

27<sup>th</sup> January 2022

## Nearer

**“Nearer, my God, to thee.”**

*Sarah Flower Adams, title of an 1841 hymn*

“Nearer, my God, to thee”, written by the 19<sup>th</sup> century hymn writer, Sarah Flower Adams, unfolds the story of Jacob’s dream. Genesis 28 tells us: “So [Jacob] came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep. Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it ...”

*Though like the wanderer, the sun gone down,  
Darkness be over me, my rest a stone;  
Yet in my dreams I'd be nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!*

*There let the way appear steps unto heav'n;  
All that Thou sendest me in mercy giv'n;  
Angels to beckon me nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!*

Jacob was nearer to God than he had ever been before and would ever be again. He had a special place and a special moment. God was *very* near.

Legend has it that the hymn was the last song the band played on the RMS *Titanic* before it sank in 1912. And bizarrely, the 19<sup>th</sup> century soprano, Emma Abbott, prompted by "her uncompromising and grotesque puritanism", rewrote *La Traviata* so that Violetta expired singing not Verdi's *Addio, del passato*, but "Nearer, my God, to thee".

Where can you say you are “nearer, my God, to thee”? A country church or great cathedral; the summit of a Munro or the shores of a loch; alone or with a loved one; lost in a piece of music; on the deck of a ship, or an opera stage, or with your head on a stone pillow at Bethel? It doesn't matter – not to God, anyway. But it matters that *you* know where it is and where you can go to find it. You might need it more often than you think.

### **A prayer for today**

*Or if on joyful wing, cleaving the sky,  
Sun, moon, and stars forgot, upwards I fly,  
Still all my song shall be, nearer, my God, to Thee,  
Nearer, my God, to Thee, nearer to Thee!*