



Radio 4

**Sunday Worship  
from Trinity Church, Sutton  
Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2007 (0810-0850)**

**'An unutterable beauty'**

**The Revd Martin Camroux reflects on the quest to know the glory of God.**

**Leader: The Revd Mike Dales (Sutton Baptist Church)  
Preacher: The Revd Martin Camroux (Trinity Church, Sutton)  
Music Director: Stephen Haylett  
Organist: Joy Williams  
Producer Simon Vivian**

**BBC Radio 4. The quest to encounter the glory of God is the theme of our Sunday Worship this morning which comes from Trinity Church, Sutton. The service is introduced by The Reverend Martin Camroux and begins with the introit 'From the rising of the sun'.**

**~ CHOIR:**

From the rising of the sun (F.A.Gore Ouseley)

**~ THE REVD MARTIN CAMROUX:**

Good morning and welcome to Trinity Church, a striking neo-gothic building at the very centre of the London Borough of Sutton. We're a joint United Reformed and Methodist congregation and part of a local ecumenical partnership with Sutton Baptist Church and St Nicholas Parish Church. In this, our Centenary year, our membership includes people from 26 different nationalities, all united by the inclusive love of God. And so it is, with that love in our hearts, that we begin our worship this morning, which will be led by The Reverend Mike Dales, minister of Sutton Baptist Church.

**~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:**

In the freedom of the truth  
And in the spirit of love,

**~ ALL & MIKE:**

**We unite for the worship of God  
And the service of all.**

**~ CHOIR, CONGREGATION & ORGAN:**

**ALL**

1. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord!  
Unnumbered blessings, give my spirit voice;  
Tender to me the promise of his word;  
In God my Saviour shall my heart rejoice.

**LOWER VOICES**

2. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his name!  
Make known his might, the deeds his arm has done;  
His mercy sure, from age to age the same;  
His holy name - the Lord, the Mighty One.

**UPPER VOICES**

3. Tell out, my soul, the greatness of his might!  
Powers and dominions lay their glory by;  
Proud hearts and stubborn wills are put to flight,  
The hungry fed, the humble lifted high.

**ALL**

4. Tell out, my soul, the glories of his word!  
Firm is his promise, and his mercy sure.  
Tell out, my soul, the greatness of the Lord  
To children's children and for evermore!

(Tune: Woodlands; Words: Timothy Dudley-Smith)

**~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:**

Let us pray.

Holy and gracious God,  
you are greater than our minds can conceive,  
holier than our hearts can fathom,  
more lovely than our greatest hymns can express,  
more profound than our deepest thoughts,  
more loving than our tongues can tell.

Our minds are limited and our words are inadequate –  
compared to your greatness, we are very small.

“What are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”

Yet we approach you in worship knowing that we are accepted.

For you are also the God who has come to us in the humility and gentleness of Jesus Christ:

In his words we hear your word of acceptance;  
In his deeds we see your love in action;  
In his life, and death, and Risen presence, we perceive your presence.

And who, while with us here on earth, taught us how we might approach you in prayer saying:  
Our Father,

~ ALL & MIKE:

**Who art in Heaven, hallowed be Thy Name.  
Thy Kingdom Come, Thy will be done, On Earth as it is in Heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.  
For Thine is the Kingdom, the Power and the Glory for ever, Amen**

~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:

Help us, gracious God, to offer our best in worship and praise - worthy of all that you are. And so let us be changed.

Through Christ Jesus who is the very source of joy, and our window onto the glory of the Father.

~ ALL:  
Amen!

~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:

Asked what he would do if he were God for a day, Boris Johnson replied: "I think I would try a bit harder to prove my existence." Sometimes God can seem quite unreal, especially in those times of darkness or doubt that we all go through from time to time.

But there are moments in life when the eternal mysteries seem almost tangible. Moments of marvel awe and wonder, moments when we experience the numinous, the holy, [the Mysterium Tremendum,] even an unutterable beauty. For Elijah such a moment came in the sounds of silence.

~ READING (Robert Stewart):

A reading from the first book of Kings, chapter 19.

At that place [Elijah] came to a cave, and spent the night there. Then the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.'

He said, 'Go out and stand on the mountain before the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by.' Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a sound of sheer silence. When Elijah heard it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to him that said, 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' He answered, 'I have been very zealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away.' Then the Lord said to him, 'Go, return on your way to the wilderness of Damascus; when you arrive, you shall anoint Hazael as king over Aram.'  
(1 Kings 19:9-15)

**~ CHOIR, CONGREGATION & ORGAN:**

**ALL**

1. Dear Lord and Father of mankind,  
Forgive our foolish ways;  
Reclothe us in our rightful mind;  
In purer lives thy service find,  
In deeper reverence, praise.

