of money. ... Hang on, this one’s new, and it looks interesting.

The reality of hymn-singing is that we all have our favourites and we often have very personal reasons why they are just so special. It may be because we are reminded of early childhood, school days, big celebrations. Or we might have stumbled upon a hymn that completely took us by surprise and left us speechless. That’s the power of song, and the very, very particular power of hymn singing.

I think that the psalmist recognises there is something special about the musical praise we bring to God. Consider the opening of today’s reading:

*Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.*

*Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come into his presence with singing.*

Or, if you prefer the version in the old *Scottish Psalter* from all the way back in 1650:

*All people that on earth do dwell,  
sing to the Lord with cheerful voice.  
Him serve with mirth, his praise forth tell,  
come ye before him and rejoice!*

Whether sung in Old Testament times or in the here and now, we are encouraged to throw off dull routine and engage with what it means to be loved by God. We are to respond to his grace and mercy by singing our celebration with such an outpouring of joy that we raise the roof in a quite marvellous – and marvellously unforgettable – way..

# the Son and of the Holy Spirit . . .

All of that is fine and good. Yet lovers of hymns know that there is another side to life: the anxiety and fear which walk alongside our flawed humanity; the sorrow of loved ones lost. At times we might struggle to find the right words to express the pain that lies deep inside us. That's when some people have the presence of mind to turn to their hymnbooks to find songs of lament which speak of tragedy, rather than joy:

*O come and mourn with me awhile;*

*O come ye to the Saviour's side;*

*O come, together let us mourn:*

*Jesus, our Lord, is crucified!*

It is at these most profound points in our living that ordinary words can fail us. Common speech is insufficient to plumb the depths, yet the poetic and the musical, when merged together, can help us approach the otherwise unapproachable. One day you might be deeply touched by a pop song on Radio 2. At another time it might be a Bach chorale from the Albert Hall. It is no exaggeration to say that the poetic language of song can often express precious messages which too often lie just beyond our spoken, prose-bound words.

Perhaps one of the most debilitating losses for people during these months of pandemic isolation has been the loss of singing – proper, uninhibited singing. All around the world, choirs have been closed down, karaoke nights have disappeared from the calendar, live concerts with many a sing-along opportunity have been sidelined. And it hurts.

Here in church we felt the sadness of giving up our hymns. And as the months of lockdown drew towards their close so many people would ask me: “When can we get back to singing?” The process has been slow, with “no singing” leading on to “masked, seated singing”. This gave way to “masked standing singing”, but who likes to sing in a mask? Singing brings freedom, but if that freedom is curtailed, how can it (or we) be truly free?

But wait a minute: even in times of restriction and limitation, singing still has power. We might go further and say that *especially* in times of restriction and limitation, singing has power to liberate. Whether our hymns come bare-faced or masked, the hymns we sing are *our* hymns still. And even if all we could do was to sing them in our heads as silent musical prayers to God, in that singular action still we would be pulling against the ties that bind us.

“Liberated” is a very good word to associated with hymn singing. Even if you are convinced in your own mind that you couldn't sing to save yourself, still you can realise that a hymn which touches you is a hymn of power ... for you. And whether you sing quietly into your hymn book or with all the fervour of a football crowd at Hampden, you too can play your part in God's choir which spans the globe and covers the centuries.

In the words of some music-loving Scandinavians: *Who can live without it? I ask in all honesty what would life be? Without a song or a dance what are we?*

I was struck by something I read recently, penned by the writer Kenneth Samuel on this very subject. Thinking about the power and the possibilities offered by songs which come to our aid in our trials and in our troubles, he noted that they help us to, “put into words the richness of our faith and the mystery of our spiritual journey. We hear, we comprehend, and we are inspired as we go.”

And who among us here would deny that there is something of God's grace in that.

Amazing grace, how sweet the sound. Amen.

# Praying for others

*On this day when we are thinking about hymns, we are also considering the COP26 Conference planned for Glasgow in the days to come. Our good friend the Rev Tom Gordon has written a hymn entitled “A wake-up call”, focusing on climate change issues and our responsibility to care for our fragile planet.*

*As Tom says: “It is in the form of a prayer of confession and a call to ‘wake up’ and do better.” We are very grateful to Tom for the opportunity to offer his powerful words here.*

The world is made by your creative hand.  
You made us stewards of sky, and sea, and land.  
And yet with carelessness or cruel design  
we’ve wrought so much destruction over time.

We’ve caused the trees to burn, the seas to rise,  
dispersed our carbon clouds throughout the skies,  
plundered the earth for all that we could gain,  
and treated warning voices with disdain.

We took the greens, and blues, and vibrant reds,  
and made them turn to black and greys instead.  
We took the forests and abundant seas,  
and then misused their riches as we pleased.

Forgive us now for every sin and shame,  
for we should know we are the ones to blame.  
Forgive us for the damage we have caused  
by taking little heed of nature’s laws.

For earth was given in trust to everyone,  
to pass to generations yet to come.  
So call us once again to work with you,  
to give this fragile earth the care it’s due.

And sound for us again a wake-up call –  
that each of us should learn to give our all  
to care for this, your world, in all we do,  
and ever give abundant thanks to you.

Tunes: *Sursum Corda* (CH: 96) or *Chilton Foliat* (CH:497)

*Copyright © 2021 by Tom Gordon*