

Mother's Day

14 May 2023

[As the hymns are integral to the message, today, they are included and many of them can be listened to on YouTube]

The song we are about to sing was written by English children's author, playwright, poet and broadcaster **Eleanor Farjeon** and set to a folk tune from the village of Bunessan on the isle of Mull in Scotland.

Eleanor is one of seven female hymn writers that we'll be meeting this morning.



PROCESSIONAL SONG

TiS 156 Morning has broken

Morning has broken
like the first morning;
blackbird has spoken
like the first bird.

Praise for the singing,
praise for the morning,
praise for them springing
fresh from the word.

Sweet the rain's new fall
sunlit from heaven,
like the first dewfall
on the first grass.

Praise for the sweetness
of the wet garden,
sprung from completeness
where his feet pass.

Mine is the sunlight;
mine is the morning
born of the one light
Eden saw play.

Praise with elation,

praise every morning,
God's recreation
of the new day.

Eleanor Farjeon 1881–1965. By permission Oxford University Press.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

From before recorded time, the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation have cared for this land that we meet on today.

We acknowledge their Elders and their communities who have told the sacred stories and nurtured faithfulness to the Creator. We pay our respects to the Elders who have gone before, all who carry the stories today, and those who are emerging.

We ask God's blessing on all those who continue to work for healing and justice for this land and its people.

WELCOME

to those gathered here at Croydon North as well as folks at Croydon and at home watching on Zoom

Today we remember Mother's Day ... an opportunity to remember and give thanks for our mothers but also other significant people in our lives who have nurtured and encouraged us.

As a way of honouring these people – who were often women – we will be singing hymns today that were all written by women and will be hearing some of their stories.

HYMN of praise

TiS 135 All things bright and beautiful (original verses)

Kathryn to introduce **Cecil Frances Alexander** ...

*All things bright and beautiful,
all creatures great and small,
all things wise and wonderful,
the Lord God made them all.*

Each little flower that opens,
each little bird that sings,



God made their glowing colours,
and made their tiny wings.

Refrain

All things bright and beautiful
The purple-headed mountain,
the river running by,
the sunset and the morning
that brightens up the sky.

Refrain

The cold wind in the winter,
the pleasant summer sun,
the ripe fruits in the garden,
God made them every one.

Refrain

God gave us eyes to see them,
and lips that we might tell
how great is God Almighty
who has made all things well.

Refrain

Words Cecil Frances Alexander 1818–95. Music William Monk 1823–89.

INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

Today we are remembering women and their many gifts ... which seems an appropriate thing to do on Mother's Day.

We've already been introduced to two women hymn writers and we're going to meet several more during the service.

The earliest woman hymn writer mentioned in the Bible is of course ... **Miriam** ... the sister of Moses who wrote the song recorded in Exodus chapter 15.

While history has lost or ignored many women's names and their deeds, we might recall several saints known for writing sacred songs and hymns ... people like **Kassiani** of Constantinople, **Hildegard**



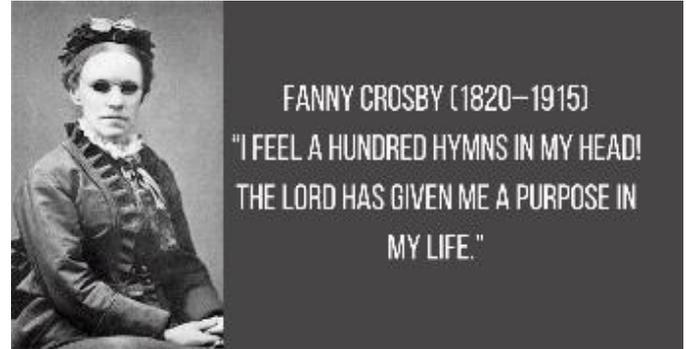
of Bingen, **St Teresa** of Avila.

