

## “Let us Pray” – Week 2 Praying with hymns, songs and music

Last week Chris was helping us pray using the Psalms and I think this leads us nicely on to this week’s topic music. You see I can remember as a child being in services where psalms were sung and we on occasion still do that in our services. During lockdown I have been using the Church of England daily prayer app and this has recently changed to give a spoken option, by that I mean one you listen to. And this on occasion includes chanting the psalms. But psalms can also appear in the oddest places. For example, U2 on their album War included this song simply called 40

*I waited patiently for the Lord  
He inclined and heard my cry  
He brought me up out of the pit  
Out of the miry clay*

*I will sing, sing a new song  
I will sing, sing a new song  
How long to sing this song?*

*How long to sing this song?  
How long, how long, how long  
How long to sing this song?*

*You set my feet upon a rock  
And made my footsteps firm  
Many will see, many will see and hear*

*I will sing, sing a new song  
I will sing, sing a new song  
I will sing, sing a new song  
I will sing, sing a new song*

*How long to sing this song?  
How long to sing this song?  
How long, how long, how long  
How long to sing this song?*

<https://youtu.be/msNBEYmW-fE>

A prayer included within a secular album. Psalm 40 is very much a description of prayer in action.

Music plays an important part in our worship and I am sure like me you have missed singing when we have been in church. It is part of our time of prayer; it serves as preparation and guidance into prayer but often, in the rhythm and lyrics, becomes a prayer in itself.

Music also plays an important part in our life. Plato said that “*Music and rhythm find their way into the secret places of the soul.*” Music communicates, creates, inspires, calms us, it can bring us together but it can also separate. It can be both good and bad in what it imparts, it can unify and divide.

Perhaps Louis Armstrong put it best when he said “*music is life itself*”; the beat underlying a piece of music whatever the genre is like the beat of life. Music can, through the sound, impact not just on your emotion but it can move us physically; many a time I have come out of a concert with ringing ears and a sore throat from singing, well shouting along.

Beethoven said “*Music can change the world*” and Elton John once said “*music has healing power*”. It has the ability to take people out of themselves for a few hours.

Music and prayer are linked; one can and does lead on to another.

One of the things I have picked up on through lockdown is how much people have missed live music in all its formats. We have missed our hymns in worship, musicals, live bands. People have missed the connection that music can bring. Musical, live performances, festivals have been cancelled, postponed and rearranged. Local bands unable to practice together do so over the internet using a click track. Not sure what that is but I think it is like the beat of the music; there it is again, that life beat, the rhythm of our life. Think of the last concert you attended, or when you sang with others, how did it make you feel.

Having listened to the above song you will probably, and quite rightly assume my musical tastes edge (no pun intended) towards the loud, guitar-based variety. Psalm 100 in the King James Bible proclaims “make a joyful noise unto the Lord” which sums up my music catalogue very well, noise. In my youth I would go and watch the likes of Whitesnake, AC/DC, U2 and Queen, a real joyful noise. The first and last concert I took Karen to was Status Quo – “never again” was her assessment. Each to their own, music is like that.

Over the next few days, we shall listen to music, read lyrics and in doing so consider what they tell us, and, as people of faith, what, if anything, God is saying to us through them. Hopefully this will help you look at prayer in a different way, that prayer can be seen in the oddest of places. Prayer like music moves the soul. I am sure this will be challenging to us all, because we don't all like the same thing. I will listen and watch to most things live but I struggle with classical music, and musicals, I've never warmed to rap or Jazz music; ballet and opera are a real challenge. But it would be a very boring world if we liked the same thing. We don't all see prayer in the same way either, for me it's a conversation with God, and often I find music helps with that connection.

It is quite odd perhaps that in Lent I am asking you to listen if possible, to what isn't always going to be in keeping with the whole silence, contemplative, prayerful idea of Lent, but I hope over the next few days you will get something out of what has been prepared. One of the things I have been doing during lockdown is learning Spanish and one of the “top tips” recommended is to write down at the end of each lesson new words or phrases. I am going to suggest that you do same here. Just write down what you have found useful, informative, good, bad about the music each day.

Is there within the music something about prayer?

I am not going to have you read a great deal apart from lyrics as this is a listening exercise. I am sure you will find some you like and am quite prepared for you to find some to be rubbish, but that's the other aspect of music. It speaks to each us as an individual. Which I believe fits in with our faith. God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit speaks to each of us, calls us where we are. Hopefully this week the music will help us face within face upwards and face outwards to consider the power music has in our lives and our world and in Lent can we learn something new.

