

Now double pandemics

Patricia Williams: "As we watch, two great tragedies unfold and intertwine: the toll of coronavirus, and the toll of extrajudicial deaths at the hands of state actors. One maps on to the other in a double helix of grief and despair."

tune: Montgomery or St Denio (immortal, invisible)

Now double pandemics, one old and one new,
bring double injustice, both choke hold and flu;
a vast double helix of grief and despair,
entwining and trapping, profoundly unfair.

A gruesome inheritance, blighting us all,
descended from slavery's inhuman fall,
means those trapped by racism's structural pain
are crushed by this virus all over again.

The sad myth of 'whiteness' shape-shifts to live on,
so now let us gather to root out this wrong;
let's live to resist, reconstruct and re-new,
work healing and justice by all that we do.

John Campbell 29/6/20

Cry, "I can't breathe!"

The words of George Floyd (and others who died pinned down by police) have become a rallying cry for much wider issues of injustice. This song seeks to invite Christians to share the cry and the struggle. tune: Woodlands ('Tell out my soul')

Cry, "I can't breathe!" with those pinned down to die,
when law enforcers kill, all help deny.
Cry, "I can't breathe!" while racist structures mean
so many blighted lives, beyond obscene.

Cry, "I can't breathe!" rememb'ring times long gone
when slave ship holds would stifle and condemn.
Cry, "I can't breathe!" with those from later days
still trapped by aftershocks of slav'ry's ways.

Cry, "End this now!" with those who've had enough
who march to end injustice harsh and rough.
Cry, "End this now!" with all who would proclaim
that black lives matter; let us end the shame!

Cry, "In Christ's Name!" till all Christ's church can see
that Jesu's work's not done till all are free.
Cry, "In Christ's Name!" as we commit to share
in striving for a world that's just and fair.

Cry, "I can't breathe!" with all who seek to build
a world where no-one is unjustly killed.
Cry, "I can't breathe!" till hope begins again,
and all are blessed, and peace and justice reign.

John Campbell 23/7/20

Nehemiah hurt inside

*Our world is looking as devastated as the Jerusalem Nehemiah visited.
Can we find encouragement for creative action from his story?
Nehemiah 1-3 tune: Just a closer walk with Thee*

Nehemiah hurt inside –
people suffering, hope denied –
“Use me, God!” he boldly cried,
“In Your way, this I pray, God use me!”
**When life’s crushed by fortune’s knee,
when folk hurt and are not free,
take us, use us, that’s our plea;
let it be, dear God, let it be!**

Nehemiah in the night
rode to view the people’s plight,
challenged all to put things right
“Let’s all care, God’s work share, ’til we’re free!”

Nehemiah on his own
could not build, nor end the wrong,
yet his vision loosed a throng,
who then worked, never shirked; hope set free!

Now, when hurt and failure reign,
grant us vision once again;
let’s all work to end the pain,
by Your grace, set the pace, let it be.

John Campbell, 29/7/20

In exile, defeated

*Looking for Scripture stories that speak to a sudden irreversible change in circumstances
to help speak to our Covid-19 infected world, we turned to Jeremiah’s letter to the exiles in
Babylon, in Jeremiah 29.1-9 tune: St Denio (Immortal, invisible...)*

In exile, defeated, to Babylon hurled,
they barely subsisted, cut off from their world,
their memories of Zion, both blessing and curse,
sustained and yet trapped them, made Babylon worse.

To them Jeremiah, sent word, in God’s name,
to leave off their dreaming, start living again.
“Build houses, get settled, plant gardens and eat;
engage with this new world to end your defeat.”

“Be bold Babylonians, who build, work and sing,
prove exiles’ lives matter by all that you bring;
yet pray for this city, its peace, its *shalom*,
for Babylon’s peace and your own peace are one.”

This challenging message allows no way back,
no matter the danger, disaster or lack;
with God press on forward, engage where you are,
by grace live new beauty, in God’s strength go far.

John Campbell, 30/7/20

A bouquet of sunflow'rs and thistles

One Saturday in August there was a BLM demonstration outside Tottenham Police Station.

Passing along the High Road after this protest was all over

I saw a bouquet of sunflowers and thistles propped against the fence.

It seemed deeply symbolic, so I wrote this song....

tune: My bonnie lies over the ocean

A bouquet of sunflow'rs and thistles
lay propped by the p'lice station door;
a B. L. M. gift of remembrance,
a shout-out for justice, and more.

**Weep on, but keep on
resisting together, stood side by side.
Stay strong to fight wrong,
'til no-one has justice denied.**

Sharp thistles here stand for the struggle,
harsh suff'rings already endured,
and how we, ourselves, will face dangers,
till justice for all is ensured.

Bright sunflowers tell of this wonder,
the joy that creativeness brings;
black giftedness crushed by injustice,
that nurtured and cherished grows wings.

This bouquet of sunflow'rs and thistles
reminds us of truths we should know;
let's rise, then, to take on the challenge
of helping God's justice to grow.

John Campbell 12/8/20

No justice? No peace!

As the BLM movement has spread across the world the cry, "No justice? No peace!"

has rung out in city after city. It took me back to God's outrage shared by Amos

Here is the resulting song. Amos 5.21-24 tune: Hanover

God's people had failed, not going God's way:
the rich would exploit, then turn up and pray.
Through Amos God challenged, said all this must cease,
let all understand me, "No justice? No peace!"

When George Floyd was killed, brute force held him down
and protests spread fast through town after town;
outraged by the actions of racist police,
soon millions would shout out "No justice? No peace!"

Committed black youth now come to the fore;
with passion and pow'r they push at the door,
and boldly demanding all racism cease,
they shout God's own slogan: "No justice? No peace!"