It was from the 19th century onwards that women started to be recognised as hymn writers, although even then, many were forced to publish their work under pseudonyms.

The next writer we are going to hear about is credited with writing over 8000 hymns, sometimes as many as 6 or 7 a day, and usually by memory ...

Liz to introduce **Fanny Crosby** ...

Frances Jane van Alstyne (1820 – 1915), more commonly known as **Fanny J. Crosby**, was an American mission worker, poet, lyricist, and



composer. As Peter said, she was a prolific hymnist with more than 100 million copies printed and 4 books of poetry. She is also known for her teaching and her support of gospel revivals, writing many songs that were credited with their success. By the end of the 19th century, she was a household name and she was the first woman to speak in the United States Senate when she recited one of her poems there. In later life she worked tirelessly for 30 years amongst the poor in New York.

She achieved all this while blind from near birth. Of all the hymns she wrote Australians would probably be most familiar with *Blessed Assurance*, used at the Billy Graham crusades, and the one we will sing now:

[TiS 147 To God be the glory](#)

To God be the glory, great things he has done!
So loved he the world that he gave us his Son,
who yielded his life in atonement for sin
and opened the life-gate that we may go in.

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the earth hear his voice!

Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!

Let the people rejoice!

*O come to the Father, through Jesus the Son,
and give him the glory, great things he has done!*

Great things he has taught us, great things he has done,
and great our rejoicing through Jesus the Son;
but purer and higher and greater will be
our wonder, our rapture, when Jesus we see.

Refrain

Frances Jane van Alstyne (aka Fanny Crosby) 1820–1915 *alt.*

BIBLE READINGS

John 16:16-22

Jesus went on to say, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.’ At this, some of his disciples said to one another, ‘What does he mean by saying, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,” and “Because I am going to the Father”?’ ...

Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, ‘Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. So with you: now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.

Acts 9:36-41

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became ill and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. When the disciples heard that Peter was staying nearby, they sent two men to him and urged him, ‘Please come at once!’

Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood round him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning towards the dead woman, he said, 'Tabitha, get up.' She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive.

MESSAGE

I am not a mother and haven't directly experienced either the pain or the joy of bringing a new life into the world. But that intense and life changing experience is about to happen to the disciples in today's reading from John's Gospel.

Jesus is about to be taken away from them – through his arrest, trials and death on the cross. The disciples are about to be thrown into a world of intense pain and confusion – much like a woman going in labour. They will weep and mourn and grieve, while the rest of the world rejoices. They will feel like everyone else has gone off to celebrate, leaving them alone and in severe pain – like a mother in labour.



Luckily, hospital and birthing patterns have changed over the decades. I'm told the story that when my mother went into labour with me, she was left alone in a room for hours with a midwife coming to check she was okay only occasionally. And of course my father was not permitted to be around to support her.

The goal of birthing labour is to bring a new child, a new life, into the world. Then there is joy, a deep joy that a woman feels at the safe arrival of this precious new person. Birth doesn't always turn out this way, unfortunately, but that is the goal.

And that is how it will be for Jesus' disciples. After the shock and brutality of Jesus' death, they will indeed mourn and grieve, but then they will see Jesus alive again – pointing to the resurrection – and their pain will



turn to joy.

We've recently had a new addition to our family, our granddaughter Georgina. The labour for new Mum Helen was long and painful, but there was joy in the end.

And the joy spreads. Here is my Mum holding her great granddaughter –the beaming smile says it all.



So on this Mother's Day, we give thanks for our own mothers and for the pain – and the joy – that they endured for us.

I wonder how life will turn out for little Georgina. Aspects of her life will undoubtedly be hard, yet my prayer is that girls like her will not face the prejudice and discrimination that many women have faced throughout history ... whose worth was often limited to having babies – and baby boys please! – and working in the kitchen.

