

## Christ Church Freemantle

Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September – 15th Sunday after Trinity

### *The rich man in his castle*

Where is Craig going with this title you are probably asking yourself, do stick with me! I wasn't sure where to start with my thought of the week so I thought I would try and follow on from the two previous contributors on the theme of creationtide but writing to my speciality which is music and liturgy. If you read my last article you know that I have an interest in hymns, their composers, writers and what you *don't* see in the hymn book. I addressed at how leaving out and, or changing just the slightest of words or phrases can potentially change the whole feel, emotion or devotional intent of a writer.

So off to my hymn book I went and to the chapter for 'Creation and the Environment' (*if you're not aware, for the users ease, the book is laid out in a variety of themes and sections from the liturgical year to things like 'Justice & Peace', National & Thanksgiving, and of course the dreaded 'General' section for when all inspiration is lost, or the many weeks of Trinity kick in*). In the creation section there are 24 hymns and songs. Hoping to look through and find inspiration for an article or story, I first passed *All creatures of our God and King* which Steve covered last week. The next item was *All things bright and beautiful*. Surely there is nothing special about this? I decided to check up on the lyricist Cecil Frances Alexander and see if anything interesting came up. Well firstly, Cecil was an Irish lady and I'm afraid that did surprise me, but maybe if over the years I had noticed the spelling of her middle name; Frances, I'd drawn a different conclusion. When I got to reading further I had also never joined up the fact that she had also penned several other well-known hymns including; *Once in Royal David's City*, *St Patrick's Breastplate* and *There is a green hill far away*.



Involved in charitable causes most of her life she was described as an "indefatigable visitor to poor and sick" and monies raised from her publications helped build the *Derry and Raphoe Diocesan Institution for the Deaf and Dumb* which was founded in 1846. One such publication was her *Hymns for Little Children* of which the dedication to her Godsons reads; "*I inscribe these simple lines, hoping that the language of verse, which children love, may help to impress on their minds what they are, what I have promised to them, and what they must seek to be*".

Here I found a fascinating link between the aforementioned hymns (apart from St P's Breastplate) that they formed part of a simplified but also by nature of length, an expanded version of The Creed over 20 hymns.

No 9 'On matter of heaven and earth' we find *All Things bright and beautiful*

No.11 'Who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, son of the Virgin Mary' we have *Once in Royal David's City*

No.12 'Suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead and buried' is *There is a green hill far away*

I've always seen, set, and played two of these hymns at distinct parts of the liturgical year, namely Christmas and Passiontide. Unfortunately with All things B&B (as coined by organists) it seems to have fallen in to a rather throw away, often mocked and badly played hymn used at weddings and funerals as the only thing people really know how to even attempt to sing.

Now, in that rather judgmental and controversial statement (which comes from years of bad experiences) I've done Cecil Alexander a severe disservice. All things B&B and Once in Royal have not only stood the test of time but have clearly been *impressed on* the *minds* of the adults (formerly *children*) and young people that sing them each time. Furthermore, whether the singer knows it or not, through singing these hymns they have been making in part an affirmation of faith and that's a wonderful thing. So where does *The Rich man in his castle* come into it all? Well, most of Cecil's hymns remained published in an unaltered form apart from one. It seems that despite her work for less fortunate and her indefatigable ways, she nonetheless endorsed the class system. Subsequently her original 3<sup>rd</sup> verse of 'All things bright and beautiful' seems to have been stricken from publication;

*The rich man in his castle,  
The poor man at his gate,  
God made them high and lowly  
And ordered their estate.*

What do you think? Does this offend you? Does it add something to or take away from the 'matter of heaven and earth' part of the Creed? Do you view Cecil any differently knowing she endorsed the class system? Lots of questions! Maybe someone could take up a thought on this? Interestingly the United Church of Canada penned their own unique verse;

*The rocky mountain splendour,  
the lone wolf's haunting call,  
the Great Lakes and the prairies,  
the forest in the fall.*

Like salt or seasoning in cooking it's easier to add later than take away and I think the 'adjustment' of and moreover the treatment of hymns could maybe follow this instead of a sort of hair cutting analogy that, once its chopped off if you don't like it, it could be a while before it grows back if at all! *I hope you know what I mean!* I would prefer to see whole texts and make a decision on what to include or leave out of a service or life event then have it seemingly censored only to pass a point, such as where we seem to be now in society that, reinstating something could provoke unnecessary and irrational conflict. If we are to sing about and give thanks for all God's *bright and beautiful* creations, I'm afraid that does include the rich, the poor, the ones that do us harm and those that love us. For as Cecil concludes in the refrain, *the Lord God made them all.*

*Craig Lawton*