

Sunday Morning, August 18, 2019

The music for this Sunday's worship has two intentions; First, to help us focus our minds and voices in preparation for and response to the reading and preaching of God's word. Additionally, to celebrate what we, and many other churches call "Rally Day."

What is Rally Day? Rally Day is a festival day which signifies the end of summer activities, and the beginning of our year together. Marion Lawrence, described by a 1911 New York Times article as "the American Sunday school leader," offers some insight as to how this tradition began. Lawrence says this about Rally Day in his book *How to Conduct a Sunday School* (1905):

"This festival is rapidly growing in favor. It usually comes at the end of the summer break-up, and is used as a means of rallying the forces again for the work of fall and winter. When a general is preparing for a battle he is said to rally his forces...(this) may be applied to the Sunday school work; we are rallying our forces for the great campaign of the fall and winter."

With this in mind, Sunday morning's music incorporates celebratory music with texts that set our affections on the church, and the joy and privilege we have as believers and disciples of Jesus Christ to gather together to worship him and learn of him.

Our choral introit—the function of which is to help prepare our hearts and minds for the worship of almighty God—is a setting of John Newton's *Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken*, from his *Olney Hymns* (1779). The tune the choir will sing is ABOTT'S LEIGH, composed by Cyril Taylor in 1941. Taylor wrote the tune one Sunday morning during his time at the wartime headquarters of the Religious Affairs Department of the BBC. We will soon be singing this setting as a congregational hymn, so listen carefully (and keep a look out for a push notification with the recording on the church app).

The opening verse of Newton's hymn refers to Isaiah 33: 20, 21, which grounds us in the immutable character of our God and his kingdom:

Behold Zion, the city of our appointed feasts!
Your eyes will see Jerusalem,
an untroubled habitation, an immovable tent,
whose stakes will never be plucked up,
nor will any of its cords be broken.
But there the Lord in majesty will be for us
a place of broad rivers and streams,
where no galley with oars can go,
nor majestic ship can pass.

Our opening hymn is the exuberant *New Songs of Celebration Render*, whose tune (attributed to Louis Bourgeois) is found in the Genevan Psalter of 1551. Our hymn of response to the

confession of sin and assurance of pardon is a paraphrase of Psalm 121 to the tune DUNDEE, followed then by the offertory, William Parry's majestic setting of Psalm 122. Both of these Psalms of Ascent are intended to be sung together, as they follow a pattern that we should continually model—fixing our eyes on Christ, our helper and keeper, as we journey together to the new Jerusalem.

The service of worship concludes with a psalm paraphrase of Psalm 50, the sermon text for the day.