Because of this prejudice – which flowed through into the life of a mostly male controlled church – women's gifts and achievements were often ignored or oppressed. The lives of some women are remembered in Scripture, but it has taken the rise of feminist scholars to highlight their rightful place in the story.

It's time to sing again, this time a hymn from a contemporary American hymn writer whose hymns we sing regularly.

Her name is **Carolyn Winfrey Gillette** and she is a Presbyterian pastor and a prolific hymn writer. Born in 1961 in Virginia, she studied at Princeton Theological Seminary and became a Minister in the Presbyterian Church, no mean feat in a fairly conservative denomination. She has also served as a hospital chaplain,



a hospice chaplain and a school aide helping children with special needs.

Her hymns are easy to sing as they are usually set to well-known existing tunes. They are often based on the weekly Bible readings in the Lectionary although several of her hymns respond to significant events such as 9-11 or mass shootings in schools. Such hymns help us express our deepest feelings and pains.

Let's stand as we sing a hymn by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette ...

God of the women who answered your call.

HYMN God of the women (5 verses to tune Slane)

God of the women who answered your call,
Trusting your promises, giving their all,
Women like Sarah and Hannah and Ruth —
Give us their courage to live in your truth.

God of the women who walked Jesus' Way,
Giving their resources, learning to pray,
Mary, Joanna, Susanna, and more —
May we give freely as they did before.

God of the women long put to the test,
Left out of stories, forgotten, oppressed,
Quietly asking: "Who smiled at my birth?" —
In Jesus' dying you show us our worth.

God of the women who ran from the tomb,
Prayed with the others in that upper room,
Then felt your Spirit on Pentecost Day —
May we so gladly proclaim you today.

O God of Phoebe and ministers all,
May we be joyful in answering your call.
Give us the strength of your Spirit so near
That we may share in your ministry here.

Jesus saw the world differently to most of his contemporaries.

Given his claims in the Gospel of John to be one with the Father, we may conclude that Jesus' attitudes to people reflect the heart of God.

So Jesus saw women – and children – and non-Jewish people – as equally deserving of God's love as Jewish men.

He healed and restored women and girls.

He had women as disciples. These women disciples were sometimes way more perceptive than the men ... especially in the time leading up to Jesus' passion and death ... and then at his resurrection, the first people there were the women.

The apostle Paul also noted the change in status of women ... following the example of Jesus, if everyone was equal before God and everyone was of value, then followers of Jesus were not to make distinctions between *women and men, between Jew and Greek, between slave and free (Gal 3:28)*.

Luke, the writer of the book of Acts, may have focused on the exploits of Peter and Paul, but also gave us the stories of significant women such as Dorcas – pictured in this stain-glass window here at Croydon North who sewed clothes for the poor... and also the story of Lydia, a rich woman who provided hospitality and leadership to the church in Philippi.

Although the church has often been slow to embrace the vision of Jesus towards women, the Uniting Church has attempted to be inclusive, ordaining women as Ministers since its beginning in 1977, entering a covenant with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Christians in 1985, accepting gay and lesbian Ministers from the late 1990s and becoming a multicultural church in the 2000s.

In church music, there has also been a gradual shift towards accepting and celebrating the gifts of women hymn writers, as we are doing today. But it's a long journey, with over 90% of the hymns in our hymn book, *Together in*



Song, written by men.

It's time now, though, to introduce another amazing hymn writer from NZ, **Shirley Erena Murray** ... who will be introduced by Sue.

Shirley Murray was born in 1931 in Invercargill on the southern tip of the south island of NZ. Raised in the Methodist church, she worked as a language teacher, researcher, radio producer and hymn writer.



She married a Presbyterian Minister and starting writing occasional hymns to accompany his sermons. The impetus that transformed her into a prolific author with a distinctive voice was a desire to express Christian faith in a contemporary way and from her distinctively New Zealand experience. With her husband she helped publish the New Zealand hymn book *Alleluia Aotearoa* in 1993.