Together, let's stand, determined and strong,
end racism now, let's root out this wrong;
by our work and God's work let justice increase
'til no-one need shout out "No justice? No peace!"

John Campbell, 14/8/20

We holdin' on

*In one week I kept coming across people facing big, ugly situations
and I couldn't imagine how they were coping. How did they keep holding on?
tune: I have decided to follow Jesus*

These times are strange times, strange and demanding,
life's complications just keep expanding;
they've left us battered, but, still, we're standing,
we holdin' on, we holdin' on.

Though some are sick'ning and some are dying,
though some are crazy and some are lying,
we're going to keep on, just keep on trying,
we holdin' on, we holdin' on.

It's time for change now, not idle playing,
it's time for kneeling, it's time for praying,
it's time for action and not just saying,
we holdin' on, we holdin' on.

Messiah Jesus has gone before us.
to show us God's way and then implore us
to be his people, let him work through us,
we holdin' on, we holdin' on.

It's time to wake up and stand together,
to strive for justice for one another,
live true as sister, live true as brother,
we holdin' on, we holdin' on.

John Campbell 23/8/20

King Herod *tune: St Denio (Immortal, invisible)*

King Herod had struggled to capture his throne;
with help from the Romans he'd made it his own.
No matter how nasty, he'd do what it took
to keep hold of power – the man was a crook!

No rival, no plotter, no prophesied child
could be tolerated – they'd all drive him wild;
What God had intended meant nothing at all,
he'd kill and destroy 'til he'd conquered them all.

Today, those with power may not seem so crude;
they spin endless stories so they can look good.
Too often their actions protect those with wealth;
their goals are the same, they're just Herods by stealth.

The triumph of Herods, however achieved,
leaves justice demolished, lets violence succeed;
yet, always, such vict'ries cannot be the end,
our God is still with us to help and defend.

The fightback of kindness, resistance by grace,
may struggle and struggle to take evil's place;
yet, God come in Jesus, so helpless and small,
grew tall for our rescue, wins hope for us all.

John Campbell 11/1/20

Christian love

*tune: Ode to joy or another pacey 87 87 D tune
a song for Racial Justice Sunday inspired by 1 Corinthians 13.4-7*

Christian love is not romantic,
not soft-focussed, twee or sweet,
Christian love's not 'likes', nor dating,
far more real than text or tweet.
Christian love means life-long struggle;
lived-out kindness ev'rywhere.
Christian love must echo Jesus:
selfless, soulful, steeped in prayer.

Christian love respects the other,
seeks to understand, not judge;
takes delight in mutual learning
doesn't force and doesn't fudge.
Christian love's an arduous journey,
finding self by giving all;
serving, sharing, helping, caring;
full response to Jesus' call.

Christian love cries out for justice
wheresoever it's denied;
joins the struggle, makes the protest,
stays the course, eyes open wide.
Christian love rejects what's racist,
sexist, ageist, prejudiced,
turns against each nurtured bias,
learning daily to resist.

Christian love is learned from Jesus,
walks his way and bears his cross;
self-surrenders, like our Saviour;
gains much more than what is lost.
Christian love is so persistent,
it outlasts all other things;
by its hope, its faith, its struggle,
it's the song all heaven sings!

John Campbell 15/11/19

Oludah and Onesimus *tune: O Tannenbaum (O Christmas Tree)*

Oludah and Onesimus
were both brought low by slav'ry's curse.
The law saw them most evilly
as nothing more than property.
Yet both found ways to break their chains,
find life set free from slav'ry's stains;
with Christ their new reality,
they found their full humanity.

Yet neither simply hunkered down
safe in the freedom they had found;
Onesimus, with Paul's support,
went back to challenge slav'ry's hurt.
Oludah wrote and gave his all
to work for abolition's call.
Such courage and such fortitude,
must challenge us to work for good!

John Campbell, 20/8/19

Our Legacies *tune: Aurelia (The Church's one foundation)*

When hist'ry makes it harder to be who we might be,
when long-ago oppressions still shape what we can see;
when deep-ingrained assumptions hold back, restrict, restrain,
then, Jesus, lead the struggle 'til all true freedom gain!

When women face restrictions, and risks that men don't face,
and ancient expectations say 'you must know your place';
when masculine assumptions dictate who all may be,
then, Jesus, friend of Martha, help Mary-ness run free.

When blackness read thro' slav'ry corrupts the way we see,
imposing double standards, means black folk can't be free;
when whiteness sets what's 'normal', degrades all other lives,
then, Christ, our slave-like Saviour, bring justice that abides.

When borders serve injustice, restricting who can share
the wealth which some inherit, excluding others there;
when walls preventing fairness define who each may be
then, Christ, for us excluded, break borders 'til we're free.

Christ, lead us in addressing distorting legacies;
help us make reparations for deep injustices.
Your love is daily trampled if we decline to act;
help us remove injustice, turn fairness into fact.

John Campbell

It's easy to surrender *tune: Wolvercote (O Jesus I have promised)*

It's easy to surrender to half-acknowledged fear,
to urges and emotions we sense are always there.
It's hard to let the Gospel then question what we feel,
restructuring commitments, transforming, keeping real.

It's deep within our nature to stand up for our own,
defend from threats and dangers, whatever we call 'home',
but surely Jesus challenged the limits we'd maintain,
for all, to Him, are fam'ly; our walls are built in vain.

Each age finds fresh excuses to speak of 'us' and 'them';
migrations, wars and famines come back, and back again,
yet, always, God of migrants, You summon us to care;
we must not limit welcome but learn to love and share.

So, now, whatever dangers or threats might multiply,
Great God, grant us the courage to follow You and try
to live out love that welcomes, finds friendship ev'rywhere;
to immigrate to kindness and never move from there.

John Campbell