4th August 2022

Transported

"I had forgotten who I was and where I lived.
I was transported into a world of sunlight."

J D Beresford, *Introduction to 'Martin Pippin in the Apple Orchard' by Eleanor Farjeon*

Having reflected on "transportation" in my piece yesterday, I recalled a story which took my thoughts in a different direction.

In the middle of a fierce Edinburgh snowstorm many years ago, I was trudging through the city centre when I saw my friend, Richard Baxter, coming towards me through the flurries of snow. Richard, who died in 2009, had spent many years as a missionary in Central Africa. He was a member of the Iona Community with me, and a man whose integrity, wisdom, humour and passions I greatly admired. He had his shoulders hunched against the wind and the hood of his duffle-coat pulled across his face as an additional protection. I saw him before he saw me *and* heard him too! For in the middle of an Edinburgh snowstorm, Richard Baxter was singing an African hymn. We briefly exchanged greetings and passed on, with Richard heading rhythmically on his way singing his African chant even more loudly! In the midst of a storm, Richard had transported himself back to Central Africa by singing a song familiar to his beloved people.

Years later, the ever-feisty Richard Baxter was arrested with others at a peaceful anti-nuclear protest at the Faslane Naval Base near Helensburgh. While his alleged misdemeanour was being processed, Richard had to languish in a police cell, where he spent time in prayer, saying the Iona Community's daily Office *and* singing his African songs. He had transported himself again, not from a snowstorm, but from a prison cell, singing indigenous hymns in tune with his African friends.

Richard knew how to transport himself, from storms, physical and metaphorical, to Beresford's "world of sunlight", in the worship in his heart. Through his African hymns, Richard could be back with the people with whom he remained bound in living fellowship all his life.

Through music or memories, images or ideas, we can do the same – just as I'm doing right now in the company of my friend, Richard Baxter, as I hear him singing his African hymns, and as I join in with his songs.

A prayer for today

In worship, loving God, you transport me, and I am at one with you. Amen

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