Her many hymns address themes ranging from the seasons of the Church year to human rights, care of creation, women's concerns and above all, peace and justice. Her work has appeared in more than 200 different hymn books and other collections worldwide and been translated into several languages.

Today we will sing **A place at the table** ... a hymn that emphasizes that everyone has a place at God's table.

For everyone born, a place at the table,
for everyone born, clean water and bread,
a shelter, a space, a safe place for growing,
for everyone born, a star overhead,

*And God will delight when we are creators of
justice and joy, compassion and peace:
yes, God will delight when we are creators of
justice, justice and joy!*

For woman and man, a place at the table,
revising the roles, deciding the share,
with wisdom and grace, dividing the power,
for woman and man, a system that's fair.

Refrain

For those we neglect, a place at the table,
a voice to be heard, a part in the song,
the hands of a child in hands that are wrinkled,
for those we neglect, the right to belong.

Refrain

For all who have breath, a place at the table,
a covenant shared, a welcoming space,
a rainbow of race and gender and colour,
for all who have breath, the chalice of grace.

Refrain

For everyone born, a place at the table,
to live without fear, and simply to be,
to work, to speak out, to witness and worship,
for everyone born, the right to be free.

Refrain

Words Shirley Erena Murray (1931–2020) © 1998 Hope Publishing Co. Used by permission.

We pray together now a version of the Lord's Prayer from the New Zealand Anglican Prayer Book ...

**Eternal Spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver,
Source of all that is and that shall be,
Father and Mother of us all,
Loving God, in whom is heaven:**

May the hallowing of your name echo through the universe!

May the way of your justice be followed by the peoples of the world!

May your heavenly will be done by all created beings!

**May your commonwealth of peace and freedom sustain our hope and come
on earth.**

With the bread we need for today, feed us.

In the hurts we absorb from one another, forgive us.

In times of temptation and test, strengthen us.

From trials too great to endure, spare us.

From the grip of all that is evil, free us.

For you reign in the glory of the power that is love, now and for ever.

Amen.

SENDING SONG

We stand in thanks before you (3 verses to tune Thornbury)

Introduced by the writer **Jean Hill!**

We stand in thanks before you;
our God we give you praise
for mercies never ceasing
that brought us to this day.
For those who've gone before us,
whose vision led the way,
we lift our hearts, rejoicing,
remembering them today.

Lord, help us carry forward
their hope from long ago;
here be your faithful people
your loving grace to show.
The message of the Gospel
to tell out loud and clear,
the cross our inspiration
as year succeeds to year.

In bread and wine and water,
acknowledging God's grace,
this 'Church upon the Highway'
has yet a human face.
O, Holy Spirit, fill us,
and strengthen us today
to spread throughout this neighbourhood
your light, your truth, your way.

Words Jean Hill.

Kay to introduce ...**Elizabeth Joyce Smith**

Elizabeth was born in Stawell in 1956 and attended secondary school in Euroa where her mother, Valerie, remained an active member of the Uniting Church until her death last year.

Elizabeth studied theology at Trinity College in Melbourne and was ordained as an Anglican priest in 1993. Her PhD thesis explored feminist interpretations of the Bible in worship. As a hymn writer she aims to use inclusive language – both of women and all the other people God loves but whom the church often overlooks or excludes. She has published three collections of hymns, of which 5 are included in *Together in Song*.



Today we will sing God gives us a future

SONG TiS 687 God gives us a future

God gives us a future, daring us to go
into dreams and dangers on a path unknown.
We will face tomorrow in the Spirit's power,
we will let God change us, for new life starts now.

We must leave behind us sins of yesterday,
for God's new beginning is a better way.
Fear and doubt and habit must not hold us back:
God gives hope, and insight, and the strength we lack.

Holy Spirit, teach us how to read the signs,
how to meet the challenge of our troubled times.
Love us into action, stir us into prayer,
till we choose God's life, and find our future there.

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