

NNE Lent Booklet



‘Singing out our soul’

A series of reflections looking at
some of the hymns / worship songs
we sing as part of worship

So here it is another book of reflections put together by the circuit staff team. This time during the season of Lent we are inviting you to reflect upon some of the hymns and worship songs that we hear in our worship services.

I wonder if you have ever stopped to think what is the one item of worship that people in the congregation (and not forgetting those leading worship) participate in the most and with the greatest frequency? It is singing, whether it is a traditional 'hymn sandwich' type service or one that begins with a period of singing a block of more contemporary worship songs together.

Many would say Methodism was built on song, with the hymns of Charles Wesley being one of the three pillars on which Methodism was built together with Wesley's sermons and the house group or class structure. And many of those early Methodists would come away from worship with the tune or words of Charles Wesley stuck in their heads far than the words of John Wesley's sermons. How little things have changed...lol

The most recent Methodist hymn book was called 'Singing the Faith' for good reason, for that is often what we do, we sing or verbalise what we believe. The question is how often do we stop to actually think what it is we are singing or are some of our hymns / worship songs so ingrained and familiar that a little like when we recite the Lord's Prayer we do it without really considering what it is we are proclaiming

In this booklet, the circuit staff have chosen some of their favourite hymns / worship songs and tried to unpack why they speak to them as they do but also to, to quote one of our previous booklets, 'Go Deeper', and explore a little of the theology within them. There will be some specific Lent themed reflections and then in Holy Week our focus shifts to hymns / worship songs that reflect the last few days of Jesus' life

As Sundays are not counted in the 40 days of Lent, they are in fact feast days, there is no reflection to read on a Sunday, instead there is a space for you to reflect on the readings you have encountered in the previous week.

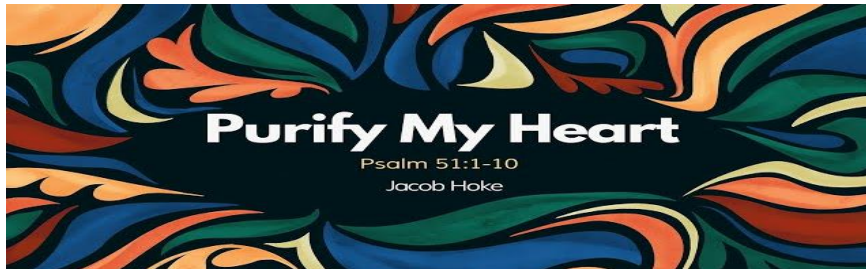
We have called this booklet 'Singing out our soul' which just so happens to dovetail nicely with the material for each Sunday in Lent provided by the Methodist Church this year entitled 'Soul Food', material we hope our ministers, local preachers and worship leaders will use to base their worship services on.

We hope you enjoy your journey as much as we have enjoyed putting this booklet together.

With love from Helen, Julie, Richard, Marc, Nikki, Cath, Jason and John

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Ash Wednesday 5th March STF 508 Purify my heart



To start of our Lenten journey on Ash Wednesday, the popular contemporary worship song “Purify my heart” by Brian Doerksen, seemed to me an *appropriate way to begin. The opening words of this worship song are*

*Purify my heart; let me be as gold and precious silver. Purify my heart let me be as gold, pure gold. Refiner's fire, my heart's one desire is to be holy. Set apart for You, Lord. I choose to be holy, set apart for You, my Master.
Ready to do Your will*

Words that I hope reflect our desire to be made pure, to be made holy, to be made fit for purpose through a process of refinement, not to do our will, but to do God’s will.

The refinement process that is referenced in the song is perhaps most commonly associated with removing impurities from precious metals, one that requires exposure to intense heat; gold doesn’t melt until it reaches a temperature of 1,064 degrees Celsius compared to water boils at 100 degrees. As the gold liquefies in the smelting furnace, unwanted properties referred to as ‘slag’ rise to the surface and after cooling are able to be chiselled away leaving behind the purified gold.

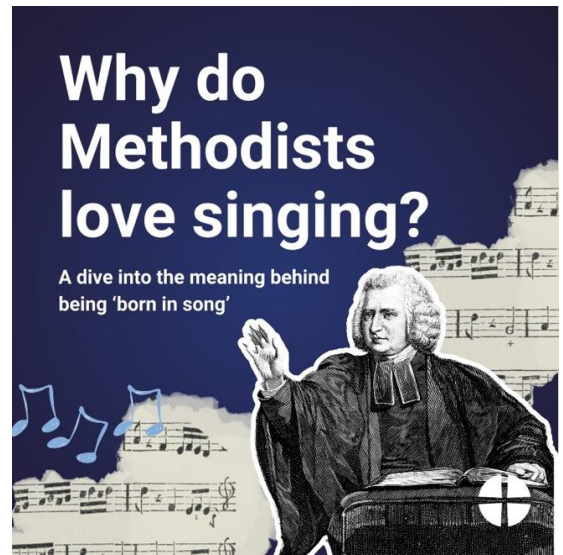
The prophet Malachi speaking about 100 years after the peoples return from exile, reminded the nation of their need for personal and national repentance, stating that the Lord “will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; He will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver (Malachi 3:3).” And in Psalm 51, one attributed to David after the prophet Nathan came to him after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba, we hear the cry ‘*Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.*’

At the start of our journey of song through Lent, what impurities do you need to remove from your life? What contamination needs to be cleansed away? In what ways does your discipleship, faith and witness need to be refined by God’s holy fire in order that your true precious nature can be revealed.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Thursday 6th March STF 21 Born in Song

Don't we often state how Methodism was born in song? Well, this hymn written by Brian Hoare, past President of the Methodist Conference reflects that. I absolutely love it and personally think that we don't sing it enough! For me, it encapsulates the joy and purpose of worship, reminding me of the centrality of praise in the Christian life. Rooted in biblical and theological truths, it speaks to the human response to God's grace and the transformative power of worship.



From the opening line, *"Born in song! God's people have always been singing"*, the hymn recalls the rich tradition of music in Scripture. It brings to mind the songs of Moses and Miriam after the Exodus (Exodus 15), David's psalms of praise and lament, and Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). These biblical songs express the spectrum of human experience before God, uniting worship with life's joys and struggles.

Theologically, *"Born in Song"* affirms that worship is a response to God's revelation. It reflects the doxological nature of our faith, as seen in Paul's outburst of praise in Romans 11:33-36, where contemplation of God's wisdom leads to spontaneous worship. The hymn reminds me that worship is not just an act but a way of being—a life oriented toward glorifying God (1 Corinthians 10:31).

The hymn's emphasis on singing as communal strengthens my understanding of the church as the body of Christ and captures what I feel Methodism is all about. When we sing together, we embody the unity described in Ephesians 4:4-6, joining our voices as one in praise of the God who unites us. Singing also serves as a witness, proclaiming the gospel in a way that touches hearts beyond words.

Personally, this hymn inspires gratitude for the gift of music in worship. It reminds me that singing is not only a celebration of God's goodness but also an offering of ourselves. Through it, we join the eternal song of creation, lifting our voices in harmony with heaven (Revelation 5:13).

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Friday 7th March STF 20 Be still for the presence of the Lord



Back in the early 2000's upon receiving what I understood to be a call to ordained ministry, this was one of the songs that 'spoke to me' as 1001 different thoughts, mainly ones of disbelief and confusion, whirled through my mind. Written some 15 years earlier, it was at the time still regarded as relatively 'new' especially in a church that regarded anything written in the 20th century as being modern!

For me, two biblical passages / images resonated with the images and at that time 'theology' of the song I was unable to put into words, both associated with two of the great Patriarchs of the Old Testament.

The first is found in Genesis 28 when in a dream at Bethel Jacob encounters God at the top of a staircase connecting heaven and earth. Waking from his dream Jacob reveals, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was not aware of it." The second passage is the familiar story of Moses encountering the presence of God in the burning bush when Moses is indeed commanded to take off his sandals because he is standing on Holy ground (Exodus 3).

In her poem Aurura Leigh, the poet Elizabeth Barrett Browning echoes that encounter when she writes that, 'Earth is crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God, but only he who sees takes off his shoes: the rest sit round and pluck blackberries'

God's presence is not confined to great cathedrals or churches, spectacular locations, or even so called 'thin places' but can be found in crowded hospital corridors,.....if only we are attentive enough to encounter it.

The question is do we have eyes to see, ears to hear, minds to understand and hearts open or have our senses become dulled and unresponsive?

Or just like Moses do we need to be reminded that wherever we are, because we will be standing on part of God's creation, we are in fact on holy ground.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Saturday 8th March STF 139 Today I Awake



I am not sure I've ever sung this offering in Singing the Faith but I have used the words of this song several times as a call to worship for services.

I'm a drummer and a musician but, ironically perhaps, I'm not very good at rhythms, routines or definite daily practices - I'd not make a very good Deacon! But I like the pattern of this song and how it frames the day.

For me, I think what I like most is that it's trinitarian, giving us a chance to reflect on the various aspects of the character of the persons of God and then drawing them all together in the last verse.

There's something I find particularly beautiful about that last verse: I love the idea of "enjoying" the Trinity and the presence of God the creator, Christ the healer and the Spirit the inspirer surrounding us. To "enjoy" is to take delight and pleasure in something or someone. It's the idea of the heart singing and being present, passionate and finding fulfilment in that moment. How I long for that to be my experience of God and life each day!

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Because I don't want to do all the hard work for you, I'm going to leave you with some questions to ponder drawn from each verse of the song:

- What does it mean for you that God goes before us today?
- What does it mean for you that the Spirit is within us today?
- What does it mean for you that Christ is beside us today?
- How can you enjoy the Trinity around you today?