**LOWER VOICES**

2. In simple trust like theirs who heard  
Beside the Syrian sea  
The gracious calling of the Lord,  
Let us, like them, without a word  
Rise up and follow thee.

**ALL**

3. O sabbath rest by Galilee!  
O calm of hills above,  
Where Jesus knelt to share with thee  
The silence of eternity,  
Interpreted by love!

**UPPER VOICES**

4. Drop thy still dews of quietness,  
Till all our strivings cease;  
Take from our souls the strain and stress,  
And let our ordered lives confess  
The beauty of thy peace.

**ALL**

5. Breathe through the heats of our desire  
Thy coolness and thy balm;  
Let sense be dumb, let flesh retire;  
Speak through the earthquake, wind, and fire,  
O still small voice of calm!

(Tune: Repton; Words: John Greenleaf Whittier)

**~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:**

So what can we make of these strange moments when something sacred seems to touch our life?  
What is certain is that, by all accounts, all sorts of people experience them, including many who are quite outside the Church, or indeed outside anything they would describe as faith. There are no adequate descriptions or explanations but poets do better than most. This is David Porter's poem: "The Search"

**~ READER (Deborah Wroe):**

She almost saw it once in a rose –  
a certain breath of wonder  
she looked again perhaps that was her mistake  
she should have gone on walking

and then again in mountain country  
she heard an echo again  
but it was muffled by thunder ear  
and she had no ear for music

In the years that followed she found it again and again  
In children that later got arrested on drugs charges  
flowers that died, animals that bit her;  
she almost had it by the hand in a symphony concert  
but even the music faded

and when she finally found it (she was one of the lucky ones)  
she found it in such a strange manner  
it came up behind her and spoke to her  
for a time she was frightened but at last she turned round  
and it knew her, it loved her it spoke her name  
it had always known her  
it was amazing it was perfect  
it was true, at last

**~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:**

Such moments are always mysteries. They are always inexplicable. But the Christian names the mystery – God. Sometimes in the still quietness or in ecstasy and wonder, God becomes real.

**~ CHOIR & ORGAN:**

God be in my head (Kevin Norbury)

**~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:**

Kevin Norbury's setting of 'God be in my Head'.

Our preacher this morning is the minister of Trinity Church, The Revd Martin Camroux.

**~ THE REVD MARTIN CAMROUX:**

I recently read about a man who wanted a revelation from God. "I want a revelation" he told his minister "I want God to speak to me simple and straight". His minister was rather puzzled as to what advice to give. Finally the minister said "Look the next time it rains, go outside, look up into the heavens, and ask God for a revelation".

A few days later the heavens opened. There was torrential rain. The man came back to the minister utterly sodden, dripping water everywhere. "I followed your advice" he said "I stood in the rain for over an hour, looked up into the skies asking for a revelation from God. Nothing happened. Nothing at all. The rain pelted down on my face, the water ran down my neck, I just felt ignorant and stupid". The minister replied "What greater revelation did you need?"

Occasionally you come across religious believers who seem to imagine that everything about God is plain to them, sometimes only to them. Nothing could be more foolish. None of us should try to tell anyone who God is. St Augustine said it long ago: "Anything which your intellect is able to understand is too small to be God". In the Hebrew tradition God is the mysterious life beyond all life whose name is so holy it can never be pronounced. It's what the First World War chaplain and poet Studdert-

Kennedy meant when he spoke of God as “the unutterable beauty”. God is beyond our ability to know or describe. *God* is the word we use to name a mystery.

I always like to agree with Richard Dawkins whenever I can. In a debate with the geneticist Francis Collins, he affirmed his atheism and then added, “If there is a God, it’s going to be a whole lot bigger and a whole lot more incomprehensible than any theologian of any religion has ever proposed.” Exactly!

It is not our job to tell the world what God is. All we can do is talk about the moments when this mysterious reality has touched our lives. And the astonishing thing is that this seems to be universally known in every culture that we know anything at all about.

So here is Elijah in an obscure story about a long forgotten conflict. In turmoil, fleeing for his life he makes his way to Mount Sinai. Some amazing natural phenomenon occur. Wind, an earthquake, fire. And then he hears what – a “Still small voice”. Or in a modern translation “a sound of sheer silence.” No voice from heaven. Just silence. But in the silence - God. And as R S Thomas asks: “Whose silence is as eloquent as his?”

Why does this resonate so powerfully? Because sometimes in the silence haven’t we heard a still small voice speak? I was talking to a man at a wedding reception recently. “I’m not really a religious man” he said. “But the other day I was up Ben Moore on the Isle of Mull. And there was no sound except the wind. And for the first time in my life I thought I knew why people believe in God”. After another such moment also in the Hebrides a poet wrote: “In such a place as this the very wind is like a prayer”.

