

Sunflowers & Thistles



Praise songs and protests by John Campbell



Acknowledgements

I was due to retire from full-time ministry with the United Reformed Church (URC) just as the Covid-19 pandemic began. But it truly felt like the wrong time to leave. Instead, I have been blessed with permission to remain in ministry through it all.

So, I have stayed in active fellowship with High Cross United Reformed Church in Tottenham; Rectory Road and Manor Road United Reformed Churches in Stoke Newington; Clapton Park United Reformed Church in Hackney and Islington; and the South Lea Valley Local Area of the URC.

I was also surrounded by valued ecumenical colleagues in Tottenham through Christians Together in Tottenham, and in touch with a wide circle of treasured colleagues and friends across Thames North Synod and beyond, including Jamaica and Ghana.

Thanks to you all for sharing the journey. It is your fellowship that inspires me to write fresh songs to well-known tunes that might, just might, help to keep you singing as we all negotiate our way through these strange times.

Prayers and blessings,
John Campbell



www.urch.org.uk 

Song 37: O God who longs to make us whole

A hymn celebrating the founding and work of the NHS. Written in 1998 for a special service in Leicester Cathedral, celebrating the NHS 50th anniversary. The third verse was added in 2021 to recognise the efforts and courage of people other than NHS staff during the pandemic.

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Introduction

There is a certain perversity in continuing to write new song lyrics for churches all through a year when churches, in the main, have been unable to sing.

When these songs have been performed for worship, it has usually been by a single voice broadcasted via Zoom to an array of screens where others, if suitably muted, (yes, only if muted) could try joining in at home by reading the words off a screen share. Not ideal circumstances for congregational song.

Yet, I would argue, the causes of our silencing and separation demanded new songs. Indeed, they demanded new songs that speak directly to our new predicament. I believe this crisis time for church singing cries out for fresh engagement in song.

So, I have continued trying to write new songs for these times of Covid and Floyd. And I've continued writing to tunes I was confident people could sing at home, to themselves, even if 'church' was silent.

Indeed, as many of these songs were first sent out in our church's weekly on-paper mailing to people without internet technology, they had to be to tunes that people could confidently raise for themselves in the kitchen or living room or wherever.

I have been writing songs like this for over a quarter of a century now. In the foreword to my 2016 collection of 200 songs, published by Kevin Mayhew Ltd (*Songs to shake us up*), I described my songs as 'intentionally specific, contextual, immediate and ephemeral'. That description still applies.

This new context seemed to require new songs too, even if people could only read the words or hum them over to themselves. The church needs to sing, and to sing about the things that sit before us now.

I hope these songs may help. **They are offered freely for use until April 2022**, with due acknowledgement, hoping that after that they may be unnecessary and inappropriate.

I have written a little introduction to each song. Their writing and their inspiration is scattered across the twelve months from April 2020 to April 2021. Each song has its own story. Please explore them and employ them as you will. I've noted where the tunes may be found in *Rejoice and Sing* (R&S), *Mission Praise* (MP) and *Songs to shake us up* (STSUU) where possible.

John Campbell



We're facing a danger

Tune: To God be the glory

A song for the Covid-19 crisis. My first response to 'social distancing' and 'lockdown' and how God fits into the pandemic picture.

We're facing a danger we don't understand,
we're baffled by changes its risks now demand;
our gestures of kindness, of intimate care,
risk spreading contagion, so how can we share?

God, you've seen all that's been
when disasters have struck;
watch us now, and somehow,
don't just leave us to luck;
stay close while we distance, your kindness expend,
stay close through whatever, true helper and friend.

We're facing a danger we can't even see,
this virus that travels so far and so free,
means we have to distance, keep metres apart,
relearning engagement, new hope-sharing art.

We're facing a danger that's changing our world
that's trashing our 'normal', as lockdowns take hold;
where some isolate, facing all this alone
and others give all in the health danger zone.

We're facing a danger that leaves us dismayed
when loved ones are taken though we wish they'd stayed;
whilst we face the fever, the grief and the pain,
stand by us, Christ Jesus, and heal us again.

John Campbell, April 2020

2 **Though Easter vict'ry seems far, far away**

Tune: Thine be the glory, *R&S 247, MP 689*

An Easter Sunday song to an Easter Sunday tune, but taking the Covid situation into account.

Though Easter vict'ry seems far, far away,
even in our lockdown, You are here to stay.

Though our times bring dangers, laced with fear and gloom,
You are here to help us, victor from the tomb.

**Though Easter vict'ry seems far, far away,
Easter means you're with us, each and ev'ry day.**

Though we're avoiding even those we love,
resurrection blessings come down from above.