May we sing daily of the joy and privilege the God, in three persons, calls us to life, and calls us their friend.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Sunday 9th March A day of reflection

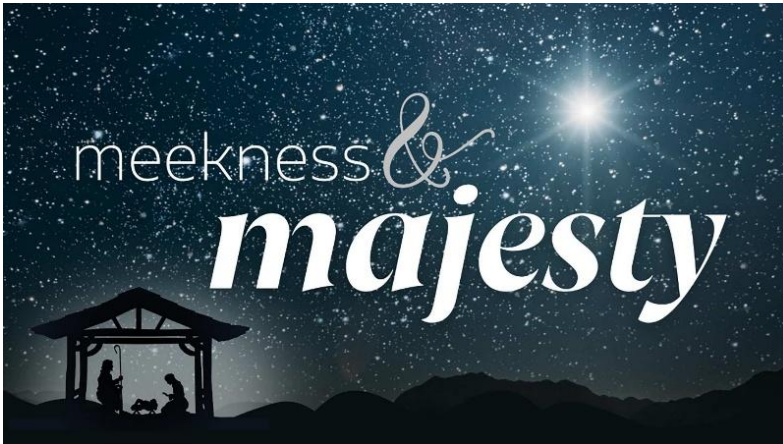
Sundays are not counted during the 40 days of Lent. Indeed they are considered feast days, a day of celebration, almost mini Easters commemorating the resurrection of Christ, and as such fasting and other penitential practices are not observed these days. Neither, in the case of this booklet, will there be a song for you to reflect on until we reach Palm Sunday.

Instead we offer the opportunity to look back over the hymns and worship songs that you have read in the previous week and engage with various challenges. So this week consider the following

- How familiar were you with the hymns / songs that have been chosen?
- Did you get out your hymn books to read through the lyrics of each song/
- Did you sit and listen to a version, or perhaps more than one version of each song?
- What discoveries did you make?

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Monday 10th March STF 362 Meekness and Majesty



This is one of my favourite hymns. I've loved it since first hearing it being played slowly, but the words just struck me as being gorgeous.

I was a relatively new Christian and I had gone to find out more about this God stuff, and this beautiful

hymn's lyrics really spoke to me. Meekness and Majesty – how can you be both? Meek suggests quiet, standing back, shy even. And Majesty – well that speaks of kingship, of sovereignty, of leadership.

Has there ever been such a thing as a meek ruler? The history books tell us of kings and queens and presidents seizing power by force – none of them were meek.

But Jesus is of course a different kind of king. Jesus is a man and deity all wrapped up in one. One of my favourite lines in this hymn is – '*...lifts our humanity to the heights of his throne.*' Through Jesus, our humanity can reach a new level, a new height. If we'd only follow and listen to Christ, we'd reach a higher level of our own grace and mercy, sharing what we have from God with one another, and spreading that all encompassing love that we receive.

'Father's pure radiance, perfect in innocence, yet learns obedience, to death on a cross.'

These lines from verse 2 tell us several things. Firstly that God is the Father of Jesus Christ and God's image is radiant within Christ. Secondly, that Christ is perfect and that he is innocent. Not innocent like a baby is innocent though, just that he is without sin. He is *clean*. He learns to be obedient to God. '*Not my will, but thine*' Jesus says, because he knows that God has a plan, and although he might not like the plan, and he may not even understand it, he trusts God, even to death.

Bow down and worship, for this is **your** God.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Tuesday 11th March 10,000 reasons (Bless my soul)

*Bless the Lord oh my soul, Oh my soul, Worship His Holy name
Sing like never before, Oh my soul, I'll worship Your Holy name
The sun comes up It's a new day dawning It's time to sing Your song again
Whatever may pass And whatever lies before me Let me be singing When the evening comes*

*You're rich in love And You're slow to anger Your name is great And Your heart is kind
For all Your goodness I will keep on singing Ten thousand reasons For my heart to find*

This song by Matt Redman was written in 2011 and is based on the opening lines of Psalm 103. It is a song that I often associate with funerals; on one occasion I stood in a line outside the entrance of a church and blessed people with this song as they left the service of a beloved Deacon. I wasn't singing on my own I hasten to add, it might not have been such a blessing if I had been!

It's also a song that comes to mind when I have had some difficulties to face – 'whatever may pass and whatever lies before me, let me be singing when the evening comes'. It has got me through a number of challenges over the years, including worries around health appointments and difficult committees I have had to face.

As I reflect upon the words of the second verse which reminds me that God is slow to anger and rich in love, there are a myriad reasons why I should sing of the goodness of God. It's so easy to forget what God has done for me, the opportunities I've been given to serve Him and the experiences that I have had as a result of that, and to focus solely on the here and now. When death comes knocking and we are given glimpses into what might be the closing stages of life, this allows us the opportunity to not only look back but to count our blessings and to recognise that our praise should be unending.

Returning to the aforementioned Psalm 103, which is headed The Love of God in the Good News translation, we are given a sense of the goodness of God –

¹ Praise the LORD, my soul All my being, praise his holy name!

² Praise the LORD, my soul, and do not forget how kind he is.

³ He forgives all my sins and heals all my diseases.

⁴ He keeps me from the grave and blesses me with love and mercy.

⁵ He fills my life^[b] with good things, so that I stay young and strong like an eagle.

May we find 10,000 reasons to keep on singing!

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Wednesday 12th March STF 186 "Tell Out, My Soul"

This hymn was written by Timothy Dudley-Smith in 1961. The words of the hymn paraphrase the Magnificat, from Luke 1:46-55. Timothy had been reading the New English Bible, which instead of the introduction of "My soul glorifies the Lord", began, "Tell out my Soul the greatness of the Lord", and these words inspired him to write the hymn.

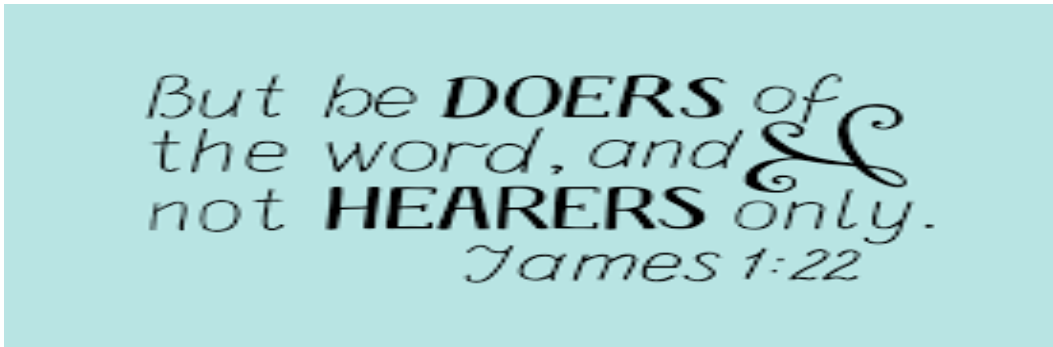
"Tell Out, My Soul" tells us of God's faithfulness and provision for his people. The hymn's lyrics proclaim God's love and power, and the salvation that comes to all people through Jesus Christ.

Here are some of the hymn's key themes:

- God's covenant with Abraham: The hymn recalls the promise made to Abraham and his descendants, that "In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).
- God's saving work: The hymn proclaims that God's saving work brings salvation to all people, regardless of their nationality.
- God's enduring love and power: The hymn's words proclaim God's enduring love and ever-present power.

Tell out my soul is a favourite hymn of mine. I often choose it as a "sending out" or recessional hymn because it reminds me of my sending church Holy Trinity in Boston; Where every week as we left the service the words "Be not just hearers of the word, but doers of the word" were carved above the door (James 1:22).

After having met with the Lord in our worship on Sundays, why would we not want to go out into all the world and "tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord", making known his power and might, his promises and his loving mercy for all mankind?



*But be **DOERS** of
the word, and
not **HEARERS** only.
James 1:22*

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Thursday 13th March STF 67 This, this is the God we adore

The author of this hymn, John Hart, was born into a Calvinist Christian family. In the early part of his life he struggled to make sense of his own spirituality, and he did “go off the rails” for a time. On Whit Sunday in 1757, he heard a sermon on Revelation 3 v 10. His life was changed and he became at peace and confident in his relationship with God. This new peace was translated into words through the many hymns he wrote. Today’s hymn was first published in his “Hymns composed on Various Subjects, with the Author’s Experience.” Knowing a little of Hart’s story I think you can see the personal experience in his words. But it is challenging me to reflect on what they mean to me.

This, this is the God we adore ... How and when do you adore God? Why do you adore God?

He is ***our faithful, unchangeable friend*** ... as someone who finds it difficult to express my adoration of God, this says it quite simply. God doesn’t love me one day and not the next. He loves me even if I am getting life wrong!

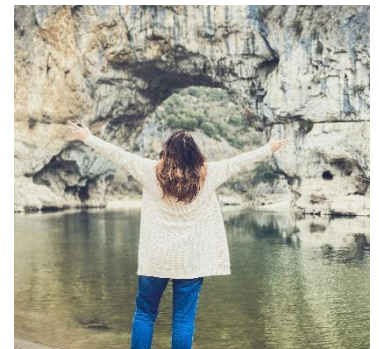


Photo by [Jametlene Reskp](#) on [Unsplash](#)

And that ***love is as great as his power*** ... When we consider the power of God in creating the universe, in the majesty and wonder of nature, even in the power of the waves we have seen over this winter, that is truly some love ...

And it ***neither knows measure nor end...*** God’s love can’t be measured, it is limitless and has no end. It is infinite.

‘Tis Jesus the first and the last ... “in the beginning was the word and the word was with God and the word was God (John 1 v1) Jesus was there at the beginning, with God, was God. And he is with us still for all time in the person of the Holy Spirit who will ***guide us safe home*** into a continuing relationship with God.

We’ll ***praise him for all that is past*** ... God has been with us in all of our life up to this point, even if like John Hart, we struggle at times to know him and be sure of our relationship with him. Even if we too go off the rails at times.

And trust him for all that’s to come ... as we go forward today, tomorrow, this week, this month we can trust this God to remain faithful and unchangeable, bestowing on us that love which has no end.

Just 8 lines – 8 lines which sum up the God we adore!

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Friday 14th March It is well with my soul

(Tune; *Ville du Havre* - Words; Horatio Spafford [NNE Youtube <https://youtu.be/tsdH-G82nJ4?si=0hSvvWSh9nGTS2z4>]).

Some say that blue skies do nothing to test our faith. Rather, it takes storms to prove our trust in God. Isaiah 26: 3 says “God keeps in perfect peace, all who trust in him”.

The story connected with the writing of this hymn illustrates that aptly. Horatio Spafford was married with four daughters. He and his family lived in Chicago where he worked as a lawyer.

