

# Thought for the Day 11-17 January 2021

by Jane Eldred

## Monday 11th

I write this on the cusp of a New Year, when I'm sure none of us will wish



to turn the clock back and revisit the old one. Yet, at least once a week throughout 2020 we have prayed: '*Thy Kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in Heaven*'. Do we feel these prayers were heard? Do we discern when and how God's Kingdom is present, here and now?

Without wishing to deny the fear and heartache that 2020 brought us, if I look back to last year I can think of many

blessings, too:

- The feeling of real fellowship during Zoom services
- Greater appreciation of the natural world around us, emphasised in the Creation season we observed during the autumn
- The support St Andrew's choir have given to me and each other
- The joy of making music together after a long time apart
- The creativity the churches have, by God's grace surely, discovered within themselves when needed – outdoor services and events, scarecrows, Zoom service formats, support networks, etc etc.

These, and many other small manifestations of the dynamism of our spiritual life, show us that if we can only see it, God's Kingdom is with us now, and we can play our part in expanding and deepening it in this world – we don't have to wait until the next! In the choir, we quite often sing musical settings of the words *Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est* (Where charity and love are, there is God). Heaven is where *agape*, God's love, is found.

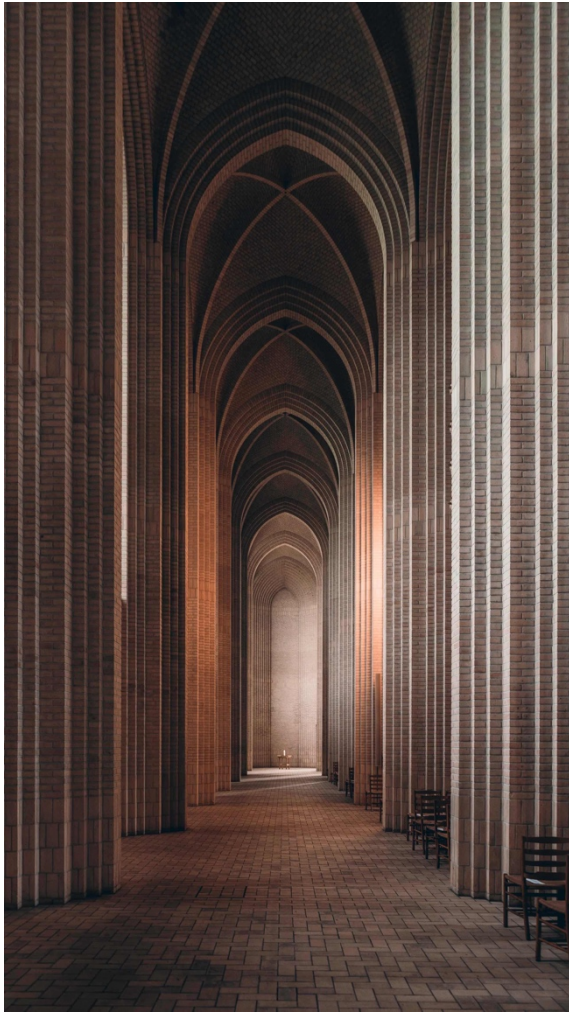
Check out this cool version of Ola Gjeilo's setting!

*Ubi Caritas – Ola Gjeilo sung by Kings Return:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oCQOXY-FWTK>

## Tuesday 12th

I sometimes find myself hoping that when I pass through the Pearly Gates they will be playing Mozart, and wondering whether, if not, I really want to go there!



Music has such power for me that, when listening to music I love, I can easily feel I'm being transported into a heavenly place, and, indeed, into the presence of God. I know many other people feel the same, and for many it's the most direct way to experience a sense of the divine. I do believe that we can be very aware of the Kingdom of God in this world through music. And it's not just Mozart's music that can take us there – I realise that's a matter of taste!

Although we can't actually know what eternal life will be like, we have faith that we will be with God, outside the physical world and time itself. But music is actually human exploitation of a phenomenon of the physical world and takes place within a space of time.