Though death's still amongst us, death's now lost its sting,
through our grief and sadness, by Your grace, we'll sing!

Though we're uncertain what the future holds,
Risen Christ, Your vict'ry our own fate enfolds;
love spilled out proved stronger than death's crushing blow,
through your resurrection faith and hope must grow.

John Campbell, for Easter Sunday 2020



We are sailing in the darkness

3

Tune: Battle Hymn (John Brown's body / Glory, glory, hallelujah)

"We are sailing in the darkness" is a quotation from Thomas Traumann, a Brazilian commentator on the Covid-19 crisis, cited on The Guardian website, 17 April 2020.

We are sailing in the darkness
and our captains have no charts,
and so much is still uncertain
it sits heavy on our hearts;
though our boats feel very flimsy
and we're forced to sail apart,
our God sails with us all.

**May Your love reach out in caring,
keep us active, kind and sharing,
keep us cautious, yet with daring,
Great God, sail with us all.**

Some are struggling with a fever,
some are locked down all alone,
some are risking all for others
well outside their safety zone;
yet no matter our own trials,
we can try to live as one,
our God sails with us all.

You have battled with the darkness,
You have sailed on angry seas,
and you struggled in a garden
with the weight of sin's disease;
yes, you came to share our troubles,
You're the God who never leaves –
our God sails with us all

John Campbell, April 2020

4 Prayer may not halt the pestilence

Tune: Finlandia

Worried by a Christian colleague who said, of Covid-19, 'We'll be safe, we're protected by prayer!', I tried in this song to talk of what I believe prayer does and does not do.

Prayer may not halt the pestilence around us;
it did not save our Saviour from his fate.
Harsh famine's curse defied the prayers of many,
time after time, exacting grievous hurt.
Yet, if we pray, and share life's pain with Jesus,
we will be changed and strengthened while we wait.

Prayer may not bring an end to all injustice;
too many died whilst Naaman found his cure.
Yet, prayer by prayer, we and our world are changing,
if by prayer's pow'r our hearts grow strong to care;
if we reach out, empow'ered by prayer, in action,
then hope may help the fearful to endure.

And if the cup of suff'ring set before us
proves deep and bitter ev'rywhere, for all,
our prayers must help us work within the wasteland,
give strength to rise up, even when we fall;
that help and care and kindness and sharing,
may build anew a better world for all.



John Campbell, April 2020

Zoom, zoom, zoom!

Tune: Three blind mice (traditional UK nursery rhyme)

In no time at all, after lock down, we found our worship services were on Zoom. Here was a wee song to start a Zoom worship service ...

Zoom, zoom, zoom,
zoom, zoom, zoom,
God's in the room,
God's in the room.
We may be scattered out home by home
and some of us may even live alone,
but God will gather us all into one,
by zoom, zoom, zoom.

Zoom, zoom, zoom,
zoom, zoom, zoom,
God's in the room,
just don't assume
that only those who can get on screen
are reached by the God who loves us, unseen,
let's pray for all as we now join and sing
by zoom, zoom, zoom.

Zoom, zoom, zoom,
zoom, zoom, zoom,
God's in the room,
working the loom.
Yes, God is here as we try to share,
to weave us together in mutual care,
to make us strong for the problems out there,
so, boom, boom, boom!

John Campbell, May 2020

6 Hard-pressed and surrounded

Tune: In the name of Jesus, *MP 339*

Based on 2nd Corinthians 4.8-9 NIV – Paul says ‘We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.’ That seemed to speak to the way many of us were feeling in April to May 2020, and since.

Hard-pressed and surrounded,
yet we’re not confounded,
Jesus will see us through!
Deep in dark confusion,
we need faith-profusion,
Jesus, we call on you!
We may face fierce persecution
but God’s care keeps us strong and true.
Some are struck down, yet we’ll push on:
Jesus will see us through!

John Campbell, May 2020



Sing praise to God, then, one and all

7

Tune: My hope is built on nothing less (*the old tune Solid Rock, found on the internet*)

A visiting Zoom preacher chose this Psalm extract for our worship; I thought we should sing it. Psalm 66.8-12 and 16-20.

Sing praise to God, then, one and all,
for God protects both great and small;
it's God who keeps us all alive
and steadies those who slip and slide.

**For God, with constant, loving care
is strong to answer ev'ry prayer,
is strong to answer ev'ry prayer.**

In love, our God may test and try,
set nets, load burdens, make us cry;
yet, always, though each trial seems vast,
God will release us at the last.

And when we cry from pain and grief,
God hears and works to bring relief.
Let's all abandon selfish ways,
and turn to God with heartfelt praise.

John Campbell, May 2020



8 Great giver of courage

Tune: St Denio (Immortal, invisible ...)