His business was affected by the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 bringing financial disaster to him, and in 1873 further financial downturn led him to



send his family ahead of him to visit relatives, and to join the campaign of Moody and Sankey in Edinburgh.

However, the ship they sailed on, the ‘*Ville du Havre*’ collided mid-Atlantic with another vessel and sank almost immediately. Mrs Spafford was “saved alone” as she later telegraphed, words that stuck with Horatio, and in his grief, during his Atlantic crossing, he began to pen the words to

this hymn in memory of his daughters.

I am confident many would react differently under such circumstances, but Horatio knew confidently that the God who sustained him was with him and would continue to be with him. This is a message that is the same for us today, no matter the circumstances that overcome us in life we can say ‘it is well, it is well with my Soul’, for you, Oh God, you are with us.

This echoes the wisdom of St Julian of Norwich... “All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well” - speaking that same assurance and peace of God which is grace for all, even in the worst storms and greatest trials of life.

Perfect peace is kept for us who put our trust in God

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Saturday 15th March Yet not I but through Christ in me?

It always amazes me what hymns / worship songs people know and how someone can discover a 'new' song only to 'discover' that folks have actually been singing the song for years, if not decades

I admit do not have my finger on the pulse of contemporary Christian Music, in fact I am not sure my fingers are anywhere near the body never mind a pulsating artery. This is partly due to the church in which my faith developed which was I think one might say traditional. And I do not listen to Christian music at home or when driving the car.

I'm not sure where i first came across this hymn, possibly as recently at Jason's welcome service a couple of years ago. It was certainly at a service I attended rather than led. Thankfully having watched it numerous times on the internet I subsequently discovered that it was only written in 2018 and so I was quite pleased that I was only 6 years late to the party. And so it's the only one I've provided a Youtube link to...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zundjUFazfg>

I was hooked as soon as the music started to play, even before the first words had been sung. And whilst there are many things within the entire song that appeal to me, it was one line from the chorus, the title of the song, that resonated....'Yet not I, but through Christ in me'

Contrary to commonly held belief the life of a minister is not one of 24/7 heavenly bliss and rapture, sometimes it can feel like running through quicksand wearing weighted diving boots. Which is why some people within the churches I look after may 'occasionally' wonder and indeed ask where I have mislaid my 'happy face' ...lol

Don't get me wrong I love what I do, (most of the time) in fact it's the second best 'job' that I have ever done. But if waking up each day, often even before the sun has come up, I thought that I was going to have to deal with my diary in my own strength then I would probably just head back to bed.

This song, indeed this line, reminds me that I am not called to be a one man band and accomplish everything in my own strength, gifts and abilities. Rather my role is to be open and respond to what God, through Jesus and the Holy Spirit has, is and will do. Do by working on me, in me and importantly through me. Because it 'that way' far more things will be accomplished than through my feeble attempts alone

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Sunday 16th March A day of reflection

So a week of reflections completed. How many notes did you make on the pages as you went along? How many things did you highlight or underline for when you attend your house groups / study groups to reflect on the weeks hymns / songs together....because you'll get far more out of it if you do

Do I wonder....

- When do you tend to read each days reflection...do you have a set time or just squeeze it in whenever the day allows?
- Have the words of any of this week's hymns / songs made you think about your own faith journey?
- Have anything in this week's reflections helped you in your prayer life?
- How many of the ones this week were new to you?
- What discoveries did you make?

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Monday 17th March

STF 615 Let love be real, in giving and receiving

This hymn speaks powerfully to the essence of Christian discipleship: love that reflects the nature of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. It challenges me to embody an authentic, unconditional love that mirrors the love described in 1 Corinthians 13—patient, kind, and not self-seeking. It is a hymn that means a great deal to me. So much so, that I had it at my wedding.

Theologically, the hymn calls us to love with vulnerability and integrity, echoing Jesus' command to love one another as He has loved us (John 13:34-35). This love is not superficial or transactional but deeply relational, grounded in grace and truth. It invites us to see others as God sees them—bearing God's image and worthy of love, regardless of imperfections or differences.

The hymn also resonates with the biblical principle of perfect love casting out fear (1 John 4:18). It reminds me that the love we are called to embody is not possessive or controlling but liberating and life-giving. This reflects the self-giving love of Christ, who laid down His life for us (John 15:13) and invites us to do the same for others.

In my journey of faith and ministry, this hymn has deepened my understanding of love as a covenantal relationship rather than a fleeting emotion. It calls me to reflect God's steadfast love found throughout Scripture—a love that remains faithful even in the face of challenges.

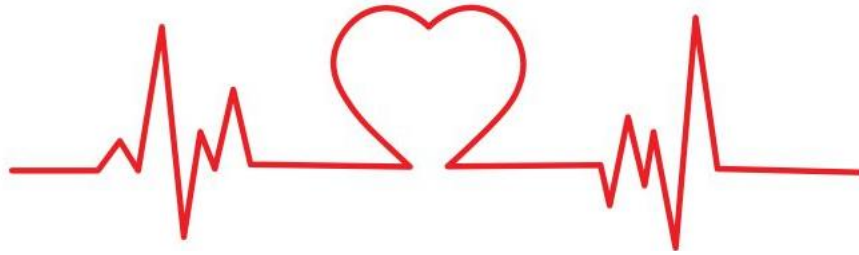
Singing "*Let love be real*" is both a prayer and a challenge. It inspires me to strive for relationships rooted in grace, where love transforms and heals. It reminds me that the love of God is not just something to receive but something to share, embodying the kingdom of God on earth as it is in heaven.



**Let
Love
Lead**

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Tuesday 18th March STF 699 – God of Justice



My son is called Micah. He is named after the Old Testament prophet who wrote my favourite verse in the Bible. If you've ever heard me preach, the chances are you've heard me reference this verse! In Micah 6:8 it says:

“He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”

To me, this verse tells us the very meaning of life, uncovering God's heart for the world:

In the beginning God created, and he told humanity what was good: Act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God;

The “fall” is life without that goodness in action;

The “law” is a call and a “how-to” guide to return to that intended goodness;

The “good” kings did those things well. The “bad” kings didn't;

The cry of every prophet is to return to that created intention of God, reminding people, as Micah does explicitly, what God requires of humanity;

The life, teaching and worship of Jesus, right up to and including his death and resurrection, is a lived example of what God called good in the beginning;

And the Holy Spirit lives and breathes in us to make it possible for us to follow the example of Jesus and to enact that goodness in our lives.

This song encourages us to sing that truth of God's hope for the world. May we recognise what God has called us to do... and be filled and sent to do it!

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Wednesday 19th March STF 345 And can it be

This is one of the most popular hymns we have in Singing the Faith, possibly in all of Methodism. Whenever I choose it there are always people who tell me it's their favourite.

But because most of us are familiar with it and we sing it often, perhaps we have missed some of the theology in it, perhaps we have taken for granted some of Wesley's deeply felt meaning in this great hymn.



In the first verse, the final two lines express Wesley's astonishment at what God has done. *How* can it be that *my God* should die – even for *me*? It's acceptance that this is what really happened – God, through Christ, died for us. It wasn't a mere gesture, – Jesus died as a human in agony on that cross. And that's what Wesley is trying to express – his amazement that God did that for him. And for all of us.

Verse two contains two lines that again express Charles' amazement – amazement that this mercy we receive from God is huge, free and seeks us out! Even those of us who thought somehow God would not want us, that we're not good enough – even then God's mercy is for us too. God seeks us out, wants to give us mercy, forgiveness, complete love. If we're receptive to that seeking, it will find us.

Verse four contains lines that are often sung the loudest in congregations, people's heads go up, their eyes light up as they sing '*My chains fell off, ...* But the line I like best is the third one – '*Thine eye diffused...*' God's eye. God sees that tiny glimmer of hope, even when we ourselves don't feel it. God sees it and that's when hearts are free, and we're released from whatever darkness we've put ourselves in. '*And can it be...*' – well yes it can!

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Thursday 20th March 'Cornerstone'

Verse 1

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly trust in Jesus' name.

Chorus

Christ alone, Cornerstone
Weak made strong in the Saviour's love
Through the storm
He is Lord, Lord of all

Verse 2

When darkness seems to hide His face
I rest on His unchanging grace
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil

Verse 3

When He shall come with trumpet sound
O May I then in Him be found
Dressed in His righteousness alone
Faultless stand before the throne

This hymn, written around 2012 so relatively new in church worship terms, isn't in Singing the Faith but will be known to some I'm sure and is a part of Hillsong's extensive catalogue of songs.

It was only when I began to dig deeper that I found the verses have been taken from a hymn named 'Solid Rock' by Edward Mote which was written in 1834. Mote was a cabinet maker who was taken to Tottenham Court Road Chapel by his master where he found faith. One day the words of this hymn came to him which he later shared with a woman on her deathbed. She was very appreciative of it and he later added more verses.

Apart from its tune, this is a hymn that speaks to me on a number of levels and I find it very powerful. It is a reminder that attempting to place our hope in anything that isn't Jesus is futile. A desire for money, fame, material possessions and so on will all come to nothing if Jesus isn't our main priority and the place we should anchor our faith. Speaking of anchoring our faith, verse two refers to the fact that even in the darkness and storms of life Jesus is the one who remains steadfast and we can hold on to him in the same way that we can trust an anchor to hold a ship firm and strong even when it is being tossed around in the storm.

I can't help but be reminded of Psalm 23 – 'even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil for you are with me, your rod and staff they comfort me'. In his book 'Living with the Psalms', John L Bell refers to psalms as being 'a vocabulary for pain' and this is no doubt true, words to which we can turn in times of struggle – a place to find comfort but also to lament along with those who have gone before.

ancient times, builders have used cornerstones in their construction projects. A cornerstone was the principal stone, usually placed at the corner of a structure, to guide the workers in their course. As the cornerstone of the building of the church, Jesus is our standard of measure and alignment. Where is your anchor point? Is Jesus the cornerstone, the foundation of your life?

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Friday 21st March STF 440 Amazing Grace

The hour I first believed was on an Alpha Course in January 2003, aged 39. I had what can only be describes as a road to Damascus experience, and I think this is why the hymn Amazing Grace resonates with me so much.