*Resources compiled by Revd Marcus Bulcock*

## Monday – Praying with Hymns

Think about your favourite hymns – Almost all are prayers of some kind – prayers of praise, or reflection or request. For today I invite you to consider the hymn ‘*I cannot tell*’ – you can find a version here <https://youtu.be/zltma-BImM8>

*I cannot tell why He Whom angels worship  
Should set His love upon the sons of men  
Or why as shepherd, He should seek the wand'ers  
To bring them back, they know not how or when  
But this I know: that He was born of Mary  
When Beth'hem's manger was His only home  
And that He lived at Nazareth and laboured  
And so the Saviour, Saviour of the world is come*

*I cannot tell how silently He suffered  
As with His peace He graced the place of tears  
Or His heart upon the cross was broken  
The crown of pain to three and thirty years  
But this I know: He heals the broken hearted  
And stays our sin and calms our lurking fear  
And lifts the burden from the heavy laden  
For yet the Saviour, Saviour of the world is here*

*I cannot tell how He will win the nations  
How He will claim His earthly heritage  
How satisfy the needs and aspirations  
Of east and west, of sinner and of sage  
But this I know: all flesh shall see His glory  
And He shall reap the harvest He has sown  
And some glad day His sun will shine in splendour  
When He, the Saviour, Saviour of the world, is known*

*I cannot tell how all the lands shall worship  
When at His bidding every storm is stilled  
Or who can say how great the jubilation  
When all the hearts of men with love are filled  
But this I know: the skies will thrill with rapture  
And myriad, myriad human voices sing  
And earth to heaven and heaven to earth will answer  
At last the Saviour, Saviour of the world is king*

I like this hymn because it puts the Gospel message in 4 verses. The first 2 verses go through Jesus' life. I see verse 2 as a prayer. It places us at the foot of the cross, praying for healing, salvation and peace in our lives. The third verse how that impacts on us and the world around us a wider effect of the Gospel and finally a vision of heaven. Incarnation, presence, recognition, salvation. It gives a message of hope to a troubled world. Well, that's what I think, what about you?

Here is additional link to something I often listen to, a different kind of spiritual worship, and prayer. If you have time see what you think.

[https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy\\_ntBcrOquvclXuxQn81qf4fr6Bhi6JxYBA](https://youtube.com/playlist?list=OLAK5uy_ntBcrOquvclXuxQn81qf4fr6Bhi6JxYBA)

Think of the words of your favourite hymns – sing them or listen to them, and pray them.

## Tuesday – Praying with Songs

One of my favourite comedies is Scrubs. Often the episodes contain less well known songs. I picked up this from one episode.

<https://youtu.be/YSjZID9Xh6U>

### "All The Words"

*How do I speak of the indescribable to You  
I will try to explain these feelings that are true  
So looking to the sky I will sing and from my  
heart to You I bring*

*All of the words in all of my life that could never  
explain and never describe  
All of my love, which is nothing to hide so I lift  
up my hands and I worship  
I worship You*

*In your presence I forever choose to live  
I will praise You for it's all I have to give  
So looking to the sky I will sing and from my  
heart to You I bring*

*All of the words in all of my life that could never  
explain and never describe*

(Aaron Sprinkle, James Mead, Ryan Shrout, Kyle Mitchell, Jon Micah Sumrall)

If for a second you separate words and music, I think you can see that this is very much a personal prayer. Someone trying to put in to words what Jesus means to them but in the end us unable to describe and explain this.

If you have time also check out both of the links below which I think bring together prayer and worship really well, and as modern songs really define our faith and help us reflect on our actions in the world.

<https://youtu.be/N2kl7tqpnY4>

### "A City On A Hill"

*Blessed are the poor  
for the kingdom is yours  
Blessed when you mourn, there's comfort in His  
arms  
Blessed are the meek with the world at your  
feet  
Blessed when it's righteousness that you seek  
It's beautiful  
Beautiful, like a city on a hill  
Lighting up the night*

*All of my love, which is nothing to hide so I lift  
up my hands and I worship*

*By Your grace You let me come talk to You  
It's not that I'm worthy I thank you Jesus  
For the love that You have shown*

*All of the words in all of my life that could never  
explain and never describe  
All of my love, which is nothing to hide so I lift  
up my hands and I worship*

*With all of the words in all of my life that could  
never explain and never describe  
All of my love, which is nothing to hide so I lift  
up my hands and I worship  
I worship You*

*For the glory of the Lord, Rise and shine  
We will...Shine  
Light of the world  
we can't hide it  
This beautiful light it Shines  
For all of the world  
To believe we can be  
A city on a hill*

*Blessed when you're merciful, you'll find grace  
Blessed are the pure, you'll see the face of God  
Blessed are you making peace on earth  
Blessed when you follow, even when it hurts  
It's beautiful,  
Beautiful, like a city on a hill  
Lighting up the night  
For the glory of the Lord  
Rise and shine*

(Ben Cantelon, Elias Dummer, Nick Herbert)

[https://youtu.be/-2h\\_acID0jw](https://youtu.be/-2h_acID0jw)

