**St Andrew’s on The Terrace Sunday 16 July 2017 Pentecost 6 Where is God on your playlist?**

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| God gets referred to a lot outside of church. Frequently that is in music played over the airwaves and from playlists. Popular songs were in the bible first, with David and other singer songwriters of his time, that is, approximately, the psalmist playing his harp more than a thousand years before Jesus. The psalms are Hebrew poetry. They were usually sung to simple stringed instruments such as harps or lyres. David had some skill – his moody predecessor King Saul used to ask him to play when he was feeling depressed and the music helped Saul feel better. We often use music to help us feel better. There is something in music which touches the heart and soothes the soul when it is at its most harmonious, melodic or reflective. It is a spiritual, sacred activity whether or not we overtly name it as such. We can escape into music, and find there a happy place to be, or a place which comforts our sorrow. Something deep within shifts when we add the right music to the mix.Sometimes God is actually named in music, sometimes not. It is intriguing to see what a few singer songwriters have done with sacred over recent years as well as long ago.We used the tune praise my soul for the first hymn. The original words of ‘Praise my soul the King of heaven’ were written around 1869, as was the music, especially composed for the words. The image of God in the original words is of an almighty King being praised for the world around the writer and being praised by the writer for existing for much longer than we mere humans.Around the 1960s, though John Lennon’s statement shocked many Christians, it was true that the Beatles became more famous than Jesus Christ for many teenagers. John Lennon continued his irreverent bent in the song ‘Imagine’ which he and Yoko wrote in 1971, though his song is only dismissive of religion because he saw it as a divisive force which along with other factors in the 1960s’ world caused wars. His yearning here is for peace ‘so the world can live as one’. I wonder what he would think of today’s terrorist phenomenon were he still alive.‘Imagine’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XLgYAHHkPFs> Certainly religion and our own Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand has not been kind to those different from the so called ‘norm’ of white and heterosexual and male. First women were excluded from leadership till 1955. Maori ministry training has followed a much less well funded route. And, in recent years, as this church well knows, gay and lesbian Presbyterians have been excluded from ministry selection and training. How long can our church can keep up this stance after a conservative government has apologised to those damaged by the criminalising of homosexuality? The Minister of Justice, Amy Adams, in Parliament the week before last, moved… That this House apologise to those homosexual New Zealanders who were convicted for consensual adult activity, and recognise the tremendous hurt and suffering those men and their families have gone through, and the continued effects the convictions have had on them*.**Today we are putting on the record that this House deeply regrets the hurt and stigma suffered by the many hundreds of New Zealand men who were turned into criminals by a law that was profoundly wrong, and for that we are sorry. We are acknowledging that these men should never have been burdened with criminal convictions, and we are recognising the continued effects that the convictions have had on their lives and the lives of their families. New Zealand has a proud reputation for fairness, freedom, and diversity. It is unimaginable today that we would criminalise consensual sexual activity between adults. Almost 4 years ago this Parliament passed the Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act 2013 to allow same-sex couples to legally marry, and I was proud to vote in favour of it.**Today is another historic day for the New Zealand gay community and their families as Parliament formally apologises for the hurt caused by the convictions and takes the first reading of a bill to expunge those convictions. It is never too late to apologise. While we cannot ever erase the injustice, this apology is a symbolic but an important act that we hope will help address the harm and right this historic wrong. The Homosexual Law Reform Act 1986 decriminalised sexual conduct between consenting males aged 16 and older. The right to be free from discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation was later recognised in the Human Rights Act 1993. However, convictions for those offences remain on record. This means that they can appear in criminal history checks, and those New Zealanders continue to be tainted with the stigma that such convictions carry.**This bill seeks to address the ongoing stigma, prejudice, and other negative effects arising from a conviction for a historical homosexual offence by creating a statutory scheme for a convicted person, or a representative on their behalf if that person is deceased, to apply for the conviction to be expunged. This is the first expungement scheme ever to be created in New Zealand, reflecting the uniqueness of the situation. I cannot think of any other situation where a Government in this country would seek to rewrite criminal histories based on changes in societal views.**It is clear that the laws under which the men affected were convicted have not represented the views of most New Zealanders for many years, and it is right that we now formally recognise that. While it is impossible to know the exact numbers, it is estimated that around 1,000 people may be eligible to apply under the scheme. This is based on analysis of conviction data published by the then Department of Statistics on people convicted of indecency between males, which was the most common offence prosecuted between 1965 and 1986.