

It was being asked to be a holiday relief home group leader that shaped my setting of The Lord's Prayer. The group watched a video interview on The Lord's Prayer given by Pete Greig of 24/7 Prayer as part of an Alpha course. The session included the word 'hallowed', and this bothered me, because I realised that even contemporary versions of the prayer use this antique word, but I wouldn't personally call anything or anyone 'hallowed' however precious they might be to me. So I thought I would look into it, because it might provide a diversion from the strain of trying to be holy for all the 90 minutes of the meeting.

Researching 'hallowed' led me to the Kaddish, which is the Hebrew Prayer on which The Lord's Prayer is based, and still very much in use today. It begins 'May His great name be exalted, and sanctified is God's great name.' That didn't really provide a complete answer to what 'hallowed' means in relation to God's name, because the Lord's Prayer could have employed either of those words, so I researched the origins of that phrase and found it in the Book of Ezekiel (of 'dry bones' fame), and in the story of Gog and Magog where God proclaims to a threatened Israel his furious response to her enemy, and declares (38:23) 'So I will display my greatness and my holiness and make myself known in the eyes of many nations. Then they shall know that I am the Lord.' So, following the salutation, the first phrase of The Lord's Prayer is part of God's response to those who would harm his people, and the overtones to the word 'hallowed' are far reaching. It was a short step for me to see the choir as representing God's people and writing simple music for them that caught the timeless and awe-filled 'hallowed' atmosphere. They sing just the first few words of the prayer, close to the 'Kaddish'.

The revolution in The Lord's Prayer is that Jesus takes a prayer that is respectfully at a distance and makes it up close and personal. That's why the choir, before they launch into the Kaddish sing 'Abba' – 'daddy' – the first word to be heard, and which introduces the soprano soloist. She sings the whole Lord's Prayer and makes the Father a one-to-one daddy from whom we ask our daily needs. I wanted to make her music contrast with the choir's conventional harmonies, so I have thought in terms of chords to colour the individual words and phrases, rather than letting the harmonies progress as they might in a hymn tune.

I set the music in a rhythm of 5 beats in a bar – five happens to be an important number in both Jewish and Christian mystical symbolism and the rhythm adds to the other-worldly feel of the piece, but I didn't want it to be 'up there' entirely, and I had one of those moments where something just came into my mind out of nowhere. I recall the great composer Stravinsky stating that he 'was the vessel through which' – one of his great works – 'passed.', in other words he just wrote down what came to him out of the ether. The off-the-wall thought of bongo drums just arrived with me, and I have added a rhythm for them that repeats itself gently but continually, slightly at odds with the heavenly music above, but a reminder of the treadmill down here on earth. My setting of the prayer ends with not one but nine distinct 'Amen's' – an ecstatic response to the prayer which is so simple but whose dimensions are so universal.