A song for Pentecost in challenging times.

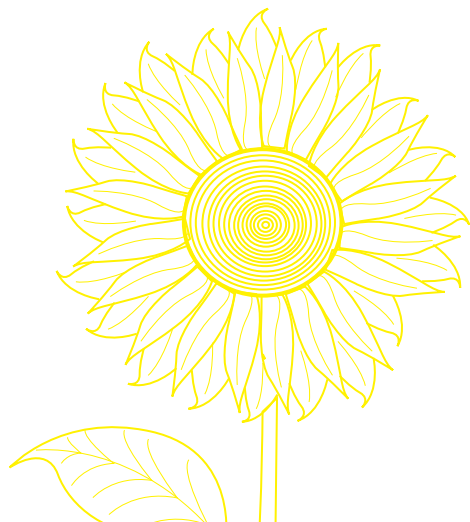
Great giver of courage, fresh influx of love,
God's presence intruding like wind from above,
you seek out those locked down, confused and unsure,
burst in to revive us with hope, joy and cure.

Uncertain disciples, once Jesus had gone,
were prayerful, yet fearful, each lost and alone,
yet through their heart-windows, kept open by pray'r,
you burst in upon them, with life-bringing flair.

The weary replenished, the sad brought new joy,
the troubled now eager, failed friends re-employed;
all this was your doing on Pentecost Day,
now come and renew us, blow through us, we pray!

Infect with your wisdom, for what we must face;
endow us with courage, to help us keep pace;
revive and restore us, so we may pull through,
work wonders together, empowered by you.

John Campbell, for Pentecost 2020



The pain and the outrage

Tune: To God be the glory

For George Floyd. A first response to the shocking news of this public death.

The pain and the outrage are strong, fresh and true;
once more, in broad daylight, injustice showed through;
once more law enforcement was so far from fair
it shrieked the deep secrets of wrongs always there.

**So our song – cries of wrong that we all have to right,
ev'ry day, come what may, let's stay true to this fight,
to rebuild our world in response to God's call,
'til freedom and justice are lived out for all.**

America knows its original sins –
the evil of slav'ry, the mindset it brings;
though slav'ry itself was dislodged long ago,
its poisons still poison the world that we know.

In Britain, we cannot just stand back and stare,
our own story's left us deep evils we share;
through Windrush, through Empire, slave-thinking
stayed strong;
let's pledge to the struggle to root out this wrong.

For black people killed or life-blighted or used
let's pray, but let's work to end all this abuse;
we all are diminished whilst some are denied
the freedom, the justice for which our hearts cried.

John Campbell, May 2020

10 Reach out

Tune: The Bard of Armagh / The streets of Laredo
We were looking at Jesus' strong emotions in response to this locked down or locked out leper. Mark 1.40-45.

Reach out to the locked down, in Christ-like commitment, sharing some kindness that brings them release; include the excluded, bring song to their silence, and help re-connect them, despite this disease.

Let empathy lead you and Christ's vision feed you, giving you wisdom to seek out some way to honour their safety, whilst helping their heart-needs; let kindly communion enfold them each day.

With Jesus whose anger and focussed compassion, rescued that man, aching, lost on his own, may we work together to build up each other, 'til no-one's left hurting and no-one's alone.

And though this may strain all our hard-pressed resources, though we are struggling, and we're locked down too, let's reach out in kindness to strengthen each other, help God's kingdom grow and true kindness win through.

John Campbell, June 2020



God grant us patience

Tune: Bunesan STSUU 40

We asked a visiting Zoom preacher (John Proctor) to tell us about patience. Using this passage from James 5.7-11 he gave us a fabulous sermon and I wrote this song to sing (although I had to write it before I heard the sermon!)

God grant us patience, morning by morning,
trudging the footpath each new day brings;
patience of farmers waiting their harvest,
kept by your promise till new joy sings!

God grant us patience, even in darkness
when faith alone can help us believe;
patience of prophets, sore persecuted,
yet who are certain God will relieve.

God grant us patience when life unravels,
leaving us numb, hurt, sorely aggrieved;
patience like Job knew, though all else failed him,
crushed but surviving what he'd received.

God grant us patience, endless endurance,
longsuff'ring, faithful, all of the way,
till your compassion, kindness and mercy,
burst into blossom, saving the day.

John Campbell, June 2020



12 Patient, loving, caring Jesus

Tune: Praise, my soul, the King of heaven

A sung response we've used every month after sharing our Covid-time Zoom Communion.

Patient, loving, caring Jesus,
grant us strength to carry on;
here renewed, revived, replenished,
keep us faithful, make us one;
may Your kindness
daily find us,
'til our work on earth is done.

