**Music for the Soul - Lent Reflection – Creation and Creativity – by Neil Turpin**

“*If music be the food of love, play on.*” Orsino is asking for more music because he is frustrated in his courtship of Countess Olivia in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night.*  He muses that an excess of music might cure his obsession with love, the way that eating too much removes one’s appetite for food. Music plays an important part in Shakespeare’s plays and is often used to carry the plot. It’s reasonable to surmise that he did believe it to be ‘the food of love.’

As the anonymous quote on the invitation to this series of Lent talks says:

*There is something wonderful in music. Words are wonderful; music is more wonderful. It speaks not to our thoughts but straight to our hearts and spirit. It surprises us in the most tender of places. Where there has been pain bitter beyond tears, it reaches to the very root of our souls. It is the sunshine and the moonlight; the song of the skylark and the stars. Music is the speech of the Angels that fills the universe – the love songs of God himself, who sings his heart out.*

I have picked two, very different, pieces of music which I hope will speak to your hearts and spirit tonight both of which speak of creation and creativity. One is dependent on a lot of modern technology both in terms of its orchestration and production and in terms of playing it tonight; the other will be played live for us on an instrument which, in its modern form, is about 400 years old – although similar instruments have been around for almost 1000 years.

But first, and by way of introduction to our theme of Creation and Creativity, some background and context:

“In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while the spirit of God swept over the face of the waters.”

“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being.”

The immediately recognisable opening words of Genesis and St John’s Gospel respectively both lead us into narratives of creation and the created order. Genesis speaks in metaphorical terms of the creation of the physical world and St John talks in metaphysical poetic terms of the creation of the Kingdom of God.

What these passages have in common, of course, is the intimate involvement of God as Father (and Mother), Holy Spirit and Son in the creation of the world. They also speak of God, Father Son and Holy Spirit as pre-existing and being the source of creations – "without him, not one thing came into being. Theologians and Scientists describe this as creation *ex nihilo –* out of nothing – and theologians, at least, largely agree that this is best understood as an act of gracious love. God ‘went beyond himself’, renouncing isolation, solitude and independence. He was compelled by nothing beyond himself, only by the love at the heart of his being which is supremely revealed to us in the life, passion and resurrection of Christ. Creation out of nothing is not to be seen as an act of arbitrary power but as an expression of the ceaseless self-giving love within God. Colossians 1:16 says: “for in Christ, all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him.” The disclosure of God’s love in Christ is, as Emil Brunner writes “the revelation of the purpose of His creation, and this purpose of creation is the reason why he posits a creation. The love of God is the *causa finalis* of the Creation. In Jesus Christ this ideal reason for the creation is revealed."

If the one who suffered the shame and humiliation of the crucifixion is also the one ‘through whom’ all things came to be, then the act of creation ‘out of nothing’ can be construed as an act of suffering or sacrificial love. “Hands that flung stars into space, to cruel nails surrendered” as Graham Kendrick puts it in ‘The Servant King.’

So what can we say about our own place within creation and our response to it? Our starting point may be recalling the frequent declaration of the Psalmists that creation, in a myriad of ways, is endlessly praising its Creator. In all its colour, movement, subtlety, richness, diversity and splendour, it brings glory to God: Psalm 19:1-3 “The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.”

Our calling is to articulate and extend that praise in ever fresh ways. In humankind, creation finds a voice; to use George Herbert’s word, each of us is invited to be a ‘secretary’ of praise:

“Of all the creatures both in sea and land  
Only to Man thou hast made known thy ways,  
And put the pen alone into his hand,  
And made him Secretary of thy praise.  
(“Providence” 5-8)

Everyone is creative. Creativity is hardwired into our DNA by God himself. All of us were made to be creative people. We see this in Genesis 1:27 which says: So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. God, the greatest of all creators, the one who fashioned the Sun, and the humpback whale, made us in his image. The Divine image has been stamped upon us. We alone are made in the image of God. God has given us the glorious task of representing him on the earth.

So when an accountant takes piles of raw data and fashions the data into a meaningful account, he is reflecting the image of God. When a gardener works the raw soil and causes it to bring forth flowers, vegetables and herbs, she is reflecting the image of God. When a dancer choreographs a series of movements to tell a story, he is reflecting the image of God. When a composer arranges the seven notes of the scale into chords and scales and tunes, she is reflecting the image of God.

John Piper writes: If you are God, your work is to create out of nothing. If you are not God, but like God – that is, if you are human – your work is to take what God has made and shape it and use it to make him look great.

