

# All 150 Psalms to Be Sung in One Weekend

## In the News

Three years ago, Tido Visser, managing director of the Netherlands Chamber Choir, viewed a small exhibit about the biblical psalms in a church where the chamber choir was practicing. As it happened, the choir was singing an arrangement of one of the psalms, and the confluence of the music with the visual exhibit sparked in Visser an idea: Why not have the choir perform all 150 psalms, set to music by 150 composers, representing over 1,000 years of choral music, in a single weekend?

That is now set to happen on the first weekend of September in Utrecht, Netherlands. An additional such weekend performance of all the psalms will take place at Lincoln Center in New York City in November and another in Brussels next March. The Netherlands Chamber Choir will be joined by The Tallis Scholars, the Norwegian Soloists' Choir and The Choir of Trinity Wall Street. All four groups will sing together at each of the three presentations.

One factor that favored Visser's idea is that over the centuries, a great many composers, including Bach, Mozart, Bruckner, Beethoven, Palestrina, Josquin, Rossi, Gretchaninov, Schumann, Rachmaninov and numerous others, have all set psalms to music, and contemporary composers, including Americans David Lang and Nico Muhly, have contributed others.

Another factor was more personal. Visser said that together, the rehearsing choir and the psalm exhibit opened a new world for him. "Firstly the texts, these texts -- some as much as 3,000 years old -- came across to me as if they were written yesterday. They were about me. About my own hope, about my wife's joy, my son's comfort, my friend's sadness. But even more than that, they dealt with what fills the newspapers: the White House, Red Square, Brussels or Syria. They described the disappointed voter, the refugee's fear, the oligarch's greed, the leader's tyranny." Thus, Visser concluded, the themes of the psalms remain keenly relevant today.

The performances will also provide venues for lectures, workshops and exhibits regarding the psalms.

Apparently, Visser is not the only one to conceive of having musical settings of all 150 psalms. Though unrelated to Visser's choir project, there is a nonprofit organization called The Psalms Project whose mission is to raise money and awareness for world missions by setting all of the psalms to music. According to that group's website, "All of the profits generated by the music, concerts and merchandise is donated to Christian mission efforts focused on sharing the Gospel of forgiveness of sins, healing, and deliverance through faith in Jesus Christ."

Visser said the "psalms are not only a source of wise lessons in life, but also still a source of inspiration." He also noted the connecting power of song and the humanity of the psalms. "That's the magic of choral singing," said Visser, "it connects us, it unifies us. And if there is one thing we need in this world, it's precisely that."

**The arts are often viewed as ways in which we can transcend differences, connect spiritually, and experience the Holy. How do songs, poetry, and works of art figure into our practice of faith?**

Here are some Bible verses to guide your discussion:

**Matthew 26:30**

*When they had sung the hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. (For context, read 26:26-30.)*

This verse is from Mark's narration of the Last Supper, which was a Passover meal. The "hymn" Jesus and the disciples sang, was in fact a psalm. An essential part of the Passover ritual was the singing of the *Hallel*. *Hallel* means 'Praise God!' And the *Hallel* consisted of Psalms 113-118, which are all praising psalms.

**Questions:** How are songs that we sing in church declarations of our beliefs? How does the "sung" part of our religious practice help us? Do people talk during the prelude and postlude? Should they?

### **Ephesians 5:18-19**

*Do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery; but be filled with the Spirit, as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs among yourselves, singing and making melody to the Lord in your hearts ... (For context, read 5:15-20.)*

Here is Paul, advising the Christians in Ephesus to be filled with the Spirit as they sing psalms and other music of faith.

**Question:** How do various art forms, including singing, help you to be filled with the Spirit? What songs, prayers, poems, or artwork in church is most helpful to you?

### **Exodus 35:31-33, 35**

*[God] has filled him with divine spirit, with skill, intelligence, and knowledge in every kind of craft, to devise artistic designs, to work in gold, silver, and bronze, in cutting stones for setting, and in carving wood, in every kind of craft. [...] He has filled them with skill to do every kind of work done by an artisan or by a designer or by an embroiderer in blue, purple, and crimson yarns, and in fine linen, or by a weaver—by any sort of artisan or skilled designer.*

Here we see Moses calling the people of Israel to use their artistic and creative gifts to build every part of the worship space and every item within it with precise instructions.

**Question:** Where does beauty and art belong in our faith? How can we justify spending large sums of money that could otherwise help the poor or needy in order to create beautiful spaces in which to worship?

### **Prayer for Joy in God's Creation (BCP p.814)**

O heavenly Father, who has filled the world with beauty:  
Open our eyes to behold your gracious hand in all your works;  
that, rejoicing in your whole creation, we may learn to serve  
you with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all  
things were made, your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.