At that time my knowledge of the Christian faith was what I had learned at Primary School. I remembered the Lord's Prayer, some of the great Bible stories like David and Goliath, Noah and the flood and some of the hymns we'd sung in assembly, but I had no clue about a relationship with God through belief and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

I had been asked to sing Amazing Grace at my Nan's funeral, because she always loved to hear me singing, but I refused. My Nan had also begged me to be confirmed when I was about 10, but I also refused.

Now I can honestly say I have never been the Captain of a slave ship or a slave trader like John Newton, although I had lived a pretty Godless life until that time, but in the words of the hymn "I once was lost, but now I'm found, was blind, but now I see" described exactly what had happened to me!



John Newton became an ordained minister as did I. Our overwhelming response to Gods Amazing grace was to follow His call to a very specific ministry. I don't

know about John Newton, but for me this was a gruelling process which I only pursued because I genuinely believed (and still do) that God was calling me to be ordained, all I could do was respond in obedience to this call.

This inspirational hymn contains the message that forgiveness and redemption are possible regardless of sins committed and that the soul can be delivered from despair through the mercy of God because – Gods grace is free and undeserved. There is nothing we can do to make God love us more. There is nothing we can do to make God love us less. This is the Amazing Grace of God - It's not about us, it's all about God and His transforming work in our lives through His only Son Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Saturday 22nd March STF 564 O thou who camest from above

One of Charles Wesley's 6,500 hymns, this was published in 1762

It is thought that Leviticus 6 v 13 is the verse on which the hymn is based ...

“The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out.”



It seems to me that the hymn can be split in half. The first two verses are us placing ourselves before God and asking him to come into our lives, to kindle that flame of love on the very centre of our heart so that our hearts become like an altar to God. It's almost a conversion prayer or a reaffirmation of our faith. It reminds me of that first Christian Pentecost, when what seemed to be tongues of fire rested on each of those gathered. (See Acts 2) It is said that this hymn meant a great deal to John Wesley, possibly reflecting on his conversion experience when he observed that his "... heart was strangely warmed."

Verse 2 gives me an image of a flame which grows from the kindling to a well-established fire, burning for God's glory. Our faith may begin with just a spark of a flame, but if we continue to go back to God in prayer and praise, the flame grows and grows and becomes a flame which never goes out.

In the second half of the hymn we are asking Jesus to confirm our response - that we should work, speak and think for God. I find the use of the words "... stir up thy gift in me" interesting. The collect for Christ the King Sunday begins, "Stir up, we beseech thee, O Lord, the wills of thy faithful people..."

I think that we all need stirring up at times. We can get complacent or apathetic about things. We focus on the negative. We only look to the past and not the future. We can get fatigued with the constant bombardment of bad news, preferring to turn the TV off rather than remembering that these are real issues affecting real people.

***This lent do we need to ask for a kindle of sacred love once again?
Do we need to be stirred up into action?
How can we keep the fire of God's love burning?***

And finally, Bishop E Bickersteth reflected that expecting a congregation to sing a word such as *inextinguishable* which has six syllables "...practically leads to a hymn being passed by." I, for one, am extremely glad that this hymn was not passed by. It's one of my favourites!!!

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Sunday 23rd March A day of reflection

A challenge for you this week, one that might involve you putting your thinking caps on. We have talked a lot, and I mean a LOT, about the Methodist Discipleship pathways over the last couple of weeks. And I am aware that a lot of those pathways interconnect and overlap.

Even so looking back at the six hymns / songs you have engaged with last week, which of the discipleship pathways would be most appropriate i.e. was it a hymn / worship song concerned with....



Let love be real

God of Justice

And can it be

Cornerstone

Amazing Grace

O thou who camest from above

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Monday 24th March STF 370 Breathe on me, breath of God

(Tune; *Trentham/Carlisle* - Words; Edwin Hatch [NNE Youtube <https://youtu.be/G8WqMySRaCQ?si=r8auAiDNlzBuVib1>]).

This hymn, written by Edwin Hatch, takes its inspiration from younger years living in Canada, and his later years as a church historian and theologian in Oxford. It was after his death in 1889 that his 'little book of poems' was discovered and published, which contained this gem, 'having the shape of a psalm of praise', speaking of a longing for God's Spirit. The text leads the reader (or singer!) to look toward eternity.



To me its 'mood' depends on the tune chosen! The first tune (*Trentham* - linked above) is more solemn and reflective, whereas the second tune (*Carlisle*) lifts and builds to something 'more'... It is this sense of 'the greater things of God' as received from God's Spirit that causes me to continue to reflect on the potential for a transcendent experience of God in the prayer and praise we offer in our devotions and worship.

In Spain there was a statue with the motto "*Non Plus Ultra*", which referred to the Pillars of Hercules, which historically symbolised the edge of the known world, the motto itself translates to "nothing further beyond" in Latin.

However, Spain later adopted the reversed phrase "*Plus Ultra*". In the statue, a lion's paw now reaches out and is seen destroying the word "No", leaving the words "*More Beyond*" as their national motto, for Christopher Columbus' voyages proved there was more to discover beyond their known world.

How might we use this season not only to seek, but to realise the prospect of a new encounter with God. How might we use this season not only to seek, but to recount these experiences to others. How might we use this season not only to seek, but to relish the opportunity for 'more'.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Tuesday 25th March STF 673 Will you come and follow me?

Originally written by Graham Maule and John Bell to be used at a one off occasion to mark the conclusion of a youth volunteer's time of ministry, Will you come and follow me now appears in over 40 hymn books. It is I would suggest a staple favourite of many Christian communities.

And for those of you who might wonder why I am here, doing whatever it is I do, it has a lot to answer for, for it was whilst singing this song, for the very first time, that I received what I understood to be a call to ordained ministry.

When singing the first four verses of the song, it appears that we are singing in and through the voice of Jesus. A voice that during those verses poses a whole load of challenging questions to any potential followers, each one exploring a different form that true discipleship should take.

As we sing we are asked...Will you / will we...



come and follow me, go where you don't know, let my love be shown, let my name be known, let my life be grown in you, leave yourself behind, care for cruel and kind, risk the hostile stare, let me answer prayer, let the blinded see, set the prisoners free, kiss the leper clean, (a line that certainly resonated with me having

worked helping treat leprosy patients in Calcutta), admit to what I mean, love the 'you' you hide, quell the fear inside, use the faith you've found to reshape the world around.

No small task! The question is how will we respond to this challenge to live out a radical discipleship? The final verse gives is a chance to respond. Because the summons on our life echoes true, we will turn and follow Jesus. In his company we'll go where his love and footsteps show and in and through Jesus we will move and live and grow.

And the line that resonates the most, one that occurs 5 times, once in each verse is **'and never be the same'**. Responding to Jesus should and will change us and filled with grace and empowered by the Holy Spirit by living out our discipleship in such a radical way, should and can help change the lives of others. The question is 'Will you come and follow me?'. What is your answer today?

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Wednesday 26th March

STF 409 Let us build a house where love can dwell



A hymn of welcome and radical inclusion, this song challenges us to ask ourselves do we truly welcome all people in our church? As a result, this hymn resonates deeply with me as a vision for the church as the body of Christ, called to embody God's love and welcome in tangible ways. Rooted in biblical and theological themes, it invites us to participate in God's mission of reconciliation and renewal (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

The hymn's refrain, "All are welcome," reflects the radical inclusivity of Jesus' ministry, where tax collectors, sinners, and outcasts found a place at the table (Luke 15:1-2). It echoes Paul's words in Galatians 3:28, reminding us that in Christ there is no division between Jew or Gentile, slave or free, male, or female—we are all one in him. This theology of unity challenges us to build spaces where diversity is celebrated as a gift from God.

The imagery of walls being broken down recalls Ephesians 2:14, where Christ is described as our peace, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility. This is a profoundly theological statement about the nature of the church: not just a gathering of individuals, but a community united in Christ, called to embody his love and justice.

As I reflect on my journey in ministry, the hymn's emphasis on building a house of safety and compassion resonates with my understanding of the church as a foretaste of God's kingdom. It reminds me of the eschatological vision of Revelation 21:3-4, where God dwells among humanity, wiping away every tear and making all things new.

Theologically, this hymn serves as a reminder of the church's call to be a sacrament of God's love in the world—a visible sign of God's grace. It inspires me to live out this calling, trusting in the Holy Spirit to empower the work of building community, healing divisions, and welcoming all.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Thursday 27th March STF 257 God has Spoken

It's a dangerous thing to claim that God is speaking and to have the audacity to suggest we have heard it right! Down the generations many have claimed the associated authority of claiming to be the mouthpiece of God. That has occasionally led to glimpses of good, but more often to abuses of power and political, social and religious manipulation.



Yet God has spoken, and is speaking, and God will speak again. It's something we believe in our faith. It's something we hope for when we turn up at church to sing and pray and listen to sermons. It's the reason we read our Bibles, pray and seek God's guidance in our lives. God speaks.

The issue is how we discern what God might be saying to us. I think this song goes a long way to giving us the answer:

*"God has spoken -- spoken his unchanging word...
God still speaks, the Word unchanging"*

And the middle verse declares that God speaks in the living word – Jesus.

God as the "Word" is unchanging, but the words God speaks are also unchanging. The words God speaks cannot contradict the character of God. God's instructions to us as Jesus' disciples will make us look more, not less, like Jesus... And Jesus is God and God's love in human form!

If the messages we are hearing or the words we are speaking are inconsistent with the character of the God of love we believe in, with the life and teachings of Jesus, and with the fruit of the Spirit, then it is not God speaking.

May we be able to discern God speaking to our hearts again by the Spirit.
May we hear God's age-long word and message now as then.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Friday 28th March STF 351 In Christ Alone

This is a controversial choice of hymn. It's the Wrath that proves difficult, but that isn't the line that concerns me.

I agree, the wrath of God needing to be satisfied sounds worrying – why does God need his anger to be satisfied by the horrific death of someone?



This God that we view through Christ isn't an angry God, and we can be uncomfortable thinking Jesus had to die in order to appease this unforgiving God. It makes God seem like one who would stop the harvest from growing out of spite, and that isn't really the God we understand. But, some people change the words to '*love of God...*' which I don't think is any better. It still begs the question – why does it need to be satisfied by death?

