

Music Notes for March 3, 2024

The service music during Lent includes the Presentation Hymn (“What shall I render unto you, O God”, listen [here](#)), the Sanctus by David Hurd, one of the preeminent Black composers of the Episcopal Church (listen [here](#)), and the Fraction Anthem (“Christ our Passover, listen [here](#)). The Psalms during Lent will be sung using simple congregational antiphons, mostly composed by me, with verses sung by the choir to traditional plainsong chants. The psalms will be sung *a capella*, with a sample bell accompaniment to give the pitches.

The service today opens with the Decalogue, a recitation of the Ten Commandments. The inclusion of the Decalogue in the Prayer Book began in 1552. After praying the Lord’s Prayer and the Collect for Purity, the priest would stand and turn to the congregation, reading each commandment, and the people responding “*Lord, have mercye upon us, and encline our heartes to kepe this lawe.*” The Decalogue was a required part of the liturgy at one time, though in our current Prayer Book designates it as an optional part of the Eucharist. We are including it again this year to emphasize the penitential nature of the season of Lent. A cantor chants the commandments, and the congregation responds with the sung response, “Amen. Lord have mercy” to a setting from Healy Willan’s *Missa de Sancta Maria Magdalena* (listen [here](#)).

The sequence hymn today is “God, the sculptor of the mountains,” containing themes based on the words of today’s Gospel lesson. The hymn is a relatively new one with the text written in 1994. The words are paired with a wonderful tune by Gerre Hancock, who was the Organist and Choirmaster of St. Thomas Episcopal Church on 5th Avenue in New York City from 1971 – 2004. Trivia note: early in his career, Hancock was the music director of Christ Church in Cincinnati (before it was a cathedral), now the seat of the Diocese of Southern Ohio.

Today’s anthem is “Come, Ye Sinners, Poor and Needy,” a setting of the shape-note hymn tune, “Restoration.” The tune was first published in 1844 and uses the pentatonic scale. This makes it especially suitable to be sung in canon, one of the features of the arrangement in today’s anthem.

The music during communion during Lent will be Taizé-style chants. Today’s is “*Bless the Lord, my soul.*” This chant was written by Jacques Berthier, who was the organist at St. Ignace Church in Paris from 1961 until his death in 1994. Berthier is best known, of course, for his extensive output of service music for the Taizé community near Cluny, Burgundy.

The closing hymn is “Christ is Made the Sure Foundation.” This hymn comes from a Latin text from the 6th or 7th century, A.D., and was translated by John M. Neale, one of the most prolific hymn translators of the 19th century. Neale was sickly for most of his life and was derided or ignored by many of his contemporaries. His translations are lauded today as outstanding contributions to the Church and hymnody in general. The tune, “Westminster Abbey,” was composed by Henry Purcell. He is regarded as perhaps the greatest English composer who ever lived, though he only lived to the age of 36.

The prelude and postlude today are both short pieces originally written for harmonium (reed organ) by Sigfrid Karg-Elert (1877-1933). Karg-Elert spent much of his youth in Leipzig, the city best known as the long-time home of J.S. Bach. His last name was originally "Karg," but he added a variant of his mother's maiden name "Ehlert" as a tribute to the influence of both his parents on his life's work. The reed organ is not much in use today, being usually thought of as a musical instrument for a country church not able to afford or big enough to house a pipe organ. Nevertheless, Karg-Elert gave weekly radio recitals on the harmonium beginning in 1924. The pieces adapt well to the piano, which is how we will hear them today.