

Sweet word of consolation

Words: Hilary Jolly

Music: Richard Powell

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Sweet word of consolation

The writer of these words was a member of our congregation, and wrote the song to accompany a sermon series on the book of Isaiah, from which many of the images are drawn (for example, the 'wings of eagles' of Isaiah 40:31, and the 'bruised reed' of Isaiah 42:3). The song is structured around different aspects of the 'word' (variously 'consolation', 'vindication', 'dereliction'). This word is neither vainly spoken, nor empty to return (Isaiah 55:11). The song speaks of the loving purposes of God to an exiled wayward people, specifically through the work of the suffering servant, who will speak the 'word of dereliction' from the cross (Matthew 27:46) and bear his people's sin. It was originally written to the tune of 'The church's one foundation', which is optimistic in tone but a shade too 'matter of fact' for this subject matter, particularly in verse four. I wanted a more reflective contemporary tune. The break before the 'word' is sung in the second bar of each verse is intended to create a dramatic pause before the particular 'word' is announced, and thus to give it further emphasis.

How to make it go

We have played this tune either in its given key (D major) or in the lower key of B major (in which its reflective qualities benefit from the lower register). It needs to be played quite slowly for the words to be savoured. We normally pare back the accompaniment for the first half of verse four (normally just piano, playing chord changes only) and bring instruments back in for the second half, sometimes repeating those last four lines.

Placement in a meeting

This is an intense song, both musically and lyrically, and we have therefore tended to use it towards the end of a service, either during the distribution of the Lord's Supper, or following the sermon, though it would not generally be the final thing we sang. It could also follow moments of penitence and confession as an assurance of forgiveness and continued grace.

Richard Powell

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Thoughtfully ♩ = 88

G/B A/C# D G A7 Bm G/B A/C# D A sus4 A

1. Sweet word of con-so-la-tion; this God will not re-ject

5 G/B A/C# D G A7 Bm G/B A/C# D A sus4 A

his way-ward, sin-ful na-tion, yet loved and yet e-lect.

9 D/F# A/G G D/F# G/B D/F# A/G G D/A

Though ex-iled now and tear-ful, their strength he shall re-store,

13 Bm G/B A/C# D G A sus4 A D

till they, the faint and fear-ful on wings of ea-gles soar.

17 A sus4 A D/F# 1, 2, 3. G D/A 4. G A sus4 D

2. Great word of vindication!
The promised Chosen One,
sin's scourge and condemnation,
God's servant and his Son,
yet in his power remembers
a broken people's need.
He will not quench the embers,
nor snap a drooping reed.

3. Dear word from heaven proceeding
like winter snow and rain,
in silent blessing feeding
the summer fields of grain!
God's word shall not be broken.
The faithful heart will learn
it is not vainly spoken,
nor empty to return.

4. Oh word of dereliction!
The Servant meekly bore
their sin and their affliction
in pain and sorrow sore.
Yet word of all most glorious!
He is their risen Lord
who will return victorious;
God's true Incarnate Word.

Based on Isaiah 40-55
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