



*A Reflection from Victoria Johnson, Canon Precentor. Vicky's work involves overseeing the music and worshipping life of York Minster and she reflects here on her sadness when the Choirs of the Minster had to stop singing, but also her hope that our united voices might bring new hope to the world.*

How can we keep from singing until we can sing again?

Like many other cathedrals and churches, we have said a temporary goodbye to our choristers and choirs. I have to admit, that when the music stopped, I cried. The beautiful music that sustains our daily worship in this magnificent building has been silenced for a while. The wondrous acoustic of York Minster which magnifies our music, no longer echoes with the sound of our song. Normally, this week, our choirs would be gearing up for one of the biggest sings of the year.

This year, we won't be able to gather in our churches to sing Psalm 22 on Maundy Thursday as the altar is stripped, or *When I survey the wondrous cross*, on Good Friday. We won't be huddled around the lighting of the fire on Easter Eve as the Exultet is sung. We won't be able to sing our way through Holy Week and Easter in the way that we normally would. This year we won't be singing as we process into a beautifully adorned Cathedral resplendent with the light of the resurrection.

Those of us who sing in churches, chapels and cathedrals have experienced a heart-wrenching loss. For those of us who sing, this is like losing part of who we are. Through our voices we are connected deeply to one another and to the place in which we daily offer our praise. We literally live and breathe into our lungs the beauty of holiness found in worship and music, we inhabit the church's liturgies in a very intimate way, and we are changed and transformed by the glory of Christ the Singer.

How will we sing the Lord's song in this strange land of silence and isolation? In some ways, I am reassured because music and song run through our lives, the music never stops. We can listen, we can sing-a-long, we can join in virtual choirs and we can sing on our own, in our kitchens and bathrooms. Song always bubbles up within us, how can we keep from singing? We *can* keep on singing of course, but I think we all long for the day when we can sing together again.

Isn't it funny how when we're apart we value being together? This feeling isn't just true for people who sing in choirs, it's true for all of us. We miss all of those things which bind us together with other people, which make us one body of many members, one choir of many voices.



Those who sing understand the power of making music together and the transformative effect it can have on those who participate and those who listen. IN our current situation it might feel like we are disembodied, disconnected and dispersed. WE might feel like a lonely voice looking for the melody which unites us with others voices, but if God is the Master Singer we know that our song is bound together in his. If we combine our voices, actually, virtually, metaphorically, through our prayers, through our compassion, through our efforts to serve and attend to the most vulnerable, we might come to know that we can also begin to sing together that new song, which the whole world will need to get through this crisis.

There's a song which has come to my mind many times this past few weeks, and it goes like this:

My life flows on in endless song;  
above earth's lamentation,  
I catch the sweet, though far off hymn  
that hails a new creation.

No storm can shake my inmost calm  
while to that Rock I'm clinging.  
Since Christ is Lord of heaven and earth,  
how can I keep from singing?