The line that troubles me the most though, is '*bought with the precious blood of Christ.*' This image troubles me. There are several atonement theories out there, and the Methodist doesn't have a particular one – they are all valid.

Atonement simply means when we are made right with God 'at-one-ment'. I won't go into them all here, but the one I try to adhere to is what's known as 'love inducing repentance'. Which means, Jesus died for me because he loves me, so I want to be a better person and repent. His love encourages me to repent.

I know for a lot of people the sacrifice (Jesus on the cross) and debt (you now owe Jesus something) works and there are other theories of how we are saved, but for me, I can't imagine God saying to Jesus, 'I'll save her if you die'.

Instead, I think of Jesus dying for me, and so I need to do and be better. '*Here in the love of Christ I stand.*'

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Saturday 29th March STF 503 Love Divine



Charles Wesley's hymns were full of doctrine. They were written to help people (who would mostly have been illiterate), to understand doctrine and Biblical theology. They weren't intended for the hearing of just a few people but were to try and reach as many people as possible with

the theology of that particular hymn.

Love Divine is what I describe as a 'big (and beautiful) hymn'. What I mean by this is that in order to get the most out of it you really need a big congregation who will make a big sound. It reminds me of singing with hundreds of other people at Christian events like Easter People. There is nothing more powerful than singing one of Wesley's hymns, with its richness of language, alongside others who have the same deep passion for Christ as you have.

Trying to sing such a rousing hymn with a small congregation is not without its challenges, although sometimes I am proved wrong and a small congregation can make a much bigger sound than I had anticipated.

According to an excerpt from '*Amazing love! How can it be: studies on hymns by Charles Wesley*' by Duke and Fenner, the first stanza is like a prayer to Christ. Jesus' divine love is greater than all other affections known and because of this Wesley called on Christ to "come," "fix," "crown," "visit," and "enter ev'ry trembling heart." Wesley wanted for himself that deeper relationship with Jesus, but he also wanted it for everyone else as well.

The hymn-prayer has a basis in Christ's incarnation, God becoming flesh, when it speaks of: the joy of heaven has come to earth (John 1:14), He has fixed in us His humble home (John 14:23), He has crowned us with His mercies (2 Tim. 4:8), He has visited us with His salvation (Psalm 106:4), and He shall enter every trembling heart (2 Cor. 4:6, Eph. 3:17-19).

This beautiful hymn, full of theology and deep meaning, is testament to the passion of John and Charles Wesley in their endeavours to win lives for Jesus. What does it mean to you?



SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Sunday 30th March A day of reflection

A different way to think about this weeks hymns / songs today.

I am going to encourage you to put your artists hats on today and to simply draw / sketch below a picture / image / design that **you think** represents in a visual way one of the hymns / worship songs that has been discussed.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Monday 31st March "Tell Out, My Soul" STF 186

This hymn was written by Timothy Dudley-Smith in 1961. The words of the hymn paraphrase the Magnificat, from Luke 1:46-55. Timothy had been reading the New English Bible, which instead of the introduction of "My soul glorifies the Lord", began, "Tell out my Soul the greatness of the Lord", and these words inspired him to write the hymn.

"Tell Out, My Soul" tells us of God's faithfulness and provision for his people. The hymn's lyrics proclaim God's love and power, and the salvation that comes to all people through Jesus Christ.

Here are some of the hymn's key themes:

- God's covenant with Abraham: The hymn recalls the promise made to Abraham and his descendants, that "In you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).
- God's saving work: The hymn proclaims that God's saving work brings salvation to all people, regardless of their nationality.
- God's enduring love and power: The hymn's words proclaim God's enduring love and ever-present power.

Tell out my soul is a favourite hymn of mine. I often choose it as a "sending out" or recessional hymn because it reminds me of my sending church Holy Trinity in Boston; Where every week as we left the service the words "Be not just hearers of the word, but doers of the word" were carved above the door (James 1:22).

After having met with the Lord in our worship on Sundays, why would we not want to go out into all the world and "tell out my soul the greatness of the Lord", making known his power and might, his promises and his loving mercy for all mankind?



*But be **DOERS** of
the word, and
not **HEARERS** only.
James 1:22*

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Tuesday 1st April STF 147 The day thou gavest

I don't get to lead many evening services, and so unfortunately, I don't get to choose this hymn very often.



The first line reminds us that each and every day is given to us by our creator God, a God who

“... called the light ‘day’ and the darkness he called ‘night.’ And there was evening and there was morning...”

But I wonder, do we ever look back on the day as we climb into our beds. Do we ever think about the things for which we need to thank God - a random act of kindness, time spent with family or friends, our health service, the food we have eaten. What can you thank God for tonight?

Do we ever look back on the day and reflect on the times we have fallen short - the cruel words or thoughts, tasks left undone, the things ignored. What do you need to say sorry for tonight?

Do we ever look back and think about those people with whom we have come into contact - the conversations had, the coffee or food shared, the smiles or help offered. Who could you pray for tonight?

25 years ago my sister was travelling the world. One Sunday evening when she was in Australia, we sang this hymn at an evening service. As we sang these words, I just had a picture of there always being some of God's people awake. So this hymn also reminds me that we are not Christians in isolation in Nottingham North East, or even in the UK. Verse 4 says “The sun which bids *us* rest...” here in the UK is “... waking our brethren ‘neath the western sky...” In the same way, the sun which woke us this morning was calling people in the east to take their rest. This means that the “... voice of prayer is never silent...” and that “hour by hour fresh lips are making ... wondrous doings heard on high.”

And as the tears streamed down my face, I felt close to my sister, despite her being thousands of miles away on the other side of the world.

**From the rising of the sun to the place where it sets,
the name of the Lord is to be praised.**

Psalm 113 v 3

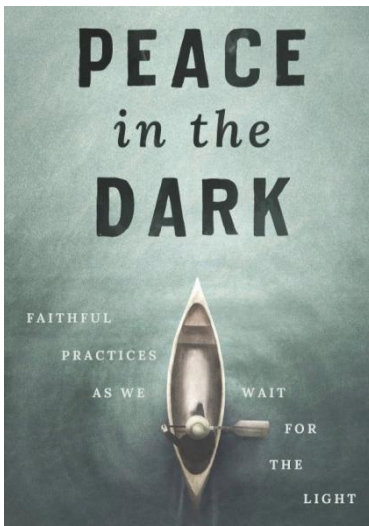
SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Wednesday 2nd April STF 561 Now I have found

(Tune; *Madrid* - Words; Johann Andreas Rothe - Translated; John Wesley).

This is a hymn of commitment and dedication written in about 1727 - nearly 300 years ago. Rothe was born in Silesia, now part of Poland, and studied theology at Leipzig University, Germany. The religious and social reformer, and bishop of the Moravian Church, Count Zinzendorf was much pleased with Rothe, and made him pastor at Berthelsdorf in 1722. Herrnhut was in his parish, and he took great interest in the Moravian settlement there. He was a man of high character, an earnest, fearless, and impressive preacher, and wrote about forty hymns,

Edward Bickersteth, a Vicar in Hertfordshire, broke out singing on his deathbed in 1850; "*Mercy's full power I then shall prove, loved with an everlasting love.*"



Likewise, when Rev. John Fletcher, of Madeley, Shropshire, a significant member of the early Methodist community, was dying in 1785, he always took a peculiar pleasure in repeating or hearing the lines; "*While Jesu's blood, through earth and skies, Mercy, free, boundless mercy! cries*".

Furthermore, whenever his wife, Mary Bosanquet - one of the first women preachers (and credited as being responsible for persuading Wesley to agree to have them!) - repeated them he would answer, "*Boundless, boundless, boundless!*"

As his strength failed, he added, though not without much difficulty; "*Mercy's full power I soon shall prove, loved with an everlasting love*".

The significance of the imagery - the depths of the ocean, the waters of the seas, the power of creation - is often one attributed to death and the sorrows and sadnesses of bereavement.

However, the interesting and inspiring thing in this hymn, and the testimony of those examples of deathbed experiences, is for me, that in such complex scenarios, there is hope. In water so deep and dark as to be impassable, there is peace. In the messiness of the world and human life, there is love - everlasting, boundless, love.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Thursday 3rd April STF 547 Beyond these walls of worship

The worship has ended, let the service begin” is a sign that adorns the exit doors of many churches. It’s a catchy and even memorable sentiment but one that suggests that worship and service are perhaps different and separate parts of our discipleship.

In this hymn we are reminded that the whole of our life, whether it be done through any of our Methodist Discipleship Pathways (and yes I will be asking you what they are in the study groups), can be viewed as ‘worship to God as we witness to God’s love.



The important emphasis of this song is that whilst it is important to care for those already within the flock, the aim of our mission should always be outward looking, beyond the walls of the building in which ‘the church (the people) gather to worship

Beyond the walls of our church building there are people who are lost, who are lonely, who feel unloved and perhaps even unlovable. Beyond these walls are people who are afraid, directionless, oppressed and limited in what they can do and who they

can be by how society treats them.

How can we develop a culture of care and concern not just for ‘us’ but for ‘them’ for those who are unknown to us, perhaps different to us

the question is how is God calling us through our varied ministries to partner with God here in this place in the healing and redemption of the world? Because God is already at work, we just need to notice God not just in scripture but also in the world too. Notice and then join in...beyond these walls of worship.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Friday 4th April STF 238 Lead us Heavenly Father lead us

This hymn originally titled “A hymn to the Trinity” was written by James Edmeston. He was born in 1791 in Wapping East London, an area that was to become known as the docklands. He was from an evangelical family who attended an independent Chapel in Stepney; however, James went on to find his Spiritual home in the Church of England.

The hymn begins asking God our Heavenly Father to lead and guide believers over life's troubles; as ultimately it is only God who can provide us with every blessing.

Living by the Thames, James would have been aware of the importance of seafaring before the days of heavy rail and road infrastructure - the tempestuous seas being a very real danger to the life and the prosperity of the growing city, which depended on the seas for trade.



The hymn goes on to ask our Saviour to breathe forgiveness on us. Jesus understands all our weaknesses, having walked the earth, experienced temptation in the desert, and felt the

pains of all mankind in his own body during his time here on earth, and by doing so, Jesus can identify with us in every way.

Hebrews 4:15 tells us “we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin”.