Music travels in sound waves, physical vibrations of the air. And different pitches are related to each other mathematically in a natural phenomenon we call the 'harmonic series'. This, and the natural rhythms of walking etc, have been used to 'organise time' into musical sounds from ancient times in myriad ways, but the results can induce feelings of awe, wonder and joy.

So, aspects of God's physical creation can take us into the realms of his spiritual kingdom – I don't really know how that works, but I know it does. Of course, it is not only people of the Christian faith, or any faith, who have that experience, but Christians can bear witness that just as Jesus, the Word made flesh, can show us God the Father, so music (and the other arts) can show us a glimpse of Heaven.

Here's an arrangement of an African-American spiritual where words and music both bear witness:

*I can tell the world arr. Moses Hogan sung by the Nathaniel Dett Chorale:*  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBwOAwsw\\_JQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IBwOAwsw_JQ)

## Wednesday 13th

Quite a few years ago now, I attended a Taizé service at St Leonard's



Church, Bengo - not a great deal of effort as I live opposite! I was also not in charge, although I took my violin to play, and I think it was the first full service in the style of Taizé which I had attended.

Taizé services are very simple – prayers, readings and the chants, composed at the French monastic community at Taizé,

which hosts international gatherings and has a world-wide ministry. The chants can be sung in many different languages and often use Latin as that is still a language studied worldwide. These chants are repeated, sometimes many times over, as an aid to prayer and meditation. The accompaniments are designed to be varied, often improvised, and using any instruments available at the time.

St Leonard's Church is a very special place – it has probably just had its 900<sup>th</sup> birthday and has a simple interior and is in a peaceful location. Taking part in the service there that evening, I had one of the strongest senses I've experienced of being in God's Kingdom, there and then.

When we can gather together again, I recommend the Taizé-style services which we have begun to use in our own churches. As I write, we have to wait once more for the day when such things can take place in person again – but meanwhile, the fellowship I experienced that evening is still perfectly possible via Zoom. (If you are not sharing a device, a more immersive experience is achieved, I find, using headphones.) Who knew that modern technology could enable God's Kingdom to come!

*Bless the Lord, Taizé:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4Svh-9ohg4&list=FLkCDGpnC7rw3TZIXqIqmjcg&index=28>

## Thursday 14th

Jesus said: *The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field that someone has found; they hide it again, and in their joy sell everything they have and buy that field.*

(Matthew 13, 44-46)



Looking back over the last 10 months or so, I find there are many times when I have been able to glimpse the treasure of the kingdom of heaven, despite it being buried beneath the pain of a pandemic.

The Holy Spirit as a creative force has enabled an array of ideas to surface.

Within church life I might think of: the development of online services; finding solutions to the question of how to provide carol services; the many uplifting sermons by our clergy and lay Team, which one can re-read online; and the scarecrow Nativity. I'm sure you can think of many other instances.

For a creative response from another Christian organisation, see the Taizé community website, which is publishing a 'Daily Prayer live from Taizé'. This is actually a half-hour service of prayer and chants, and you can listen to the chants or look at the music before you play the recording, and join in.

[https://www.taize.fr/en\\_article28227.html](https://www.taize.fr/en_article28227.html)

The Bible quotation above was their daily reading for Epiphany, 6 January. Jesus tells us that if we find the treasure that is the Kingdom of Heaven, we should make it our principal object in life to keep hold of it. May we discern how God is bringing his kingdom into our lives, and seek to keep it always.

*In the Lord I'll be ever thankful, Taizé:*

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yzr60p57h8&list=RD1Yzr60p57h8&start\\_radio=1&t=18](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1Yzr60p57h8&list=RD1Yzr60p57h8&start_radio=1&t=18)

## Friday 15th

### Music and words



I have written this week about the power of music in bringing us closer to God, but we must not forget its power can be harnessed in much darker ways. Almost always, this can happen when it is harnessed to words.