John Campbell, June 2020

13 The 'owner' of the fig tree

Tune: Aurelia (The Church's one foundation)

As part of a Zoom Bible study we looked at this simple tale about a figless fig tree in Luke 13.6-9. Our explorations, lit by the Black Lives Matter movement and news of unequal effects of Covid-19 in BAME communities, led us to see here (as we'd never seen before) a powerful investigation of competing explanations of fruitlessness, that richly echoed modern-day attitudes to the black experience in the UK. Jesus does not go with the 'owners'.

The 'owner' of the fig tree
in Jesus' fig tree tale
was clear the tree was useless –
no good to him at all.
A fig tree that is fig-less
does not deserve its place
"Remove this monstrous failure,
it's just a waste of space!"

The Gard'ner in the story
then asked to call a halt;
what if this fig-less failure
was not the fig tree's fault?
He promised new resources,
new care, with new manure.
"Perhaps, we failed the fig tree,
let's try to find a cure!"

The story Jesus offers,
if we have ears to hear,
provides a heart-felt challenge
to things we may think clear;
when we think like the 'owner',
and blame, condemn, remove,
we crush all hope of justice
and shut down truth and love.

Today, we need this story
to help us think again,
when some are set for failure,
whilst others just condemn.
Let's reconstruct our nurture,
let's give each fig their chance,
let's show all fig trees matter,
let fruitfulness advance!

John Campbell, June 2020

14 Now double pandemics

Tune: Montgomery or St Denio

Patricia Williams, in an article in The Guardian: '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.'

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 renew,
work healing and justice by all that we do.

John Campbell, June 2020



Cry, 'I can't breathe!'

Tune: Woodlands ('Tell out my soul')

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 join the struggle.

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, July 2020

16 A thorn, a thorn, a thorn in the flesh

Tune: Sussex Carol STSUU 67. 9.9.9.9.10.9

Paul didn't have Covid-19 to contend with, but something of his wrestling with unremoved difficulties speaks to many now as they struggle with pandemics old and new. 2 Corinthians 12.7-10.

A thorn, a thorn, a thorn in the flesh,
sets cruel limits; restricts success.
So Paul, with passion, sought his release,
asked God to free him from all disease.
Three times he prayed as he longed for a cure,
but God said 'No, this pain must endure!'

'This thorn, this thorn, this thorn and its pain,
to work God's work in you, will remain.
For you, my grace is all you need seek,
my grace grows stronger when you are weak!'
Painfully, Paul came to sing a new song:
'When I'm weak, then, in Christ, I am strong!'

Each thorn, each thorn, each thorn we endure,
that seems to limit, helps work our cure.
The hardships, hurts and weakness we face,
may be brave messengers of God's grace.
Painfully, we learn to share in this song:
'When I'm weak, then, in Christ, I am strong!'

John Campbell, July 2020



Brave Christ who walked among us

17

Tune: Day of Rest, MP 501 (*O Jesus I have promised*) 7676D

A visiting Zoom preacher chose to speak on the simple yet powerful story of the woman bent double in Luke 13.10-17. I wrote this song about it for our worship.

Brave Christ who walked among us
and saw and felt and cared,
with eyes to see the suff'ring
which far too many shared,
You keenly felt injustice
that others would not see,
you'd bring both help and healing,
a Sabbath setting-free.

You saw that crumpled woman,
you felt her shame and pain,
yet knew she had the spirit
to stand up straight again.
Your shout broke through the Sabbath,
to reach her, touch her soul,
set loose unfurling beauty
till she stood tall and whole.

This public reconstruction
of Sabbath hope and joy
met truculent resistance –
an old oppressors' ploy –
yet you and she, resplendent,
stood tall with righteous fire
and shamed them into silence,
and, still, you both inspire.

When life for us is crippling,
enough to bend each spine,
to leave us stooped and broken
whilst others bray and whine,
we'll seek a fresh infusion
of confidence from You
to stand up straight for justice
and do what we must do.

John Campbell, July 2020



Nehemiah hurt inside

Tune: Just a closer walk with Thee, *MP 263*

Our world is looking about as devastated as the Jerusalem Nehemiah visited. Can we find encouragement for creative action from his story? Nehemiah 1-3.

Nehemiah hurt inside –
 people suff'ring, 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, 'till 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, July 2020

19 In exile, defeated

Tune: St Denio (Immortal, invisible ...)

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.

In exile, defeated,
to Babylon hurled,
they barely subsisted,
cut off from their world.
Their mem'ries 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, July 2020

A bouquet of sunflowers and thistles **20**

Tune: My bonnie lies over the ocean

In August 2020, there was a Black Lives Matter demonstration outside Tottenham police station. Passing along the High Road after this peaceful protest was over, I saw a bouquet of sunflowers and thistles propped against the fence. It seemed deeply symbolic, so I wrote this song ...