The final verse asks the Spirit of God to fill believers' hearts with heavenly joy, blending love with every passion in a way that never grows stale, assuring us that nothing can destroy that peace that only the Holy Spirit can bring.

I chose this hymn as it acknowledges God as he is and it acknowledges us as we are. When we sing it again this Lenten time, may we have a sense of God as the one who comes to share our life, so that we might go to share His life with others.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Saturday 5th April STF 224 Behold the Lamb of God

It won't take much of my word count to give you the whole song:

*Behold the Lamb of God, behold the Lamb of God.
He takes away the sin, the sin of the world.*

John L. Bell, from John 1.29



John's Gospel bypasses Jesus' baptism and time in the desert that we consider during Lent but it's not farfetched to pair these words with those accounts in other Gospels... Lent is a season for naming and dealing with those things that distract us from recognising and worshiping God and acknowledging Jesus. So I think this song justifies its place in the "Lent" section of Singing the Faith!

Some definitions and thoughts to ponder:

BEHOLD: verb. To see or observe, someone or something, especially of remarkable or impressive nature. What do you find remarkable about Jesus?

THE LAMB OF GOD: This phrase apparently only appears twice in the Bible, and both are in John chapter 1, within 7 verses of each other. It's John the Baptist who makes the proclamation, and he sets the scene for John's Gospel narrative. By painting Jesus as the "Lamb of God" John immediately tells his readers that this is someone to watch closely because he's the saviour. Does being told this about Jesus at the start change how you read the Gospel?

HE TAKES AWAY THE SIN OF THE WORLD: This saviour, Jesus, lifts up and removes the things that stop us from living and worshiping freely: The guilt and shame we carry for our failings, and expectations of the world that stop us from worshiping God, especially in the loving of ourselves and our neighbour. What sin could you give up and let Jesus carry away this Lent?

Maybe the big question for today is, are you just looking at him, or are you going to follow him to see what he does next?

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Sunday 6th April A final Sunday of reflection

A chance to be creative again. What I invite you to do is to have a go at writing your own hymn. Here's the suggestion....pick one of the hymn / songs that you have liked so far out of the almost 30 you have looked at so far....but pick it because you like the tune. Or in my case because it's an easy tune to sing too.

Then simply have a go at writing your own three verse hymn / worship song...the theme of the song can be anything you like. So what are you waiting for

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Monday 7th April STF 272 Servant King



I've picked this picture because of the line in the hymn 'hands that flung stars into space'. I love that line. If there is any doubt about who this servant king could be, it expresses it – the servant is God, the servant is the Creator of all things. The one who placed (flung) the stars into the heavens.

Verse two is sometimes a difficult one to read, let alone sing. '*...my heavy load he chose to bear...*' The word '*my*' makes it personal, it wasn't a random hope that if Jesus did this some would be saved. It was a deliberate, decisive choice. *My* heavy load. Yours too. Not by accident, but because God knew how to save, Jesus knew what had to be done.

Jesus chose to take on this burden from all of us. His heart, the hymn tells us '*...with sorrow was torn*'. He knew what was coming, he knew he'd be arrested, tortured, humiliated and then murdered on a cross. No wonder his heart with sorrow was torn. But he then says the words that break our hearts – '*yet not my will, but yours*'. Speaking with God, he confirms 'I'll do as you ask, Father God.'

So the last verse is an exhortation to all of us. The first three verses tell us what Jesus did, now verse four tells us what we ought to do in response. We can't simply take – all that Jesus has given for us requires us to respond. We have to act in thanksgiving. How? Learn how to serve, care for one another, think of others' needs. And when we do that, it is Christ we are serving.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Tuesday 8th April STF 594 Lord Jesus Christ, You have come to us

In the 50s and 60s there was a movement in the Church of England to prove to the church that there wasn't only one style of music and only one instrument that can be played in worship. They often used to put new tunes to old words, I think this is interesting because doesn't the Methodist church often do the reverse today? The writer of Living Lord wrote his own words too.

First published in 1960 by youth minister Patrick Appleyard who was working in Poplar, East London at the time, it was suggested that this hymn was modelled on Cliff Richard's 'Living Doll' although to me the similarities are negligible.

I consider Living Lord to be very appropriate for Lent. It holds memories of childhood for me. I remember singing it on the Sunday School anniversary stage in the Methodist Chapel where I lived..



We are reminded of Jesus' mother Mary and how she was about to sacrifice her son at the cross, and particularly that Jesus died for us as he took on the sins of the world.

I especially like the fact that at the end of the first verse it says 'Jesus our love for you we sing', this is a part of our DNA because Methodists are born in song!

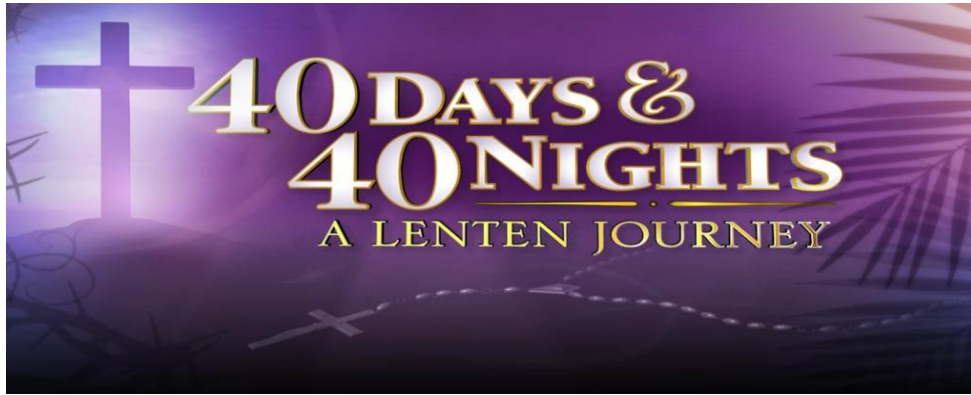
Lent is a time of fasting and prayer as we approach the cross, and the words of the hymn encourage us in our preparation, something that is hugely important as we prepare our hearts and minds for what is to come.

The third verse reminds us of the incarnation, God becoming one of us; of the pain and suffering that Jesus experienced and that he was about to sacrifice his life, remembering once again that he was the son of Mary.

The hymn urges commitment on our part to the Living Lord. The Holy Spirit at work in us encourages and enables us to use the gifts that we have been given in order to serve God and others. God's power breaks through in our lives when we allow it to but how easy is it for us to just go through the motions? May this season of Lent be a time when we pause and listen for that still small voice.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Wednesday 9th April STF 236 Forty days and forty nights



The hymn *“Forty days and forty nights”* is a powerful reflection on the season of Lent, drawing directly from Jesus’ time of fasting and temptation in the wilderness (Matthew 4:1-11). It serves as a reminder that Lent is a time of spiritual discipline, self-examination, and preparation, mirroring Christ’s journey before beginning his public ministry.

Theologically, this hymn connects with the biblical theme of the wilderness as a place of testing and transformation. Just as Israel wandered for forty years in the desert (Deuteronomy 8:2) and Elijah journeyed for forty days to Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8), Jesus’ forty-day fast signifies a period of purification and dependence on God. The hymn’s verses invite reflection on how we, too, are called to resist temptation and trust in God’s sustaining presence.

The phrase *“Sunbeams scorching all the day, chilly dewdrops nightly shed”* evokes both the harshness and solitude of the wilderness, reminding me that the Lenten journey is not meant to be comfortable. Instead, it calls for deeper reliance on God, echoing Jesus’ words: *“One does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God”* (Matthew 4:4).

This hymn also serves as a call to perseverance. Lent is not merely about giving something up but about drawing closer to God through prayer, fasting, and acts of mercy (Isaiah 58:6-7). The final verse shifts from struggle to hope, pointing toward Easter’s promise.

Each time I sing *“Forty days and forty nights,”* I am reminded that the Lenten journey is not just about hardship, but about renewal. It is an invitation to walk with Christ, knowing that beyond the wilderness lies resurrection, and beyond the cross, the empty tomb.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Thursday 10th April STF 59 Shine Jesus Shine

Shine Jesus Shine was written by Graham Kendrick as “... a prayer for revival” in 1987 and in that time has become one of the most popular songs of the last 40 years. Graham Kendrick has said that “... this song is a prayer for revival” and I am sure that we all agree that the world is in need of revival in so many ways.



- I write this reflection the day after a 15 year old boy was stabbed to death at a school in Sheffield and another 15 year old arrested on suspicion of his murder.
- I write on the day Sweden suffered the worst mass shooting in its history.
- I look at the UNICEF website and see that in Haiti more than 3 million children are in need of humanitarian support, and that there is a rapidly deteriorating humanitarian situation in eastern DR Congo. Both crises are in large part due to internal violence and unrest.
- In the Middle East we watch and pray that the ceasefire holds.

It's difficult to see the light of Jesus' love shining in the darkness sometimes.

Verse 2 invites us to come into the awesome presence of God. A few years ago Rev Andrew Charlesworth was preaching on the Transfiguration and chose this hymn. We read that strange story of the transfiguration when Peter, James and John went up the mountain with Jesus, and whose appearance changed when “...His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became as white as the light.” (Matthew 17:2) Until that service I had never thought about what it would mean for me to be in the awesome presence of God. That even I can enter God's brightness and that all my darkness can be consumed by that light of love.

But then verse 3 is really the challenge. As we gaze on that brightness, that light of love, we have to make a response. And the response is that our faces have to reflect the love back. That through our lives, by what we do and say, Jesus' story is told. And if each one of us can reflect a little bit of the light, however small, then maybe light, grace and mercy may shine in the darkness.

**The Life-Light blazed out of the darkness;
the darkness couldn't put it out. *John 1 v 5***

Friday 11th March RICHARDS NEW CHOICE

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Friday 11th March STF 636 O love that will not let me go

(Tune; *St. Margaret* - Words; George Matheson).

Whilst not strictly a Lenten hymn, being that it is from the ‘conflict, suffering and doubt’ section of the hymn book suggests something fitting within a season of penitence, of testing and trial...

I admit to quite liking this hymn and how it seems to echo Christina Rossetti’s great Christmas hymns (StF 204 & 210) which speak of incarnation and love’s great and holding presence with us in the Messiah. Here we have words from a similar era which point to a God who, even though we may experience weariness, twilight, pain, and trial, offers fullness of life.

