

LOVE WINS

Whoever has ears.

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Arguably these are the most profound words that have ever been penned. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. In the beginning God.... This is a statement about the truth of the universe. The truth is that God was the one who was there in the beginning. And in the beginning, God created.

Perhaps another way of saying that is: in the beginning God sings! Certainly, according to the book of Job, the morning stars sang together in creation (Job 38:7). In the beginning God sings his song of love, and God creates. God didn't create because he was bored. God didn't create because he was lonely. God didn't create because he had to. God didn't create because something was lacking. God created because God is love, and God created because God sang his song of love – to share his love with others.

And when God creates he is inviting us to join in his song of love. There's a song we sing that captures this deep and profound truth.

Loved before the dawn of time

Chosen by my maker, hidden in my saviour

I am his and he is mine, cherished for eternity

When I am stained with guilt and sin

He is there to lift me, heal me and forgive me.

Gives me strength to stand again, stronger than I was before.

So, with every breath that I am given

I will sing salvation's song

And I'll join the chorus of creation

Giving praise to Christ alone

*All the chains of Satan's curse
Lifted through his offering, satisfied through suffering
All the blessings he deserves, poured on my unworthy soul
So, with every breath that I am given
I will sing creation's song
And I'll join the chorus of creation
Giving praise to Christ alone.*

(Stuart Townsend)

There is a song of love at the centre of the universe. It's the song of God's great and magnificent love. And the song of God's great and magnificent love is an endless song... for the song of God's great and magnificent love is always reaching towards those he created. The song of God's great and magnificent love is always longing for those he created. The song of God's great and magnificent love is always searching for those he created. The song of God's great and magnificent love is always inviting those he created to join in salvation's song. The song of God's great and magnificent love is always hoping that those he created will join in and sing his song of love. The song of God's great and magnificent love is always hoping and waiting for you to join in, and sing his song of love.

To join in and sing a song you have to be able to hear the music.

Lisa and I just had the privilege of going on holiday to Scotland. We did what's called the North Coast 500, a 500-mile road trip starting and finishing at Inverness – 500 miles in total. Actually, we didn't do it all because, rather than go back to Inverness to finish, we went to the Isle of Skye, off the West Coast.

But, we did quite a lot of driving! And while we were driving we listened to the wonderful music on my iPod. It turns out I have 3000 songs on my iPod! So, what we did was to put it on 'shuffle,' which means it selects randomly from the 3000 songs. We made a rule that we could only skip a song if it was a Christmas song! Otherwise, whether we liked it or not, we listened to every song that played.

I have an eclectic mix of music on my iPod, from Classical to Pop, from Jazz to Soul. Sometimes a song would come on and it would be very loud and we could hear it straight away! Sometimes though, particularly classical music, it would be very quiet and it would be difficult to hear. Sometimes we'd know the song well – and we would join in heartily. Sometimes, even though it's my iPod, the song would be a new song to me and I couldn't join in – so I'd listen.

Sometimes the music captured our mood and, somehow the spectacular scenery we were driving through. Sometimes, if I'm honest, I'd have preferred to skip a song, even though it wasn't a Christmas song. There are songs we missed completely because we were talking and not listening. The music was endless – there's still music we haven't heard – we got nowhere near the end of it.

One day Jesus told a story and at the end of it he said: "Whoever has ears, let them hear."

The Parable of the Sower

13 That same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the lake. ² Such large crowds gathered around him that he got into a boat and sat in it, while all the people stood on the shore. ³ Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. ⁴ As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. ⁵ Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. ⁶ But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. ⁷ Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. ⁸ Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. ⁹ Whoever has ears, let them hear. (Mathew 13 v 1-9)

Whoever has ears, let them hear. In this story, Jesus is really talking about soil. He does talk about a farmer who went out to sow seed. He does talk about the seed the farmer sows, but he really talks about soil. We know that because for all the kinds of soil he talks about, the farmer is the same and the seed is the same. It's only the soil that's different, it's only the soil that varies. And it's the soil that determines whether the seed grows and produces a crop.

