

**Words on the Music for Worship at Grace**  
**Sunday, March 15, 2020**  
**Third Sunday in Lent**

Music presented in worship is offered to the congregation as a means to connect with God. Our intentional presence in the moment when the music is heard is our prayer time with God.

We continue our Lenten journey towards Easter; a time for prayer, penance, sacrifice and good works in preparation for the celebration of Easter. The lectionary scriptures for Sunday include Exodus 17:1-7, Psalm 95, Romans 5:1-11 and the Gospel of John 4:5-42. We will sing the hymns UMH 138 *The King of Love My Shepherd Is*, FWS 2132 *You Who Are Thirsty* and UMH 298 *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*.

At our 8:30 a.m. service Robert Cantrell will sing *Life Indeed*. Elizabeth Margaret Clarkson composed new text for this melody taken from one of Handel's operas *Alcina*. Miss Clarkson was a prolific writer; her works include poems, articles, songs and hymn texts.

*To His table spread abundantly, Jesus invites you, "come and dine, come and dine."  
Hungry, thirsty, sinful, weary, here find freely bread and wine! Come and dine.  
Pardon, power and praise await you, greater grace than all your need.  
Bread of life and living water, they who eat find life indeed!*

The Music for Gathering begins with the 19th-century hymn *In the Cross of Christ I Glory*, UMH #295. The hymn text has the expansive sense of history and time that typifies Romantic poetry of this era. J.R. Watson notes that the "image of a cross is a fine one . . . it allows the reader to glimpse the Cross standing over a ruined universe: into the Cross are drawn all the emotions, the woes of life, the good moments of light and love, so that both are 'sanctified'." It is one of the paradoxes of Christianity that an instrument of torture becomes a symbol of faith for all time where "All the light of sacred story/Gathers round its head sublime." This "sublime" cross (mentioned in the opening and closing stanzas) is a wonderful oxymoron, and as Mr. Watson points out, "an important word in the Romantic period . . . [making] this hymn a splendid example of hymn writing in the age of Blake and Wordsworth."

*In the cross of Christ I glory, towering o'er the wrecks of time;  
All the light of sacred story gathers round its head sublime.*

*When the woes of life overtake me, hopes deceive, and fears annoy,  
Never shall the cross forsake me, lo! it glows with peace and joy.*

*When the sun of bliss is beaming, light and love upon my way,  
From the cross the radiance streaming adds more luster to the day.*

*Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure, by the cross are sanctified;  
Peace is there that knows no measure, joys that through all time abide.*

My practice session of this piece: <https://soundcloud.com/christopher-schroeder-2/in-the-cross-of-christ-i-glory/s-xlPsO>

The second selection for the *Music for Gathering* is titled *Aria* by Flor Peeters. Of this piece, David Gammie writes: The *Aria* dates from the War Years; it originated in 1943 as the slow movement of a Sonata for trumpet and piano, and it is still a permanent fixture on exam

syllabuses for aspiring young trumpeters. Peeters also arranged it for violin, for cello, and for solo organ, and it is in this form that it is most often heard. The expressive melody unfolds above an accompaniment of soft repeated chords – a technique that Peeters used to equally telling effect in the slow movement of his Organ Concerto. As in so much of his finest work, there is a simplicity and sincerity in his music that speaks directly to the heart.

Here is a practice session I had with this piece: <https://soundcloud.com/christopher-schroeder-2/aria-flor-peeters/s-AUCxh>

The Chancel Choir calls us to worship with a composition of mine using text from the Psalm for the day, Psalm 95:

*O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us come into God's presence with thanksgiving.  
Let us make a joyful noise to God with songs of praise!*

The choir's anthem *Like as the Hart Desireth the Waterbrooks* by Herbert Howell is one of four anthems, conceived as anthems *in time of war*, that he composed while in London in January 1941 while the city was being bombed during WWII. This is his most enduring of the four, written in the span of a single day on January 8, 1941. It is a simple but mysteriously foreboding setting of the first three verses of Psalm 42.

