

The music of the Kingdom

BY BISHOP JONATHAN, BISHOP OF PORTSMOUTH



I'D been invited to lead a Lent quiet morning in Romsey. It was a glorious day. I kept introductory words brief and sent participants to enjoy the sunshine. I found myself with an hour before Eucharist, so I settled down in a secluded corner in the garden.

Then I heard the singing. Not singing of the most tuneful kind, but joyful, community singing: a string of music hall classics, songs from the stage and from war years drew me in. Re-entering the house ("We'll meet again, don't know where, don't know when...") I located the source: it was the monthly meeting of an Alzheimer's music therapy group.

I asked the leader if I could join in. The group was about 40 strong and made up of carers and those at various stages of dementia. I was given a splendid red tambourine. For the next hour we sang our hearts out, enjoying music together. Each of us wounded, broken and struggling with loss of one sort or another - but one, in and through the music, singing together.

A musician animated the group supported by a skilled team of volunteers. He would move close to an individual, playing his oboe, swaying in and out, beckoning and cajoling a response until a blank face lit up, until recognition came, however dim.

A husband and wife, both at an

early stage of dementia, had not sung a word until their song found them, and from this point the husband sang the song to his wife from somewhere deep inside, oblivious to the rest of us. The group, its sense of community, and the skilled facilitation of the leader had created space for the music to do its mysterious, healing work.

The encounter with the highly skilled and life-giving work of this group shone a light upon the calling of the Church: to create space for the music of the Kingdom, to be a sign of the coming reign of God in which the broken, sinful and lost find hospitality in Christ's Body.

But the hospitality didn't simply happen. The musician and volunteers were organised and worked to a plan. Good, enabling leadership is rarely about the heroic individual, and rather more about good collaboration, combined with emotional intelligence which rejoices in the complementary gifts of others.

As we travel towards Holy Week and Easter, would you join me in praying that our life together in Christ will increasingly be characterised by hospitality and welcome? First and foremost, hospitality to the Lord himself, to make room for God's real but mysterious presence and to create space for those to whom we are sent in His beautiful name.

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