*Yet we still need Pink Shirt days to combat bullying in schools often over issues of sexual identity and Vicky Beeching, well known in evangelical music circles in England and Nashville had to take all her courage in her hands at the age of 30 as she came out to a critical Christian community. Keeping her secret was beginning to cost her her health, as you will see if you follow some of the links in the order of service. Vicky Beeching <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i_U8T-vY6hU> Vicky is speaking up so other younger 13 year olds who know they are gay know they are not alone. That is our message also, whoever you are, whatever your secret, you are not alone. You are welcome here.Another group has used music over the past few centuries to ease their oppression. Music was vital to black African American morale in time of slavery. Imagining a way out of their situation was often the text of their Black Gospel songs. This Gospel hymn written first in 1905 then arranged for the soundtrack of Sister Act 2 in 1993 reflects a deep need to be looked after – the words remind us of the passage in Matthew 10 which Maxine will read to us now.Matthew 10:26-31 *26 “So do not be afraid of them, for there is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. 27 What I tell you in the dark, speak in the daylight; what is whispered in your ear, proclaim from the roofs. 28 Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul… 29 Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground outside of God’s care. 30 And even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31 So don’t be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows.*‘His eye is on the sparrow’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7Pk5YMkEcg&list=RDk7Pk5YMkEcg#t=0>Another ancient word has been recycled in recent popular music. The word ‘Hallelujah’ was often used in those ancient psalms in the Bible. Split up into its parts it is ‘Halle’ (praise) ‘u’ (you) ‘Jah’ (Yahweh) – ‘praise you God.’ It’s related to the sound you may have heard on television from the middle east when women in particular are excited and happy and make a trilling sound with their teeth tongue and lips. ‘l-l-l-l-l-l-l-l’. Leonard Cohen actually wrote ‘Hallelujah’ in 1984 though it has become more popular recently. The original lyrics are centred round the story of David and Bathsheba, though there is a touch of the Samson and Delilah in the third verse. Here’s the original story – one which does not rebound to the credit of the mighty King David.**2 Samuel 11:1-13 David and Bathsheba*****11****In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king’s men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.* ***2****One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace.* *From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful,****3****and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, “She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah  the Hittite.”****4****Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept  with her. (Now she was purifying herself in her monthly ritual) Then she went back home.****5****The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, “I am pregnant.”* ***6****So David sent this word to Joab: “Send me Uriah the Hittite.” And Joab sent him to David.****7****When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going.****8****Then David said to Uriah, “Go down to your house and wash your feet.” So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him.****9****But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master’s servants and did not go down to his house.****10****David was told, “Uriah did not go home.” So he asked Uriah, “Haven’t you just come from a military campaign? Why didn’t you go home?”* ***11****Uriah said to David, “The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents,[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=2+Samuel+11%3A+1-13%3B+Matthew+10%3A+26-31&version=NIV&interface=print#fen-NIV-8271a)*] and my commander Joab and my lord’s men are camped in the open country. How* *could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!”* ***12****Then David said to him, “Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back.” So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next.****13****At David’s invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master’s servants; he did not go home.*‘Hallelujah’ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YrLk4vdY28Q> The hymns we sing in church have developed a bad reputation as boring and straight-laced, but they are music too and they take their place in a long line of musicians wanting to express through words combined with music their deepest longings and their heart felt emotions, their doubt and anguish. What does music do for you? How is your soul soothed or stirred up by it? Whether or not God is mentioned by name in the songs you listen to, much of that music is itself weaving a sacred spell in all our lives unaware.From John Lennon to Vicky Beeching, from CD Martin and Lauryn Hill to Leonard Cohen, we can be thankful music is available for us to employ for protest, to call for justice, to pray, to mourn, to grieve and to celebrate, to sing out our need for companionship, human and divine. So may it continueAs we make our offerings today, let us give thanks for music as well as all the physical goods we have been given. As the offerings are received let’s sing the hymn we learned last week, a hymn which uses Jesus’ words from the Gospels. Let’s use music now to remind us to love our neighbour as we love ourselves. There is music on the insert in your order of service. We’ll repeat the last verse if we need to,Susan Jones 027 321 4870 04 909 9612 minister@standrews.org.nz |
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