The farmer sows seed because he wants it to grow. The seed will grow if it falls on the right kind of soil. Perhaps the question becomes: What kind of soil are

you? God sows his love into our lives because he wants us to grow. God longs for us to reach our full redemptive potential. God longs for you to reach your full redemptive potential. God's love will grow in our lives, if it falls on the right soil.

So perhaps the question is really this: How's your heart?

There are four kinds of soil in this story. The first is the pathway. This soil has been trodden on many times by those travelling and walking – people and animals – and it has become very hard. With all the people, animals and goods that have trampled this soil, it has become like cement. Nothing grows here. Any seed that fell here would be snatched away quickly by the birds and wasted.

How's your heart?

Maybe experiences in life have caused your heart to become hard. Maybe there are places in your heart where, the truth is, nothing can grow. When our heart is hard, we simply don't hear anymore. The master gardener wants to sow his love into your heart and for you to fulfil your redemptive potential. But he will wait for you to invite him to do his work.

The second soil is rocky soil. This soil takes enormous hard work to get anything to grow. This kind of soil is not good for the farmer because it cannot be relied on to yield a crop. Perhaps its barren soil. Rocky soil thinly covers the rock beneath so there is no place for the roots to grow.

Perhaps this soil asks the question: "What is in your heart that makes it hard for the seed to grow?" Perhaps there is unbelief in your heart – you simply won't let God in and you refuse to believe his truth. Perhaps there's ingratitude in your heart and all goodness is quickly drained away. Perhaps we live 'if only' lives and grumble against God for the way he handles our lives and circumstances. The consequence of rocky soil is it's hard for anything to grow. Perhaps, the truth is, we don't want to hear.

The third soil is thorny soil. In this soil it is a constant battle for anything to grow. It is, in truth, difficult to grow both thorns and fruit. 'Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?' It is one or the other. Thorns have a nasty capacity to choke a crop. So, here's a challenging question: What is growing in your life right now?

Here's another way of asking that question:

What takes up most space in your life right now?
What occupies your time and attention?
What has gained prime place in your priorities?
What is the net result of your living – weeds or fruit?

How's your heart, friends?

The fourth kind of soil is good soil. Here the seed falls and there is growth. All the other soils were considered non-productive because none of them produced the growth desired. But even here, the truth is, that the best soil where growth is possible, has first to be broken before it can become beautiful.

So, perhaps, a good question to ask is: Where in your life do you need first, to be broken? The master gardener is always longing, quietly, gently, lovingly, caringly working to produce good soil in you. Where does he most need to do his work?

Jesus says: "Whoever has ears, let them hear."

How's your heart?

There is a song of love that fills the universe and echoes across the world. It's the song of God's great and magnificent love. I'm wondering what you'd say if I asked you what kind of soil Jesus was? I'm wondering what you'd say if I asked you how Jesus's heart was? I'm wondering what you'd say if I asked you what kind of ears Jesus had? In truth, I think I know what you'd say.

If we are to love without limit, we would do well to be the kind of soil Jesus was, to have the heart Jesus had and to have the ears of Jesus too. It seems to me Jesus heard the song that beats across the universe, the song of his Father's great and magnificent love. But, he not only heard the song, he embraced it and sang the song in all he did.

Jesus took every opportunity to listen to, to hear, to learn and to sing his Father's song of love. He prayed, he wrestled, he studied, he spent time on his own, he chose to immerse himself in his Father's song and his Father's song became his song. He loved without limit – he sang salvation's song.

Whoever has ears, let them hear. There is an endless song of love, if only you can hear it. Maybe your response would echo these words:

Sing over me, sing over me
Sing above the noise that I've been making
Sing over me, sing over me
All I ever needed was to hear your melody
All I ever needed was to hear your melody
Wake me, come on and wake me
I'm tired of living like I'm asleep
And hold me the way you hold me
How you unfold all this unbelief
The voice that calms the waves, sing out
And call my name
And sing over me, sing over me
Sing away the silence that is breaking
Sing over me, sing over me
All I ever needed was to hear your melody
All I ever needed was to hear your melody
Sing over me, sing over me.

(Bebo Norman)