A bouquet of sunflow'rs and thistles
lay propped by the p'lice station door;
a BLM 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,
'till 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 sunflow'rs then tell of this wonder,
the joy that creativeness brings;
black giftedness, crushed by injustice,
that, nurtured and cherished, grows wings.

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

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, August 2020

21 No justice? No peace!

Tune: Hanover

As the Black Lives Matter 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 inspired by Amos 5.21-24.

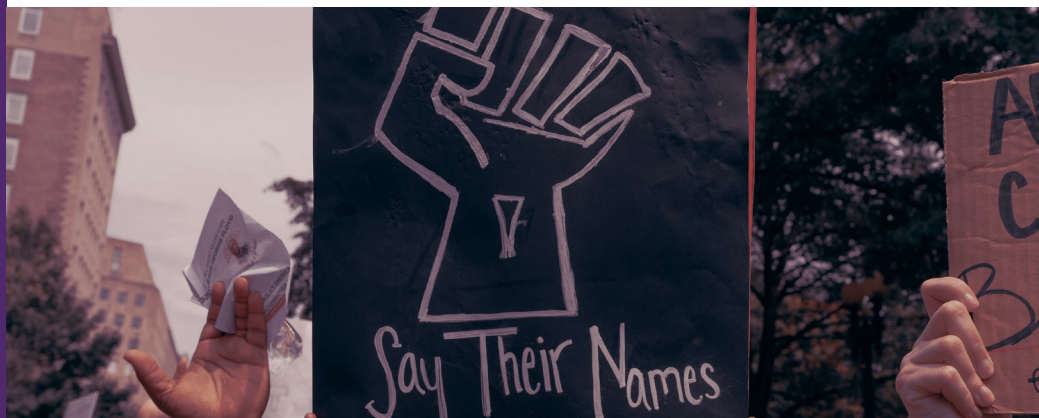
God's people had failed,
not going God's way:
the rich would exploit,
then turn up and pray.
Through Amos, God challenged,
said all this must cease:
let all understand me,
'No justice? No peace!'

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
'till no-one need shout out
'No justice? No peace!'

John Campbell, August 2020



22 The engines of ambition

Tune: Penlan 7676 D

Phil 2.1-11.

The engines of ambition
can drive us on and on,
the hunt for recognition
can haunt us all life long,
yet focus on 'my future',
with fame my test of worth,
can empty and corrode me,
prevent a wished new birth.

Christ's mind and drive were diff'rent,
his attitude was clear:
he sought the good of others,
he loved them, drew them near;
his life was spent in service –
our humblest, purest friend –
he gave and gave to save us,
relentless to the end.

Obedient to his calling,
God come as one of us,
his selflessness persisted
right to Golgotha's cross;
no shame, no degradation,
could turn him from his course,
through pain-drenched crucifixion,
he gave his life for us.

So, now, our route to freedom
leads down the path he trod,
shaped by the mind of Jesus,
we'll give our all to God,
until, in celebration,

all heav'n will take the knee
to praise our servant master
who gave to set us free.

John Campbell, August 2020

We holdin' on

23

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, August 2020

24 When all we know

Tune: Praise to the Lord, *MP 564*

When all we know is upended,
destroyed and disrupted,
how do we cope, when our world
and our hope's deconstructed?
Is God still there?
Are we sustained by God's care?
Or are we lost and defeated?

Should we like exiles sit silent,
depressed and dumbfounded,
leaving our harps and our hopes
hanging useless, impounded?
Can God not hear?
Can nothing conquer our fear?
Or can faith help us stay grounded?

Should we like Jonah just run from
the unwanted danger?
And, when denial won't work, turn
on God with our anger?
What will we gain,
if we resist God again?
Won't we just suffer for longer?

Rather, like Philip, left stood in
the middle of nowhere,
we can trust God has some wonderful
ways to show new care.
Though we're in pain,
God will work wonders again,
if we but trust, God will be there.

Though we're confused and alone
like that African stranger,
God's love can track us and find us,
a true desert ranger.
No matter what,
hold to this life-giving thought:
God stays to help through each danger.

John Campbell, August 2020



25 Psalm 91 re-treaded

Tune: Praise Him, Praise Him, Jesus our blessed redeemer, *MP 559*

Whosoever goes to our God for protection,
keeping close, where God's very shadow falls,
may say, surely, 'You are my refuge and fortress,
You I trust, yes, You are my all in all.'

For our God can free us from snares that trap us,
rescue us from pestilence and disease.

Always, God will spread out the wings of protection,
cov'ring, caring, rescuing those who call.