Music is one of the ways in which humankind becomes articulate and is able to respond to God declaring his glory. And so to our music tonight.

Hector Perez is probably not a composer of whom you have heard. He studied music at the *Conservatorio Superior de Musica de Sevilla* in Spain and at the same time graduated as a Technical Specialist in Telecommunications Electronics. He is a composer, orchestrator, music producer, pianist, and sound engineer. We are about to hear, and see, a documentary video about the creation of the world composed, recorded and mixed by Hector Perez with film editing by his colleague at Mundo Sinfonico – Falele Moreno.

It takes us, through the creative media of music and film, on a journey of a little over 4 billion years in a little under 4 minutes. I hope you enjoy it! And I hope the created technology works……! (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nxdv2hxg1HQ>)

For me, the combination of the music and pictures speaks powerfully of the glory of God in creation. It starts with the chaos and crescendo of the creation of the universe – the Big Bang – leading us through what we might now term pre-history, then, with the accompanying human voices takes us on a journey in the creation of the natural world and brings us right up to date with the frenetic pace of modern life and humankind’s creativity. The combination of the orchestration in the soundtrack and the cinematography is, I think, both an expression of the glory of God in creation and testament to the creativity given to mankind to articulate and respond to our Creator.

The second piece of music I have chosen for tonight is quite different. Its simplicity (says he who hasn’t got to play it), perhaps, masks the profundity of its message. Of the thousands of spiritual songs and choruses which have been written in the last 50 years few have been as widely taken up and sung in churches and schools as this infectiously joyful and catchy hymn by the 20th Century pacifist poet Sydney Carter. I call it a hymn, as that it effectively what it has become through its use in services of worship by many different denominations. The author himself more properly describes it as a carol, ‘a dancing kind of song, the life of which is in the dance as much as in the verbal statement.’ Let’s hear it now. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OQ8UwK_f1LY>)

‘Lord of the Dance’ was written in 1963, in the early days of the folk-song revival in Britain. Many of the other songs which Sydney Carter wrote at this time had a radical social and political message, and to some extent this song is a protest against the immobility and stuffiness of traditional church services. But this one has a much more positive message as well. In his book *Green Print for Song* Carter wrote: “Scriptures and creeds may come to seem incredible, but faith will still go dancing on. I see Christ as the incarnation of that piper who is calling us. He dances the shape and pattern which is at the heart of our reality. By Christ I mean not only Jesus: in other times and other places, other planets, there may by other Lords of the Dance. But Jesus is the one I know first and best. I sing of the dancing pattern in the life and words of Jesus.’

Lord of the Dance is a sustained metaphor of the dance as a way of life, as opposed to the stillness of death: of continued and ongoing creativity as opposed to suffocation of the creative gifts that God has given us. As put into the mouth of Jesus, it becomes a daring dramatic monologue, in which he affirms life, and life more abundantly, through the image of the dance and himself as ‘Lord of the Dance.’ In portraying Christ as the ‘Lord of the Dance’, Carter was, in fact, returning to a strong theme in popular mediaeval theology, expressed in the carol ‘Tomorrow shall be my dancing day’, in which Christ is presented as coming into the world ‘to call my true love to my dance’.

The words were written to fit a tune, usually called ‘Shaker Tune’ from its origins in the community of Shakers in the US who expressed their joyful assurance of salvation and belief in the imminence of Christ’s second coming by singing and dancing. Carter used the tune of the Shaker song ‘Simple Gifts’ for his own carol.

For the Shakers, dancing was a spiritual and creative, activity. It was connected with another favourite word, ‘Travel’: The Shakers used it in a special sense: to labour in spirit, to ‘travail’ if you like, to bring to birth…. Father William, an early Shaker, is reported to have ‘travelled in song’ for about two hours. You could travel so hard, dancing, that you wore out the floor.

“Dance, then, wherever you may be, I am the Lord of the Dance, said he,

And I’ll lead you all, wherever you may be, and I’ll lead you all in the dance, said he,”

Through the human creature, the inarticulate (though never silent) creation becomes articulate. As Douglas John Hall puts it, “In this creature the speaking God locates a counterpart within a speaking animal. Here the creation gathers itself and addresses the One whose glorious Word brought it into being, word answering Word.”

Using our creative gifts is an essential part of our praise of God and he wants us to use our gifts for his glory. It also leads us to a deeper thankfulness to God for providing us with such a glorious gift as creativity to voice creation’s praise.

Amen