*From the darkness, I called Your name  
Into darkness, Your mercy came  
You called me out, lifted me up  
How great is Your love  
  
You bore my weakness  
You took my shame  
Buried my burdens in fields of grace  
You called me out, lifted me up  
How great is Your love  
  
From the heights of heaven  
You stepped down to earth  
Innocent perfection, gave Your life for us  
We are amazed, we stand in awe  
For we have been changed by the power of the cross  
  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
for us  
  
In Your kindness, You lead me home  
In Your presence, where I belong  
You called me out, lifted me up  
How great is Your love  
  
From the heights of heaven, You stepped down  
to earth  
Innocent perfection, gave Your life for us*

*We will...Shine  
Light of the world  
we can't hide it  
This beautiful light it  
Shines For all of the world  
To believe we can be  
A city on a hill  
For the glory of The Lord  
For the glory of The Lord  
The glory of the Lord*

*And we are amazed, we stand in awe  
For we have been changed by the power of the cross  
  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
for us  
How great is Your love for us  
  
There has never been, there will never be  
A God like You, a love so true  
There has never been, and there will never be  
A God like You, a love so true  
There has never been, and there will never be  
A God like You, a love so true  
There has never been, no, there will never be  
A God like You, a love so true  
  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
for us  
  
And how great, how great, how great is Your  
love  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
How great, how great, how great is Your love  
for us  
How great is Your love for us*

Modern worship songs are often very different in structure and tone from the older hymns but they are often more direct in their address to God and how they speak of God's love. If you are not a fan of the music, consider the words and make them your prayer.

## Wednesday – Praying with the choruses we may have sung as children

Growing up one of my favourite Choruses was Wide. Wide as the Ocean. Not because of any deep religious meaning about God's love for us. In doing the actions it gave a chance to legitimately hit the person on either side. I was going to use this but then Karen reminded me of a song from her youth (Hymn number 66) and I think many will remember this.

*When a knight won his spurs in the stories of old  
He was gentle and brave he was gallant and bold  
With a shield on his arm and a lance in his hand,  
For God and for valour he rode through the land.*

*No charger have I, and no sword by my side,  
Yet still to adventure and battle I ride;  
Though back into storyland giants have fled,  
And the knights are no more and the dragons are dead.*

*Let faith be my shield and let joy be my steed,  
'Gainst the dragons of anger the ogres of greed;  
And let me set free with the sword of my youth,  
From the castle of darkness the power of the truth.*

(Jan Struther) <https://youtu.be/fzz5r2BO1xA>

This is a very visual song and its often dismissed as just a Children's hymn. But the message is a powerful one the last verse is very much one of holding to basic Christian truths, to oppose anger and greed, to be set free by the Gospel and to defeat darkness with the truth of Jesus. It is a Prayer for Action. It reminds me of Paul's Letter to the Ephesians Ch 6 : 10 – 17.

But here are the words of Wide, Wide as the Ocean.

*Wide, wide as the ocean, high as the heaven above;  
Deep, deep as the deepest sea is my Saviour's love.  
I, though so unworthy, still am a child of His care;  
For His Word teaches me that His love reaches me everywhere.*

Which songs did you sing as children? Have a look at the words – many of them are lovely, if simple prayers

-  One more step along the world I go
-  I am the Lord of the Dance
-  Trust and obey
-  Jesus loves me this I know
-  I've got that joy, joy, joy, joy, down in my heart

Why not sing them again or hum them and reclaim that simple faith and joy?

## Thursday - Classical Music

If I'm honest this was a real challenge. I did study music back in my school days but this was restricted to the Russian composers and Vivaldi, and these don't have many lyrics and I'm not sure how prayerful Tchaikovsky's 1812 overture and Mussorgsky's Night on a bare Mountain are. You may find them inspiring??

So, I have gone with one of my challenging area of music, musicals, but I have taken an easy option, Les Misérables. It is a story of redemption, someone putting their life back after an early set back. The hero Jean Valjean has discovered forgiveness and now seeks to live for others, but Inspector Javert remains bound by the Law. Jesus came to free us so we can have life in all its fullness. Not easy at the moment but it is a useful reminder. I want to highlight 2 songs which I believe help our thinking on prayer.

