2021-03-28 Sanders, The Reproaches

Today’s composition is called “The Reproaches”, and you will soon understand why. John Sanders published *The reproaches* one year before retiring as organist at Gloucester Cathedral, where he also took his turn conducting the Three Choirs Festival, something I hope to hear one day.

The texts are drawn from various night services from Holy Week. These powerful words contrast the good deeds God has done for us, with what the human race did in response. For example, “I led you . . . from slavery to freedom, but you led your Saviour to the cross. I opened the sea before you, but you opened my side with a spear.” “ I gave you saving water from the rock, but you gave me gall and vinegar to drink.”

These are harsh words. And some of the harshness will be heard in this music. Yes, there are soft, gentle passages, but there are also phrases sung so loudly that I become uncomfortable—and that is exactly the point. There will be dissonances, as for the word “people”, dissonances highlighting how badly we have acted.

We will hear two refrains. The first represents, I think, the voice of God, asking those piercing questions, questions which are really reproaches. This refrain will be sung in a restrained manner.

O my people, what have I done to you?

How have I offended you?

Answer me! Answer me!

I imagine the second refrain representing humanity calling to God, I hear it as our crying out for God’s mercy. But first, we confess who God is:

Holy is God! Holy and strong! (and then our prayer)

Holy immortal One, have mercy on us.

The music in this second refrain begins louder than any other, but as we beg for God’s mercy, it is as though we quietly sink to our knees, because all we can do is plead, “have mercy on us.”

2021-03-28 Meditation for Palm Sunday is now available at:  <https://pgimf.org/meditations/>

**The Reproaches**

Music: John Sanders (1933-2003; composed 1993)

Artists: Choir of Clare College, Cambridge, Graham Ross (dir.)

[Refrain]

O my people, what have I done to you?

How have I offended you?

Answer me! Answer me! [Micah 6:3]

[Chant]

I led you out of Egypt, from slavery to freedom,

but you led your Saviour to the cross.

O my people, what have I done to you?

How have I offended you?

Answer me! Answer me!

[Our cry for mercy]

Holy is God! Holy and strong!

Holy immortal One, have mercy on us.

[Chant]

For forty years I led you safely through the desert.

I fed you with manna from heaven,

and brought you to a land of plenty:

but you led your Saviour to the cross.

[Our cry for mercy]

Holy is God! Holy and strong!

Holy immortal One, have mercy on us.

[Chant]

What more could I have done for you?

I planted you as my fairest vine,

but you yielded only bitterness:

When I was thirsty you gave me vinegar to drink,

and you pierced your Saviour’s side with a lance.

[Our cry for mercy]

Holy is God! Holy and strong!

Holy immortal One, have mercy on us.

[Chant]

I opened the sea before you,

but you opened my side with a spear.

I led you on your way in a pillar of cloud,

but you led me to Pilate’s court.

O my people, what have I done to you?

How have I offended you?

Answer me! Answer me!

[Chant]

I bore you up with manna in the desert,

but you struck me down and scourged me.

I gave you saving water from the rock,

but you gave me gall and vinegar to drink.

O my people, what have I done to you?

How have I offended you?

Answer me! Answer me!

[Chant]

I gave you a royal sceptre,

but you gave me a crown of thorns.

I raised you to the height of majesty,

but you have raised me high on a cross.

O my people, what have I done to you?

How have I offended you?

Answer me! Answer me!

Evan

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Although this series of Meditations will conclude on Easter 2021,

past Meditations remain available on our website.