

Life and Work Sunday

Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs for Life and Work Sunday: August 29 2021

Perhaps it is no coincidence that on the days surrounding this *Life and Work* Sunday, the church at large commemorates saints who accompanied people to faith and upheld them in their faithful lives: the north African Monica (August 27), who nurtured her son through a mis-spent youth to become the great Christian teacher Augustine of Hippo (28th), John the Baptist who pointed his hearers towards life in Christ (29th), John Bunyan (30th) whose writings launched so many on to a pilgrimage of faith, and Aiden, Bishop of Lindisfarne (31st), the monk from Iona responsible for the reawakening of the Christian faith throughout Northumbria. Nurture, mission, support in the Christian life through good communication in various media are also the themes of the songs that follow.

Psalm 40/CH4 31 The sentiments of this psalm have been echoed over and over again in lockdown, as so many have experienced their own versions of the psalmist's miry pit and sinking sands, but also, like the psalmist have found new strength from something read or heard or sung. The melody is by a minister in Caithness in whose parish was the Castle of Mey. He was often invited round when there was to be an evening's entertainment and it is said he taught the Queen Mother the Jeely Piece song. This beautiful tune expresses both the longing and the blessing of the psalm.

Psalm 23/CH4 16 to which people have turned at times both of loss and of celebration. This time, sing it to the tune Brother James's Air. This was James Bain (d.1925), born at Pitlochry, who studied for the ministry in both the Free and Established Church colleges in Edinburgh. He was never ordained but made his ministry the printed word, and this tune appears in one of his books. Healing and wholeness was his focus, and it said that he and his colleagues, working in Liverpool's slum areas, often sang to their patients during healing sessions.

Hymn 782 'Lord of life, we come to you'. Set to the delightful *Eriskay Love Lilt*, this recent hymn also reflects on periods of doubt and toil, and seeks a companion which will 'guide our steps in your way'.

Hymn 600 An alternative to the above might be this simple hymn (set also to a Hebridean melody) which sees the Holy Spirit as our teacher and celebrates 'the written word' through which the Spirit may speak.

Hymn 609 Here is the burning bush through which God communicates with Moses but the hymn acknowledges that our burning bush today could be the 'printed page'. The tune is less well known than it deserves, but there are others. If you sing 'This is a day of new beginnings' to *Canonmills* (526), it will fit here. So does *St Clement* (from

‘The day you give us, Lord, is ended’) but it does not have the surprise element of the other two to match the amazement of Moses.

Three hymns which reflect the Prayer

Hymn 198 ‘Let us build a house’. Marty Haugen’s inspired words are now part of the core body of hymns known in our churches. It celebrates the church but also calls us to be a better, truer church, where the message, the love, the hope of the gospel is expressed in a multiplicity of ways. If your congregation haven’t sung it yet, and you have a choir or singing group, let them (or a soloist) sing the verses and all the people affirm the very simple chorus, ‘All are welcome’.

Hymn 247 ‘Moved by the gospel’. American Presbyterian Ruth Duck explores the way the arts enable the senses to express the gospel but also how our participation in these modes of communication can help us be caught up and carried away by the Good News. The tune is well known through its earlier use for ‘Hosanna, loud hosanna’.

Hymn 710 ‘I have a dream’. Here is a wonderfully comprehensive vision of the world we would like to see, one that stirs in the Gospel as it points to a new Kingdom, but it needs more dreamers to strengthen its approach. The tune *Repton* is now well known.

Three hymns which echo the Reflection

Hymn 692 ‘Jesus puts this song into our hearts’. Graham Kendrick’s hymn sees the church as a family, the ‘something bigger’ which supports its members but also offers to share that experience in a world where so many only know isolation and breakdown.

Hymn 604 ‘Holy wisdom, lamp of learning’ (also by Ruth Duck) affirms the importance of learning more and seeking truth, a task and commitment which leads the church to flourish and to grow. If this tune is not well known, try *Blaenwern* (468), *Hyfrydol* (445), or another 8787D tune.

Hymn 613 ‘Gracious Spirit, hear our pleading’. This very simple Tanzanian song has themes of teaching, being nourished by keeping open to learning, and how this brings a fervency to our witness. If you don’t know this, get someone to sing the verses but encourage the congregation to join in the catchy refrain that they will only need to hear once.

The Rev Dr Douglas Galbraith

A Prayer for Life and Work Sunday

Ever-Present God
You are our life.
You are the One Who, from the chaos of creation
Called us into being,
Shaping who and what we are.
You are the artist and the architect.
You are the poet and the musician.
You bring colour and form, words and harmony
Into the world where we live,
And the lives that we live.
Ever-Active God,
With You we work:
To bring peace and justice,
To bring comfort and blessing
Into the world where we live.
In partnership with You and with others,
We shape and reshape our world
To make it a place where all are welcome,
And all find a place to be safe.
There is life to be lived;
There is work to be done;
For life continues to refresh around us each day,
And work continues to unfold in the vision You give us
And in the dreams we have
For what our world and our communities might yet be.
God of life, God of work,
Blend these twin realities for us,
That in our living and in our working,
We may honour You,
And follow You,
And change this world,
To Your unending glory.
Amen

The Very Rev Dr Derek Browning