<https://youtu.be/qsYnhVITf9E>

Bring Him Home. Sung by Colm Wilkinson (sorry, can't accept any other version)

<i>God on high</i>	<i>How soon they fly on and on</i>
<i>Hear my prayer</i>	<i>And I am old and will be gone</i>
<i>In my need</i>	<i>Bring him peace, Bring him joy</i>
<i>You have always been there</i>	<i>He is young, He is only a boy</i>
<i>He is young, He's afraid</i>	<i>You can take, You can give</i>
<i>Let him rest, Heaven blessed</i>	<i>Let him be, Let him live</i>
<i>Bring him home, Bring him home</i>	<i>If I die, Let me die</i>
<i>Bring him home</i>	<i>Let him live</i>
<i>He's like the son I might have known</i>	<i>Bring him home, Bring him home</i>
<i>If God had granted me a son</i>	<i>Bring him home</i>
<i>The summers die one by one</i>	

And the Epilogue is about hope <https://youtu.be/kl3T3o2-2xc>

<i>Do you hear the people sing</i>	<i>Will you join in our crusade?</i>
<i>Lost in the valley of the night?</i>	<i>Who will be strong and stand with me?</i>
<i>It is the music of a people</i>	<i>Somewhere beyond the barricade</i>
<i>Who are climbing to the light.</i>	<i>Is there a world you long to see?</i>
<i>For the wretched of the earth</i>	<i>Do you hear the people sing?</i>
<i>There is a flame that never dies.</i>	<i>Say, do you hear the distant drums?</i>
<i>Even the darkest night will end</i>	<i>It is the future that they bring</i>
<i>And the sun will rise.</i>	<i>When tomorrow comes!</i>
<i>They will live again in freedom</i>	<i>Will you join in our crusade?</i>
<i>In the garden of the Lord.</i>	<i>Who will be strong and stand with me?</i>
<i>We will walk behind the ploughshare;</i>	<i>Somewhere beyond the barricade</i>
<i>We will put away the sword.</i>	<i>Is there a world you long to see?</i>
<i>The chain will be broken</i>	<i>Do you hear the people sing?</i>
<i>And all men will have their reward.</i>	<i>Say, do you hear the distant drums?</i>
	<i>It is the future that they bring</i>
	<i>When tomorrow comes!</i>
	<i>Ah! Ah! Ah!</i>
	<i>Tomorrow comes!</i>

(Claude-Michel Schönberg, Alain Boublil)

## Friday - Contemporary Music

Song-writers (good song-writers) are thoughtful people. Music moves the spirit. So we should not be surprised if we find spiritual insights in contemporary and secular songs. We just need to be a bit careful in our reflection.

There are a number of songs that are helpful in prayer I think, also ones that get us thinking about our faith, and some in the oddest places. Oasis 'Some Might Say', for example. "Some might say they don't believe in Heaven, go and tell it to the man who lives in hell".

So how about this offering from Coldplay (This version is to keep the Wanderers fans happy). Have a listen and read the lyrics keeping in mind Luke 15:1-32.

*When you try your best, but you don't  
succeed  
When you get what you want but not what  
you need  
When you feel so tired, but you can't sleep  
Stuck in reverse*

*And the tears come streaming down your  
face  
When you lose something, you can't  
replace  
When you love someone, but it goes to  
waste  
Could it be worse?*

*Lights will guide you home  
And ignite your bones  
And I will try to fix you*

*And high up above or down below  
When you're too in love to let it go*

(Christopher Martin, Guy Rupert Berryman, Jonathan Mark Buckland, William Champion)

<https://youtu.be/k4V3Mo61fJM>

*But if you never try, you'll never know  
Just what you're worth*

*Lights will guide you home  
And ignite your bones  
And I will try to fix you*

*Tears stream down your face  
When you lose something, you cannot  
replace  
Tears stream down your face and I*

*Tears stream down your face  
I promise you, I will learn from my mistakes  
Tears stream down your face and I*

*Lights will guide you home  
And ignite your bones  
And I will try to fix you*

Which songs mean a lot to you? So many deal with the deeper themes of life, death, forgiveness, hope, sadness, loss, love, etc.

Many are not written with a Christian insight, and some may even promote views which are contrary to our faith, but many will get us thinking and even praying if we let them.

Which songs and music have inspired you this week?

## **Conclusion.**

Someone once told me that it is possible especially at live venues if the beat of a song is intense enough your heart can actually beat in time to the music. It sounds dangerous but perhaps illustrates how music can affect us not just intellectually, and spiritually but also physically.

Music can and does change us. The beat within it mirrors the beat of our heart. It hits at the very centre of our being. The differences that we have about our taste in music don't matter. We find common ground within music's heartbeat. There is safety within the beat. It is this that can make it a spiritual experience and we can learn something of our shared faith through music. We can hear God in everything not just in hymns we sing in church. It is the romance with music that nourishes the soul. Music isn't about good or bad – it's about feeling. Behind the music is love, care, joy and optimism. Optimism in difficult times.

This week I have with that in mind tried to follow a theme of prayer moving from darkness to light, returning to the idea in Psalm 40 of asking God to raise us out of the pit, out of the miry clay, learning from our mistakes, being redeemed.

To have our feet set on the rock so that all may see, like a city on a hill.

Rise and shine for the glory of the Lord.

Praying through music is about hope and let's face it, we all need to hold on to hope at the moment.

*Revd Marcus Bulcock*