A march tune does not really of itself induce a desire to fight, just to march (think of Liberty Bell, The Monty Python theme tune!). But add aggressive, partisan lyrics and it can be a very different matter. Listening to loud, relentless 'drill' music with violent lyrics can incite alienated young people to violent behaviour. The English composers Elgar and Holst both had splendid tunes hijacked by jingoistic words which did not reflect the purposes for which they were written (*Land of hope and Glory, I vow to thee my country*).

Austrian composer Haydn adapted the attached beautiful tune as a suggestion for a national anthem; it was corrupted dreadfully 150 years later by the Nazis who added sickening words about Aryan supremacy. The tune is called 'Austria' in the hymn book and can be used for the words 'Praise the Lord, ye heavens adore him' and 'Glorious things of thee are spoken'. The latter hymn by John Newton (who wrote Amazing Grace) is an evocation of a Kingdom where God is the lawgiver and peace and grace reign - the kingdom of heaven (Isaiah 33, 20-21); a much better use of a great tune!

Personally, I feel close to God listening to the version by Haydn for string quartet without any words at all – so much so that we had it at the signing of the register at our wedding! I hope it has a similar effect on other listeners.

*Haydn 'Emperor' string quartet, 2<sup>nd</sup> movement:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tHc9xWhFH4>

## Saturday 16th

### The power of words

*Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs.*

(Ephesians 4, 29)



I'm writing this the morning after watching a particularly shocking edition of the Ten O'Clock News. In Washington, supporters of Donald Trump were invading the Capitol, the seat of American democracy. And in Britain the COVID statistics were horrifying; the BBC's correspondent Fergus Walsh was reporting from University College Hospital as they struggled desperately to cope with the numbers needing their care. I wonder what the situation will be just over a week later when you read this.

As Christians, we need to be so aware of the words we speak, write and post on social media. As the saying goes, 'A lie can travel halfway round the world while the truth is pulling on its boots'. This saying goes back several hundred years in different forms but today it is frighteningly accurate. Some of the Trump supporters stated that they were acting in Jesus' name – and they believe it. We must not be taken in as they have been by conspiracy theories and lies which can travel round the world in a split second. Some of these relate to COVID and vaccines.

In contrast, although I really didn't want to hear Fergus Walsh's words, I needed not to turn away because they were the truth. We must always weigh up and test what we are being told, and what we say, against the teachings of Jesus, who said, 'By your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned'. And we must always guard against saying/hearing only what we want to believe, but rather speak up against untruth.

*If anyone considers himself religious and yet does not keep a tight rein on his tongue, he deceives himself and his religion is worthless.*

(James 1. 26)

*Let the words of my mouth – Fernando Ortega:*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qr8QoQKmXfk>

## Sunday 17th



Thinking about what might be called the spiritual qualities of music this week, I have been drawn to the music of Estonian composer Arvo Pärt.

Now aged 85, Arvo Pärt started writing music in the 1950s when Estonia was part of the USSR. At that time, he experimented with the very dissonant styles of classical music composition

which other composers were using, and his more avant-garde efforts were met with disapproval by the Soviet regime.

Many autocratic governments try to control the output of their artists, and with Stalin this extended to music even if no words were involved. Pärt found the avant-garde a musical cul-de-sac anyway, and stopped composing for some years. Instead of writing, he studied very old music including plainchant (such as we think of monks and nuns singing) and developed a completely individual, much simpler and very harmonious style.

Meanwhile, he was developing his Christian faith and he became a member of the Eastern Orthodox Church in 1972. Reflecting its traditions, his music in the new style has a strongly mystical quality. Following the publication of his *Credo (I believe)* in 1968, he was harassed by the Soviet authorities and could not get his works performed; after eventually being allowed to emigrate in 1980, he lived in exile for about 20 years.

Once his music could be heard, its beautiful simplicity and expression of his faith appealed to very many people and he became more popular even than Star Wars composer John Williams! Here is a setting in English of the Beatitudes (from Matthew 5). It starts: *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.* Take a little time to feel a sense of that kingdom through Pärt's music.

*The Beatitudes:* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxbarDRcVb4>