Do not fear the terrors unleashed in the night hours.

Do not fear the arrows that fly by day.

Do not fear the pestilence stalking the darkness.

Fear no evils met in the light of day.

Though a thousand fall at your side in battle,

though ten thousand, death will not come your way.

What you'll see is God on the move all around you,

God ensuring wickedness must repay.

But because you take God as saviour and refuge,

making God your dwelling place, house and home,

there's no evil that can intrude and destroy you,

nought can touch you, no matter where you roam.

God will send out angels with charge to guard you,

they'll ensure that you do not come to harm;

when you fall they'll come with strong hands to enfold you,

lest, somehow, you hurt your foot on a stone.

By God's grace, you'll overcome lions and adders,
fierce opponents conquer with faith-filled pray'r.
God says, 'I will always protect and deliver
those who love me, those who know I am there.
When you call me, always I'll stop to listen,
rescue you from trouble and hurt and scare.
You who love me, I will protect and give honour,
all life long I'll show you my saving care!'

John Campbell, September 2020

Whilst Covid struts

26

Tune: Nearer my God to Thee

*A response for Covid times to Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem,
'We wear the mask'*

Whilst Covid struts the land,
we wear a mask;
with others close at hand,
we wear a mask.
Always, for safety's sake,
with life and health at stake,
do this, make no mistake:
we wear a mask.

When bullies mock and shame,
once more a mask;
to face their savage game,
we show a mask.
Though we may hurt inside,
our wounds and pain we'll hide;
outside, let calm reside,
our safety mask.

When we ourselves dislike,
once more a mask;
too scared to put things right,
we take a mask;
sadly, ourselves deceive,
despite what we believe,
hide, though it won't relieve;
we wear a mask.

Christ came to share our life,
wearing no mask;
true friend through all its strife,
wearing no mask.
Openly, for us all,
suff'ring, yet walking tall,
rescuing those who fall,
Christ wore no mask.

Then, when our God we meet,
we'll have no mask;
embraced, restored, complete,
we'll have no mask;
left with no hidden zone,
facing God's gaze alone,
knowing as we are known,
we'll need no mask.

John Campbell, October 2020



Where's the deception?

Tune: Blessed Assurance

Musings on Psalm 73.

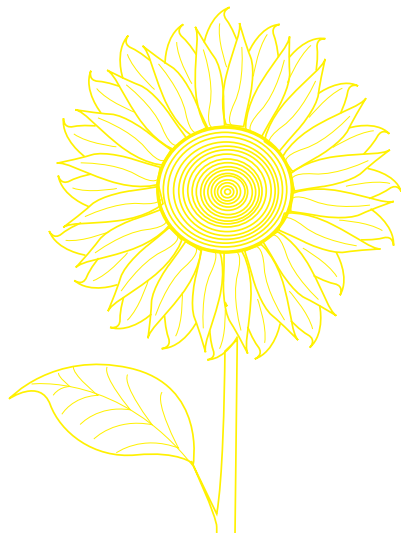
Where's the deception, where is the truth?
 What's just delusion, what brings us life?
 Is faith false comfort cov'ring up pain,
 or is true hope here, honest and sane?

**God of the journey, walk with us now,
 help us be honest, grappling somehow,
 search life's conundrums, 'til truth comes clear;
 here, through the struggle, help us draw near.**

When super-rich folk get richer still
 whilst poor folk die from Covid until
 there seems no justice, kindness or care,
 is faith delusion, is God still there?

Maybe the truth is not what it seems,
 maybe the world just offers false dreams?
 Maybe true value comes through the pain,
 uncov'ring worth, as faith lives again?

John Campbell, October 2020



28 Responding to Psalm 136 in a time of uncertainty

Tune: Monkland, *MP 415*

Let us with a gladsome mind
offer praise, for God is kind;
God's great mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

God's creative flair was sound,
wonders blossomed all around;
though we might destroy it all,
God will help us, should we call.

Though we walk through deep distress,
lost within life's wilderness;
seen or unseen, God is there,
through each struggle, God breathes care.

Even when some tragedy
wrecks our life relentlessly,
God still waits and watches us,
silent friend who makes no fuss.

Then, should hope grow strong once more,
opening a blessed new door,
God will lead us safely through,
help us do what we must do.

Let us then, with gladsome mind,
offer praise, for God is kind;
God's great mercies still endure,
ever faithful, ever sure.

John Campbell, October 2020

So strangely together

Tune: St Denio, *MP 327*

A song for virtual worship in lockdown

So strangely together, though each is alone,
our voices sing singly yet blend round your throne.
Your Spirit engulfs us wherever we are;
you gather and bless us, those close and those far.

