

What exhilaration! One wants to rush out into the street shouting **No condemnation now I dread**. Wesley also wrote what I always think of as a posher version of the same ideas. Read it and think about it. Thinking can, I hope, equate to prayer. So read the words below, based on Genesis XXXII, 24-30, first, and when you're ready, go back to **And can it be?**

*I need not tell thee who I am, My misery or sin declare;
Thyself hast called me by my name; Look on thy hands, and read it there!
But who, I ask thee, who art thou? Tell me thy name, and tell me now.*

*Yield to me now, for I am weak, But confident in self-despair;
Speak to my heart, in blessings speak, Be conquered by my instant prayer.
Speak, or thou never hence shall move, And tell me if thy name is Love!*

*'Tis Love! 'Tis Love! Thou diedst for me! I hear thy whisper in my heart!
The morning breaks, the shadows flee; Pure universal Love thou art:
To me, to all, thy mercies move; Thy nature and thy name is Love.*

And when it's all over? **Regent Square** was probably the first hymn tune ever to inspire me to a life of singing, from the age of eight. It is paired with verses which I certainly didn't understand then, but which will be the last hymn ever sung on earth of my choosing. There is only room to quote two of the splendid six verses:

*There [in heaven] no cloud or passing vapour dims the brightness of the air;
endless noon-day, glorious noon-day, from the Sun of suns is there;
there no night brings rest from labour, for unknown are toil and care.*

*O how glorious and resplendent, fragile body, shalt thou be,
when endued with so much beauty, full of health, and strong and free,
full of vigour, full of pleasure that shall last eternally. Amen.*

The first lines of these hymns are:

Love divine, all loves excelling
My God, how wonderful thou art
Dear Lord and Father of mankind
Lead kindly light amidst th'encircling gloom
At even e'er the sun was set
Round me falls the night
Take up thy cross, the Saviour said
Just as I am, without one plea
And can it be

Come, O thou traveller unknown (tune. David's harp)
Light's abode, celestial Salem

Hymns and Songs that sustain us in difficult times



A reflection from Revd Becky

If you listen to the radio, you will often hear music tracks that have provided transformative moments in people's lives and sustained them in times of trouble- the classic being the Beatles track-' Let it Be!' or 'You'll never walk alone.' 'Inheritance tracks' are also explored by presenters - music and lyrics that people wish to pass on due to its message that resonates and feelings that are aroused. Even the Queen referred to music in her speech to sustain the nation at the beginning of the Covid 19 epidemic- 'We'll meet again.'

I wonder what music or lyrics you can identify as sustaining or that you would want to pass on to future generations?

We have been passed on beautiful lyrics that can sustain us from the Bible.

The Psalms were hymns of sustenance in both private and public worship. 'By the waters of Babylon, we sat down and wept.' Psalm 137. The words express the sorrows of the exiled peoples in their poetry and by naming their feelings. 'As the deer pants for the water, my soul longs after you my God.' Psalm 42 . This Psalm laments the remoteness of the writer from the Temple- one suggestion is that David wrote it when he was prevented from entering the temple by Saul or the revolt in Jerusalem. It also expresses how we can sometimes feel when we are in difficulty- I long for you God!

The imagination of prophetic literature can also provide sustenance. Prophecies are expressions of hope that help us to reimagine what the world can be like. One example 'And the trees of the field shall clap their hands and we'll go out with joy.' is recorded in Isaiah 55v 12 as a promise that God will enable his people to return to their home land and the whole earth will rejoice.

Hymns of thanksgiving in both the Old and the New Testament retell the wonders of God's intervention in the world: the song of Moses in Exodus and of Hannah in the book of Samuel; the song of Mary and Simeon in Luke's gospel. These form the canticles that we still use in daily prayer- the Benedictus, Magnificat and Nunc dimittis to praise and commend our whole lives to God- morning, midday and night.

The practice of hymn singing is recorded in the words of the apostles in the letters to the early church. The account of the imprisonment of Paul and

Silas in Acts 16 states 'about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God.' a spiritual practice through which they opened themselves to God's work of the Holy Spirit. As the writer of Ephesians exhorts Christians 'be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart.' Ch. 5 v 18,19.

Be encouraged. I hope that you find both sustenance and hope in hymns and music – perhaps you can revisit a Psalm or verse from scripture that enables you to sing a new song to the Lord!

HYMNS WHICH HAVE SUSTAINED ME Malcolm Sturgess

Becky has invited me to write a short article about hymns which have sustained me in times of trouble. It didn't take long to come up with a short list, but before committing myself to it, I set to thinking what it might be about any hymn which sustains me or anyone else. I suspect we might come up with some very different lists.

There are those who might be able to let themselves be **lost in wonder, love and praise**. People can lose self at the foot of the Cross, in the Garden or in Jesus's presence during one of his teaching sessions or one of the miracles. They can say, **My God, how wonderful thou art And gaze and gaze on Thee**.

There are those who can forget themselves and the world's problems by immersing themselves in some jolly tunes, and there's nothing wrong with jolly tunes.

For anything to inspire me it's got to be good: quality words and quality tune to match. You can't be inspired and irritated at the same time. Some of the following short list of nine hymns may be less scriptural than others, but they are hymns which recognise real life situations in which we find ourselves, and link with them the chance of sustenance, redemption and hope.

When I went in for heart surgery three years ago, the two hymns which really did sustain me were **Dear Lord and Father**, and (above all) **Lead kindly light**.

I do not ask to see the distant scene; one step enough for me

I was not ever thus, nor prayed that thou shouldst lead me on

I loved the garish day, and spite of fears, pride ruled my will.

Remember not past years..... So long thy power hath blessed me, sure it still will lead me on.

There are two evening hymns which I have always loved - and what a pity we don't get a chance to sing them. The darkest night of the soul often comes in the darkness of actual night, and many, many times I have repeated to myself :

At even e'er the sun was set

*O Saviour Christ, our woes dispel,
for some are sick and some are sad,
and some have never loved thee well,
and some have lost the love they had.*

*And none, O Lord, have perfect rest,
for none are wholly free from sin,
and they who fain would serve thee best
are conscious most of wrong within,
and Round me falls the night.....*

Earthly work is done, earthly sounds are none

Let me hear thee softly speaking

In my spirit's ear, whisper, "I am near".

Voice, that oft of love hast told me,

Arms so strong to clasp and hold me;

thou thy watch will keep, Saviour, o'er my sleep.

One of the best, most realistic and most encouraging of hymns is:

*Take up thy cross; let not its weight fill thy weak spirit with alarm;
his strength shall bear thy spirit up and brace thy heart and nerve thine arm*

*Take up thy cross, and follow Christ, nor think till death to lay it down, for
only he who bears the cross may hope to wear the glorious crown.*

We all have crosses to bear. **Just as I am** is comforting too. One is certainly **tossed about with many a conflict etc**.

And when things do go right? Charles Wesley had the perfect words to express one's feelings:

Long my imprisoned spirit lay,

fast bound in sin and nature's night;

thine eye diffused a quickening ray;

I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;

my chains fell off, my heart was free,

I rose, went forth, and followed thee.