Regarding this anthem, Thomas Oram writes: That the score demands a "quiet intensity" is clear from the outset. After a placid introduction played by the organ, the bass voices enter with a remarkably lyrical melodic line, giving the lie to the contention that Howells had no ear for melody. Though the piece is consistently tonal, the composer occasionally colors both harmony and melody with pointed chromaticism, as here. The full chorus then enters, with great effect, on the plea "When shall I come to appear before the presence of God," slowly dying away from a loud peak to a quiet conclusion in E minor. The middle section of the piece follows, with the alto voices taking the solo for "My tears have been my meat"; again, the full chorus dramatically joins in with a louder section. The tenors then take the melody, in counterpoint with the sopranos; gradually the basses and altos are added, and the section ebbs to a close. An organ interlude serves to swell the music into the final section, in which the original bass melody returns, this time against a soprano countermelody. The interplay of the lines is prolonged, accentuating the already-extended nature of the melodic lines. Again the chorus joins together for an impassioned peak, as several parts of the text are recapitulated; then as the organ drops out, the chorus is left to conclude with a protracted cadence, which, in E major, surprisingly gives a hopeful twist to the work. The final chord is sustained for a long time, after which the organ recapitulates the cadence, further prolonging the mood.

At the Offertory, The Chancel Choir will present the anthem *My God is a Rock*. This spiritual, with its slow pace and minor key, conveys the feelings of an oppressed people. It's not just a series of complaints or calls for help. The text conveys many scriptural truths, beginning with the reference to God as a rock. God IS a rock in a weary land; a land that is parched or like desert. It's not at all uncommon for us to say, "He's my rock" to refer to a person in our lives who keeps us on track and is always dependable. God is considered a shade and rest (a shelter in the time of storm). The solo section in the middle is somewhat of a call and response style with the choir responding to what the soloist sings. Each of the "chapters" refer to various Bible stories. Debi Simons writes: Chapter one refers to "when de Lord God's work was jes' begun" at the

beginning of Genesis and chapter ten describes the Second Coming of Christ from the Book of Revelation at the end of the Christian New Testament: “John says He’s comin’ in de world again.” In between those two endpoints the spiritual doesn’t follow any kind of strict chronological order. So chapter three is about the Crucifixion: “When de Lord God died on Calvary.” Then there are several references to Jesus’ work on earth before that: ministering to the poor, healing the sick, raising the dead. Chapter eight has Him standing at the “Golden Gate,” surely referring to Heaven, but then for chapter nine we’re back on earth with the New Testament miracle of Jesus turning the water into wine. I can imagine a group of slaves, probably out in the fields or on some other type of work crew, singing to keep their spirits up and give themselves a work rhythm. One man has a booming voice, and he’s the one who leads out with the chapters. He’s making this up on the fly, so whatever fits as he goes along gets incorporated. Eventually, as with our other folk spirituals, someone wrote it down. This spiritual was arranged by two powerhouses in American choral music: Robert Shaw and Alice Parker.

Following the Benediction, the Choir responds with a *Lenten Benediction*, a new composition of mine with text that invites us to share the love of God with others.

*May the God of love, who shared His love, strengthen us in our love for others.  
May the Son who share His life, grant us grace, that we might share our life.  
And may the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, empower us to be only and always for others. Amen.*

Worship concludes with a Paul Manz arrangement of the popular hymn *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* for *The Music for Parting*. This arrangement was published in a set of hymn arrangements that made Paul Manz a well-respected composer. The arrangement includes a ritornello (recurring musical section) that is heard between the various phrases of the hymn.

Listen to a practice session of mine of this piece: <https://soundcloud.com/christopher-schroeder-2/come-thou-fount-of-every-blessing-manz/s-A5wFD>

Peace and blessings to all.

Christopher Schroeder, 3/11/2020