For now, in our worship, we'll meet and we'll share;
all bask in your presence, all sharing in pray'r.
We'll glimpse one another, hear voices we know,
come close as one people, let fellowship grow.

So, speak to us gathered and speak to each one,
send comfort, send challenge, let fresh blessings run;
unstopper our bottles of hope, faith and joy,
replenish, renew us, each dark fear destroy.

Though phones and computers fall silent again
your presence will linger to bless and defend,
keep lively the mem'ry of time spend as one,
to strengthen each household 'til lockdown is done.

John Campbell, November 2020



30 What if Jesus

Tune: Regent's Square, MP 175

I was asked to introduce a Bible study on Jesus' use of Jonah. I found an amazing book by David Benjamin Blower called Sympathy for Jonah. This song was a result ...

What if Jesus found in Jonah
help to understand God's call,
struggling with his own resistance,
wrestling God within his soul?
Did the prophet's independence
fire him as he sought God's goal?

Maybe Jesus, watching Jonah
sinking, suff'ring in the deep,
sensed his path as God's own servant
would be painful, harsh and steep;
serving God is all-consuming:
never easy, never cheap.

Was it watching Jonah walking
to the empire's cruel heart,
speaking truth to ruthless power
that inspired his own, brave part?
Facing temple, facing empire,
honesty, devoid of art.

Did he see how Jonah struggled
with God's love for Nineveh –
saw there God's impassion'd hope that
we could love our enemy?
Only love that knows no limit
can renew us, set us free.

Watching Jonah's interruption
of the empire's evil ways
may have set Christ's ideas racing
as he sought to preach and praise;
God's own Kingdom, interrupting,
will proclaim the end of days!

Watching Jesus, watching Jonah,
can we see our way ahead –
turn from mischief, graft and evil,
taking God's own way instead?
Follow Jesus, follow Jonah,
only walk where they have led.

John Campbell, November 2020



31 Gracious God, show mercy now

Tune: Llanfair (Jesus Christ is risen today), *MP 357*
A sort of remix of Psalm 51:1-17. When we get back to shared singing, this may be sung antiphonally.

Gracious God, show mercy now; blot out my transgressions.
Wash away my sins, somehow; cleanse me from my failure.
For I can't forget my wrong; my faults sit before me.
I have failed you all along; you could just deplore me.

You seek truth-filled honesty in my inward being.
God, now cleanse the heart of me, 'till it's brightly shining.
Let my once-crushed bones rejoice; mended by new gladness.
Turn, God, from my sins, by choice; end my sin-bought sadness.

God, create my heart anew, fill me with your Spirit.
Keep me close my whole life through, don't withdraw your Spirit.
Then I'll help when others fail, help them turn and seek you.
Your deliv'rance we will hail, freedom songs will greet you.

For you wish no sacrifice, save each broken spirit;
each sick heart you'll not despise, rather you will cure it.
So, forgiving God, we'll sing, joyful praises sharing;
grateful for the love you bring, your relentless caring.

John Campbell, November 2020

Bare branches stark

Tune: On Christ the solid rock I stand, *MP 473*

Bare branches stark against the dawn
yet sing creation's constant song;
though naked, stripped of life, forlorn,
they promise life can be reborn.

**Great God of Hope, to you we call,
'Revive, restore, renew us all!'**

Once, on bare branches, wracked with pain,
You hung, to bring us life again;
though naked, stripped, of life forlorn,
undone, so we might be reborn.

Like branches bare, now locked away,
we long to see a bright new day
where we may meet and greet and stay,
together share and sing and pray.

Christ, bring for us that bright new dawn
where we rejoin creation's song;
regrown, re-leafed, of sadness shorn,
refilled, reworked, through You reborn.

John Campbell, January 2021

33 Though life's loom stands

Tune: Abbots Leigh R&S 530, MP 187

A friend asked me to preach at her induction (on Zoom) to a new ministry post. She chose these readings: John 1.1-14 and Ephesians 3.14-20.

She also chose the theme of weaving people together. This song sort of came with the sermon ...

Though life's loom stands strangely silent
under Covid's crushing sway,
even now fresh links are weaving,
friendships growing day by day.
Separation keeps us homebound,
yet our words and thoughts can play,
zooming, texting, mailing, sharing –
church can live another way.

Still, the Word that spoke existence,
Word of life that made it all,
works within us, through us, round us,
Christ our light, our gift, our call.
Even when the times unsettle,
Christ stays locked down deep within,
rooting, grounding, love-enabling;
strength to weather what life brings.

Still the love of Christ keeps weaving
stories, people, hopes and pray'r.
weaving patterns unpredicted,
deftly works with skill and care;
through these times and times hereafter,
may Christ's loomcraft never cease,
binding, blending, mixing, making,
weaving justice, joy and peace.