Many years ago I read Jim Crace’s book ‘*Quarantine*’ - a fictional portrayal of the wilderness experience of Jesus. It seeks to draw the reader, through the senses invoked in descriptions of a body in an extreme environment and under physical and mental pressure, to reflect on their own sufferings and temptations and to find a way of seeing the presence of the divine, the help of heaven. This understanding it offers holds the same kind of potential which we hear in the verses of this hymn, that is God’s love, light, and joy;



- In ocean depths; richer, fuller be.
- In sunshine’s blaze; brighter, fairer be.
- In rain, rainbow; in despair, tearlessness.
- In dust, and death; life that shall endless be.

Whatever this Lent has in store - wherever we are as we enter this season - whoever we travel with - might we enter with confidence; an assurance that even in a world of conflicts, societies where we see suffering, communities where we have doubts - even as we enter this wilderness time for ourselves;

Love WILL NOT let go of us. God will ALWAYS hold us in love.

And not just ‘us’...

Specifically - YOU, and me, and each of the 8 billion people on this planet.

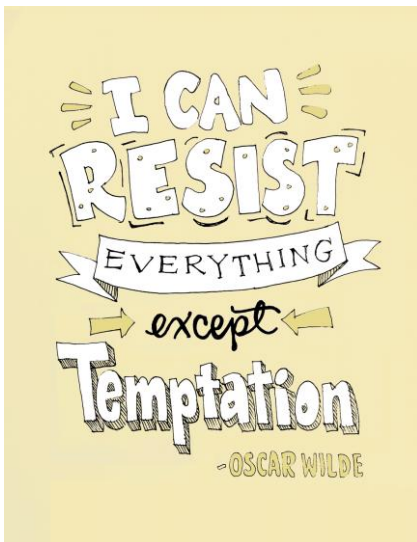
Love, eternal and sure.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Saturday 12th April STF 237 Jesus tempted in the desert

This is just one of two hymns in Singing the Faith that follow the narrative structure of the gospels' re-telling of this famous story. Describe as a kind of teaching hymn, it recounts the story in memorable form and identifies the lessons within it.

The first three verses recall the familiar tale of Jesus facing three temptations. To turn stone into bread in order to satisfy a physical need. To throw himself off the highest pinnacle of the temple only to have his fall broken by angels thus attracting people by his shock and awe abilities. And finally to acquire all the power he could ever want if only he would worship the devil. And we might think that's where Jesus being tempted ends but Luke's gospel reminds us that "When the devil had finished all this tempting, he left him **until an opportune time**. (Luke 4:13)



An opportune time is really any and every time that Jesus came up against a challenge, an obstacle, an easier option, a possible diversion from 'the way' (and remember that's what the first followers of Jesus were called) God had called him to walk. Every time the religious leaders challenged him. Every time the disciples just didn't get it. Every time his words fell on deaf ears. Every time people proclaimed him the Messiah...but the wrong type of Messiah (Ssssh, don't tell anyone: remember Mark's messianic secret that runs through his gospel).

Right up to those moments in Gethsemane when he almost pleads, "Abba, Father, take this cup from me" before adding "Yet not what I will, but what you will." And that moment on the cross when he was tempted by the jibes of onlookers to prove he was the son of God by calling all down legions of Angels to come to his rescue. For Jesus it seems temptation never stopped.

The final verse of the hymn recognises that we too face temptation all the time and so we pray for God's protection "lest we fall, your trust betray".

Q: So today what temptation(s) are you struggling with, and in what way(s) do you need God's protection to 'resist the tempters hour'?

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Palm Sunday 13th April STF 264 Make Way, Make Way



Make way for Christ the King. Simple really – get out of the way, let Christ come and do what needs to be done.

When we think of Palm Sunday, we look at the readings it conjures up an image of a huge crowd, pressing in from all

sides, standing on tip toes to see, so that they can get the best view of this spectacle. I wonder if someone said '*Make way, make way...*' so Jesus could pass through the mob on his donkey.

Perhaps a disciple had to get people to stand back, to make a clear path from Jesus to ride into Jerusalem. He had to be able to get into the city in order to make the scripture come true, so that he could start this part of his ministry.

The hymn lyrics tell us what Jesus had come for – '*the broken hearts to heal, the prisoners to free...*' Those in Jerusalem had heard of him because that's why they were there shouting 'Hosanna!' but others may not have heard, and they wondered what was going on. *Why are all these others on the streets? Who are they waiting for and why is a grown man on a colt?*

That gave the disciples a great opportunity – perhaps we should do more donkey riding through the streets of Nottingham. Imagine we get ourselves to the left lion with a donkey and someone sits upon it and rides through the town. How we could talk about Christ that day! People would say 'what are you doing?' And we would reply – 'we follow Christ and we want you to know about him.'

Make way, make a space in your diary for Christ and I will have a chat with you about our Saviour!' Would we dare to do that?

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Holy Monday 14th April

STF 249 Jesu Jesu fill us with your love

I have a memory of the minister of the church where I was worshipping at the time pointing out to the congregation that 'Jesu' should begin with a Y and not a J and since then I have always sung it like that.

The consonant form of J wasn't known in the 14th century, therefore, both J and I used the Y sound, as in the word "yes". So, in Greek, Iesous would be pronounced Yesous, and the Latin Iesus would pronounce to Yesus. In the 18th Century, the letter's J and I were split into a consonant and a vowel, and J was adopted as the consonant letter. A little bit of English language history for you!

One of the readings set for Holy Monday is Matthew 21:12 & 13, Jesus entering the temple courts and driving out the money changers, and I think that this hymn sits in contradiction to the selfish actions of the money changers as Jesus says 'My house will be called a house of prayer, but you are making it a den of robbers.' Jesus' outrage at the way the money changers were mistreating the temple was reasonable given the way in which a place of worship was being abused.



Instead, the focus of this hymn is upon love and service. Jesus' love is expressed through his words and actions as throughout the bible he relates to people who are often rejected by society – the woman at the well, people with leprosy, the blind man, the woman who was bleeding He understands and is able to speak into their situations.

Serving others and thinking the best of them often isn't easy. I recently watched a programme on the TV called 'Go back to where you came from', about a group of young people who learnt about the arduous journeys that refugees take to get to this country and how their racist attitudes changed as a result of it.

The hymn is a reminder that we shouldn't differentiate between the people that we serve; all are deserving of our love and care. I wonder if we really adopt that same attitude, or are we a bit like the money changers, perhaps aware of what we should be doing but at the same time swayed by our own selfish needs and desires?

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Holy Tuesday 15th April
STF 332 Lord, I Lift Your Name on High



It feels wrong to me to be picking a song that's relatively upbeat for Holy Week, especially as it's Tuesday and we know Good Friday's coming... Though come Friday we'll be longing for Sunday!

There's not much happening on Holy Tuesday in the Biblical accounts. Every other day of the week has some sort of story that can be lined up with it, but there's nothing definite on Holy Tuesday.

That said, the lectionary points to John 12:20-36 on Holy Tuesday. It's one of those times when Jesus inspires a voice from the heavens. Amidst his growing fame and people seeking him out, Jesus is having a vulnerable moment. In this passage he is intentionally choosing to seek to glorify the God's name and not his own. It's a fascinating little passage that makes me ask more questions than it answers (I wonder what questions it raises for you!?), but it has within it the pattern of Rick Founds' short song:

Jesus has come from heaven to earth, as the light of the world, to show the way - The way to the Father, the way to honour the law, the way to love our neighbour, the way to live in the Kingdom of God in the here and now. Soon he will be going from the earth to the cross to drive out the prince of the world. The cross to the grave (like the seed dying and being planted) and the grave to the sky (the forthcoming resurrection and ascension) will only serve to reinforce the cry to glorify God and lift high the name of Jesus.

May we join our praises with all those who recognise the saving work of Jesus and want to glorify the God he worshipped too:

I'm so glad you're in my life. I'm so glad you came to save us.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Holy Wednesday 16th April When Mary poured a rich perfume



One of my favourite hymn writers is Carolyn Winfrey Gillette. She is a Presbyterian pastor in New York and also accomplished hymn writer. Trying to find a hymn that linked liturgically with Holy Wednesday has not been an easy task but thankfully Carolyn has come to the rescue with this song sung to the tune 'Hail to the Lord's anointed'.

*When Mary poured a rich perfume on Jesus' weary feet,
Her caring filled that humble room; the fragrance there was sweet.
But full of anger, Judas said, "We could have used this more!
Why was her gift not sold instead and given to the poor?"*

*The Lord replied, "Leave her alone! She bought it for this day.
This caring love that she has shown is faithful to God's way.
The poor will always be with you, but you will not have me."
He blessed her and he thanked her, too, for giving lavishly.*

*O Christ, what can your people bring to show you thanks and love?
You need no fragrant offering; for now you reign above.
Since there will never cease to be the poor throughout the land,
May we, your church, serve faithfully by offering them our hand*

It is one of several similar stories in the gospels where a woman anoints Jesus. In Matthew and Mark the woman is unnamed, in Luke she is unnamed and also sinful (but this occurs much earlier in Jesus' ministry and not in Holy week). And in John 12:1-8 it is Mary (of Mary, Martha and Lazarus fame) who anoints Jesus at Bethany.

Such an anointing could be a sign of Jesus kingship, a sign of Mary's faith, a sign of his soon to be death and burial, a sign of sacrificial service and last but by no means least, a sign of her love

What is it that all these women 'see' that the disciples are still blind and unable to notice even though it is right there in front of them?

And would you have reacted like the woman or like Judas?

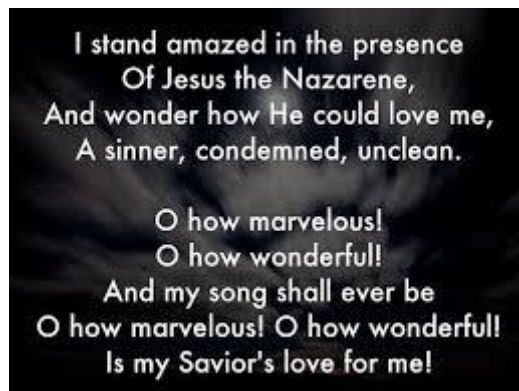
SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Maundy Thursday 17th April Songs of Fellowship 829
I stand amazed in the presence of Jesus the Nazarene.

