You Are Worth More Than Many Sparrows

for double choir and organ
One of the most devastating effects of sexual abuse is that it is so often characterised by betrayal. For those who have experienced it in a church context, the betrayal is compounded with hypocrisy. What has been done to them in secret is so completely at odds with what others see that victims become silenced by fear and shame. Many carry the secret burden of a guilt that is not theirs for years or decades. The church has not always responded well, institutionally or individually, to those who find the courage to speak about what happened to them. Their stories have sometimes been disbelieved, their experiences minimised, their complicity assumed or insinuated, their needs given less consideration than the status of those responsible for the abuse. For some, this second betrayal is at least as devastating as the first. What links the two experiences is that in combination they often reinforce the sense of worthlessness from which many survivors suffer.

The gospels suggest a very different response. In Matthew 10 and Luke 11-12 Jesus addresses the evils of betrayal and hypocrisy directly. Both passages record his insistence that all wrongdoing will be exposed, his encouragement not to fear those who can harm the body but not the soul, and his analogy of the sparrows, which, though they are sold for very little, are not beyond God’s care. ‘So do not fear,’ he concludes; ‘you are worth more than many sparrows’ (Matthew 10.31; Luke 12.7).

What if the church honoured these words? What would it be like for survivors of abuse if they were met by a church whose responses were in keeping with this statement? What transformations might then be possible? What might the church recognise in survivors’ stories if it could see them through the lens that Jesus holds up in this verse?

This piece is a musical attempt to envisage such an encounter. It is based on two songs of the white-throated sparrow (Zonotrichia albicollis) and one verse of J. M. Neale’s translation of the hymn Aeterna Christi munera attributed to St Ambrose (c. 340–97). It might be best not to think of it as a piece of music at all. Imagine instead a forest, an unbuilt space, a place where those who have been exiled by fear and shame can be met with humility and respect, where their voices are not silenced, and where their songs remind us of other songs we have long known.

The composer was a victim of sexual abuse in a church context, and of hostile responses by the church when the abuse was disclosed. The piece is dedicated to all who have suffered similar things, and to those who love and support them.

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You Are Worth More Than Many Sparrows

David Creese

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la - la-la, la - la-la
Ah,

la - la-la, la - la-la, la - la-la
Ah, la - la-la, la - la-la, la - la-la, la - la-la, la - la-la
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la
Ah, ______
la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la
la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la
Ah, la-lala, la-lala

Ah, la-lala, la-lala

Ah,
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la

la-la-la, la-la-la

Solo

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la,
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la,
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la,
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la,
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

la-la-la

Ah, SOLO

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

(No Ped.)
Ah, la- la-la, la-la-la

Ah, la- la-la, la-la-la

Ah, la- la-la, la-la-la

Solo

Ah,____
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

Ah, FULL

Ah,
Ah, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala,
Ah, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala,
Ah, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala, la-lala,
Ah, la-la-la
Ah, la-la-la
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la
la-la-la, la-la-la  Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la,

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, oh

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, oh

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la
"Ah,"

"Ah-la-la, oh"

"La-la-la, oh"

(No Ped.)
la-lala, la-lala, oh

Ah, la-lala, la-lala,

Oh

Ah, la-lala, la-lala, oh

Ah, la-lala, la-lala, oh

Oh

Ah, la-lala,
Ah, la-lala, la-lala, oh

Ah, la-lala,

Ah, la-lala, la-lala

Ah, la-lala, oh

Oh
"mf"

Ah,

la - la-la,

la - la-la, oh_

Oh_

la - la-la, la - la-la

mp

Oh_

mf

Ah,___

la - la-la, la - la-la

mp

Oh_

-

Oh_

-
Ah, rests.  

mf 

noteheads.s1  

mf 

noteheads.s2  

dots.dot  

la  

la  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

noteheads.s1  

mf 

noteheads.s1  

mf 

noteheads.s1  

mf 

noteheads.s1  

mf 

noteheads.s1 

mf  

noteheads.s2 

la 

la,  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

notes.s2  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

noteheads.s2  

la  

la  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

noteheads.s2  

la  

la  

dots.dot  

notes.s2  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

notes.s2  

mf  

noteheads.s2  

la  

la  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot 

noteheads.s2  

la  

la  

dots.dot 

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

notes.s2  

la  

la  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

notes.s2  

la  

la  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

notes.s2  

la  

la  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

notes.s2  

la  

la  

dots.dot  

dots.dot  

notes.s2  

mf 

noteheads.s2  

mf  

notes.s2  

mf 

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noteheads.s2 

mf
'Twas thus the yearning

la - la-la, la - la-la, oh

la - la-la

Oh

Solo
faith of saints,  

Ah, la la-la, la la-la  

faith of saints,  

The un-

The un-

The un-

faith of saints,
con-quered hope that ne-ver faints,

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la,

con-quered hope that ne-ver faints,

con-quered hope that ne-ver faints,

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la

Oh

con-quered hope that ne-ver faints,
The love of Christ that knows not shame,

la - la-la

The love of Christ that knows not shame,

The love of Christ that knows not shame,

The love of Christ that knows not shame,

Ah,

Ah,

Ah,

Oh

Oh
Oh

la-la-la, la-la-la

The prince of this world

The prince of this world

Oh

la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-la

The prince of this world

The prince of this world

The prince of this world

Oh
Overcame.

Solo

Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la, la-la-

Overcame.

Solo

Ah,___

Overcame.

Solo

Ah,_____

Overcame.

Sw.
119

Solo

mf

Ah,

la la la, la la la, la la la

la la la, la la la, la la la

dim. poco a poco

No Ped.
Ah, la-lala, la-lala

Ah, la-lala, la-lala
la-la-la, la-la-la
Ah, la-la-la, la-la-la

Diocese of Newcastle, 15 June 2021