*John Campbell for Bridget Banks' induction as
URC Southern Synod Moderator*

You felt the pain in Galilee

Tune: Amazing Grace or Martyrdom

A Covid-time prayer song.

You felt the pain in Galilee,
you touched, you healed, you cared,
no matter who was in distress,
each agony you shared.

Today, breach ev'ry locked-down house
where mental anguish grows,
bring peace, renewal, calm and hope,
upturning fears and woes.

Work ev'ry shift with those who care,
who risk themselves to serve;
protect, revive, re-strengthen them
to live their hope with verve.

Inspire the minds now striving hard
to find vaccine and cure;
let science serve, let passion drive,
'till worldwide help is sure.

Today, Lord, sit in ICUs,
beside each lonely bed;
sit unprotected, human, close,
for us, be there, instead.

And linger daily, through the grief,
with all who mourn and weep;
for jagged hurts and missed farewells,
let healing streams run deep.

Brave Christ of dark Gethsemane,
we know you understand;

tho' hurts, tho' fears, tho' pains surround,
hold each within your hand.

John Campbell, February 2021

35 A mystical moment

Tune: The Bard of Armagh / Streets of Laredo
Mark 9.2-12.

A mystical moment
high up on the mountain;
Moses, Elijah
and Jesus were there:
The Law and the Prophets
affirming the Gospel,
prepare for the sorrows
our Saviour would share.

A mystical moment
high up on the mountain;
God's very voice now
spoke up for the Son:
affirming, embracing
his firm resolution
to offer himself so
we all might be one.

Grant mystical moments
to help us all follow,
facing our problems,
resisting our fear:
give rich reassurance,
share strength for our weakness,
that here where we struggle
Your help will stay near.

John Campbell, March 2021

Both shut away and shielding

Tune: Aurelia (the Church's one foundation)

Mark 14-16.

Both shut away and shielding,
locked down by risk and fear,
these once-brave, bold disciples,
let no-one venture near.

The fracas in the garden,
the torch-lit night arrest,
had drained them of all daring,
their worst upturned their best.

Then stories of the trials
and crowds demanding death,
of public shame and spitting,
now crushed their frail self-worth.
The absence of a rescue,
the dark death died alone,
brought utter dereliction
as Christ's cries echoed on.

The women, still, were watching:
they risked; they heard; they saw;
and speechlessly they witnessed
with crucifying awe.

Persistent, like key workers,
they ventured to the tomb
to do the needful duties,
but found, instead, a womb.

Cooperating evil
conspired to crush and kill,
resisting God's intrusion,
defying God's own will;
yet death itself was helpless

to end the cause of love;
the tomb, the womb, was open,
with hope born from above!

Christ's rising, like a vaccine,
remade the world outside,
brought hope of resurrection
to those locked down, destroyed.
This new world would be diff'rent
but in it each could heal,
and sharing resurrection,
help prove Christ's love is real.

John Campbell, March 2021

37 O God who longs to make us whole

Tune: Kingsfold, MP 275ii

A hymn celebrating the founding and work of the NHS. Written in 1998 for a special service in Leicester Cathedral, celebrating the NHS 50th anniversary.

O God who longs to make us whole in body, spirit, mind,
we praise you for the hopes and dreams you share
with humankind:
for those in pow'r whom you inspired to share the
nation's wealth,
that rich and poor alike might know security and health.

We give you thanks for those who strive that knowledge
might increase;
for all in office, ward or home whose efforts never cease;
for those who give of wealth or self, who care or who campaign,
and all who bravely watch and wait to share your people's pain;

for those in countless walks of life who daily work and strive to keep each other safe and well, and help the weak to thrive; for those who go beyond the call in myriad other ways, and keep alive the light of hope in dark and cheerless days.

O give us grace to trust your love when hope remains concealed,
to watch and pray beside the ones who are not swiftly healed.
And grant us faith, when death itself provides its own release,
to trust in your undying love to give them perfect peace.

Give us, O God, your loving zeal to comfort, heal and save,
to care for one another 'from the cradle to the grave'.
Then north to south, and east to west, let love and
hope extend,
until the universe is whole and justice knows no end.

Michael Forster (1946)



Sunflowers & Thistles

Praise songs and protests

“I have been writing songs like this for over a quarter of a century now. In the foreword to *Songs to shake us up*, I described my songs as ‘intentionally specific, contextual, immediate and ephemeral’. That description still applies.

“This new context seemed to require new songs too, even if people could only read the words or hum them over to themselves.

“The church needs to sing, and to sing about the things that sit before us now.”

John Campbell



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