I remember once singing and playing this hymn on my guitar at a service in a big medieval church back in Lincolnshire. It was one of those very special times in worship when the presence of the Holy Spirit was tangible. A moment so precious, where the hairs on the back of your neck stand up, or where that unexpected tremble happens, or perhaps a tear in the eye or a gulp in the throat: A moment when you know, that you know, that you know, God is here, His spirit is with us.

These moments leave us astounded and amazed, I always think, why I am I so surprised? Perhaps we shouldn't feel so surprised, but there is just something so awe-inspiring about seeing God work personally in ways that are beyond our comprehension and absolutely and definitely beyond our ability!

This hymn is often sung during Holy week and on Maundy Thursday as it speaks of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane after he had washed his disciples feet John 13:1-17 and shared his last supper Luke 12:7-20. The disciples were still asking questions, they still didn't understand what was about to happen to Jesus – that His destiny was the cross, not just for them, but for all mankind - in the burden of Calvary where He would take upon Himself all of our sins by dying on the cross for us all.



I stand amazed in the presence
Of Jesus the Nazarene,
And wonder how He could love me,
A sinner, condemned, unclean.

O how marvelous!
O how wonderful!
And my song shall ever be
O how marvelous! O how wonderful!
Is my Savior's love for me!

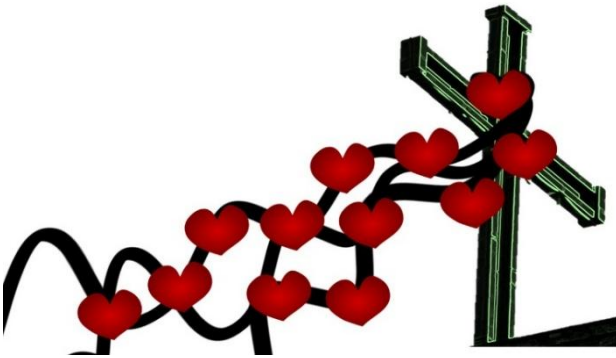
There just aren't the words to express how I feel when I sing these words. But if He can do this for me, He can surely do it for you. Because, believe me, I'm no one special. But believe me, I really am special as far as God is concerned. And so are you. That is the marvellous, wonderful love our saviour has for us.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Good Friday 18th April
STF 287 When I survey the wondrous cross

Written in 1707 and now surely one of the most popular Good Friday hymns, Isaac Watts actually penned this as a communion hymn. Some people have commented on a series of contrasts which can be seen in the lyrics.

There is a contrast in the very first line, and something which I had never thought about until I began writing this reflection. “The wondrous cross!” I mean a cross of crucifixion is hardly wonderful! Having already been flogged and mocked, those condemned to this form of execution would know that they were in for a prolonged, painful death. Families and friends standing, or sitting, at the



foot of the cross would have to watch and wait for the relief from suffering in the victim’s final breath. A wondrous cross – I don’t think so.

But there is another contrast here. Three crosses. Three people condemned to death for the crimes they had committed. On two of the crosses we have robbers, and on the third “the prince of Glory.”

And a circle of thorns composes not an ugly headpiece, but a rich crown of glory.

There is yet another contrast in verse 3. “...from his head, his hands, his feet, sorrow and love flow mingled down...” For me this is one the most powerful lines of any hymn. We have the sorrow of the scene as a son, brother and friend suffers an horrific death at the hands of an enemy occupier. Sent to Roman trial by leaders of his own faith who didn’t understand his message; deserted and denied by his own disciples; betrayed by his own people who called for his death at the expense of the criminal Barabbas.

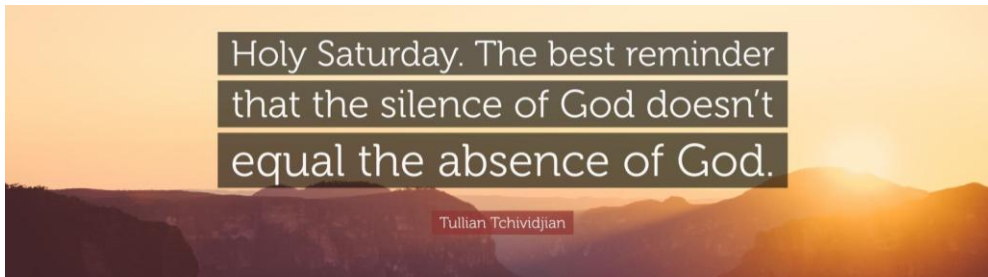
But mingled in with all that is love. The love of a God who wishes to extend his love to all. God’s love flows down from that cross for every single one of us. We don’t have to deserve it, we simple have to accept it. And as we accept that amazing, divine love, it demands our soul, our life, our all.

God showed his love for us when he sent his only Son into the world to give us life. 1 John 4 v 9 (Contemporary English Version)

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Holy Saturday 19th April

The Sound of Silence



Holy Saturday is a day unlike any other in the Christian calendar—a day marked by silence, absence, and waiting. The lack of a hymn choice for today is not merely an omission but a profound theological statement. I believe that it invites deep reflection on the mystery of Christ's death and the in-between space before resurrection. My own spiritual practice is not to listen to music on this day. If you agree with what you read here, perhaps you could try the same.

This silence echoes the stillness of the tomb (Luke 23:53), where Jesus' body lay sealed away, and the stunned grief of the disciples, who had lost their teacher and friend. Scripture is largely silent about this day, mirroring the uncertainty of those who had placed their hope in Jesus. Yet, in the silence, there is also an echo of the psalmist's cry: "*How long, O Lord?*" (Psalm 13:1). It is a day of lament, holding the weight of suffering before the joy of Easter dawn.

Theologically, Holy Saturday embodies the paradox of Christian faith—the tension between death and resurrection, despair and hope. The Apostles' Creed speaks of Christ descending to the dead, a reminder that even in the depths of silence, God is at work (1 Peter 3:18-19). This challenges me to trust in God's presence, even when they feel absent.

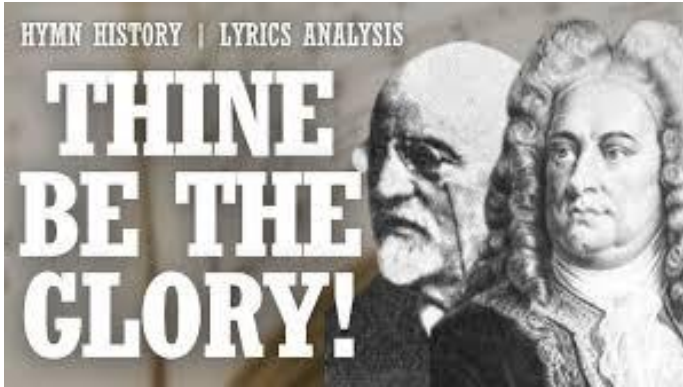
Without music, the emptiness is more tangible. It forces me to sit with grief, to acknowledge loss without rushing to Easter's celebration. It also speaks to the reality of human suffering—the times when words fail, and all that remains is the sound of silence.

Yet, silence is not the end. Holy Saturday prepares the soul for resurrection. In its stillness, it reminds me that even when nothing seems to be happening, God's redeeming work continues. The silence deepens the joy of Easter morning when the first notes of resurrection break forth, proclaiming that death is defeated, love has won, and Christ is risen.

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Easter Sunday 20th April STF 212 Thine be the glory

Tune; *Maccabæus* - Words; Edmond Budry [NNE Youtube https://youtu.be/q_2OFdUeTS0?si=Q_YWlyez3wm02XYb]).



Edmond Budry was pastor for 35 years on Lake Geneva. He wrote over 60 hymns, many of which appeared in the hymn book '*Chantes Evangelique*'. 'Thine be the glory' was written in French in 1884; "*A toi la gloire, O Ressuscite, A toi, la victoire, pour*

l'eternite", and transliterated in to English in 1923; "*Thine be the glory, risen conqu'ring one, endless is the victory Thou o'er death hast won*".

The translator of the hymn, was an English Baptist minister with remarkable linguistic gifts who managed to capture the spirit, tone, and intent of the original, which is especially seen in verse two.

On this glorious day - Easter Sunday - we as the church, with gladness, sing this hymn of triumph, for our Lord lives and death's sting is lost. We are greeted in love for Jesus meets us today - alive and calling us by name. In this new way of living and experiencing life we can proclaim with saints and angels, and all the people of heaven, today at least, that any doubt is gone, and that God in Christ is our Prince of life.

Therefore, we commit ourselves in this Easter season, and in this coming year, to proclaiming the promise of eternity, and to proclaiming what St. Paul writes of in Romans 8: 37-39, that "we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" with such an everlasting Love that "nothing...shall separate us from the love of God that is in Jesus Christ".

And the church shall cry out;

'Hallelujah, he is risen.

He is risen indeed. Hallelujah!'. Amen

SINGING OUT OUR SOUL

Easter Monday STF 309 See what a morning gloriously bright



I remember the days when the option of an Easter morning sunrise service was something which was frequently available to those who were able to drag themselves from a warm bed to rejoice in the risen Christ as the first rays of light burst through the clouds. It was always an effort for me but well worth it, especially if it was followed by an Easter breakfast! And the celebrations continue into Holy Monday.

This is a hymn filled with triumph, joy and praise, and so it should be, as it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus.

I prefer songs that have upbeat tunes (though not exclusively), and this is no exception, having a melody that mirrors the exuberance of Easter. Stuart Townend has often produced hymns with tunes which stick in the mind.

It speaks of 'the dawning of hope in Jerusalem.' After a very dark time when the disciples had witnessed Jesus' betrayal by Judas and by the people in favour of Barabas, followed by his crucifixion, hope was something which was very much in short supply.

I like the poetic language used; 'The voice that spans the years Speaking life, stirring hope, bringing peace to us'. God has been at work in the lives of people for many generations and continues to do so. We read about those who encountered God in His Word and He still speaks, though many don't listen.

We celebrate this humblest of Kings whose first bed was a manger and wears a crown of thorns and I think that the final words should be given to the hymn – 'Death is dead, love has won, Christ has conquered.'