But of course it doesn’t have to be mountains. John Hick is one of the world’s great philosophers of religion.

*"It occurred, of all places on the top deck of a bus in the middle of the city of Hull... All descriptions are inadequate. But it was as though the skies opened up and light poured down and filled me with a sense of overwhelming joy in response to an immense transcendence, goodness and love. I remember I couldn't help smiling broadly - smiling back as it were, at God - though if any of the other passengers were looking they must have felt that I was a lunatic, grinning at nothing."*

The religious life is a call to explore a mystery which goes further than our understanding. Whenever we come to the fringe of the eternal there is, as Virgil put it:

"A deep beyond the deep  
And a height beyond the height  
And our hearing is not hearing  
And our seeing is not sight".

So our thinking about God is never more than tentative. Our theologies are provisional, always open to change. Our creeds – at best attempts to trace out the edges of the mystery. “The great God is;” said the liberal American preacher and founder of Riverside Church Harry Emerson Fosdick, “our partial ideas of him are partly true”.

But God is real. God can be experienced. God can be known. The sacred is a reality. It is not just that we can believe in God with our minds we can glimpse the glory because, as Gerald Manley Hopkins put it: “the world is charged with the grandeur of God. It will flame out like shining from shook foil”. There is power, marvel, mystery. There is a small voice. There is fire that can ignite our spirit. There is “unutterable beauty”. Like Studdert Kennedy we can cry out “I must have God. This life’s too

dull without.” Ours is God whose truth is greater than we can imagine but who, in his inexplicable love, has come to us with amazing grace. When John Wesley was dying he cried out twice “The best of all is God is with us”. That discovery can change your life.

**~ CHOIR & ORGAN:**

The Father's Love (Simon Lole)

**~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:**

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Remain in my love” – words of Jesus from St John’s gospel, which must surely express the sentiments of John Wesley as he lay dying, set to music by Simon Lole.

And so to our prayers.

**~ PRAYERS (Deborah Wroe or second female reader):**

Let us pray.

Gracious and Mysterious God,

“...As the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are your ways higher than our ways  
and your thoughts than our thoughts ...”

You have placed within our hearts an unquenchable curiosity about the universe we inhabit and you have given us the minds with which to explore it:

We have been able to ponder the secrets of the atom, the intricacies of our genetic make-up, the cold beauty of the cosmos. Year upon year, we push back the frontiers of knowledge and understanding.

Yet there are some things which are too mysterious, too profound, too deep, too wonderful for even the greatest mind to understand, or even express.

You, O God, are shrouded in mystery and hidden in beauty -  
“Immortal, invisible, God only wise,  
In light inaccessible, hid from our eyes ...”

Despite all our understanding of the universe, you are the boundary we cannot cross to.

And yet, you have made yourself known. You have chosen to reveal some of your Mystery to us. You have deigned to pull back the curtain that hides you so that we catch a glimpse of your wonder.

We thank you for the revelation you have given, for the almost imperceptible signs of your presence which we can grasp. Above all we thank you for Jesus of Nazareth, who is the very image of the invisible God.

Help us, and all people, to see the signs of your glory – whether in earthquake, wind, fire, or still small voice. And so to know you, the God of Heaven who has made himself known upon earth.

And in knowing you, may we love you and serve you:

in the poor and in the rich,  
in the happy and in the sad,  
in the confident and in the frightened,

in the healthy and in the sick,  
in the newly born and in the bereaved,  
in the peaceful and in those who face a sea of troubles,  
in the believer and in those who do not know what to believe.

Gracious God, accept our prayers in Christ, for you are always ready to do far more than we can ever expect or imagine.

**~ ALL:  
Amen**

**~ THE REVD MIKE DALES:**

Of all Christian hymns, none speaks more powerfully of the presence of God than Charles Wesley's "Love Divine, all loves excelling"

**~ CHOIR, CONGREGATION & ORGAN:**

**UNISON**

1. Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven to earth come down,  
Fix in us your humble dwelling,  
All thy faithful mercies crown.

**HARMONY**

Jesu, thou art all compassion,  
Pure, unbounded love thou art;  
Visit us with thy salvation,  
Enter every trembling heart.

**HARMONY**

2. Come, almighty to deliver,  
Let us all thy life receive;  
Suddenly return, and never,  
Never more thy temples leave.  
Thee we would be always blessing,  
Serve thee as thy hosts above,  
Pray, and praise thee, without ceasing,  
Glory in thy perfect love.

**UNISON**

3. Finish then thy new creation,  
Pure and spotless let us be;  
Let us see thy great salvation,  
Perfectly restored in thee:  
Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before thee,  
Lost in wonder, love, and praise!

(Tune: Blaenwern; Word: Charles Wesley)

**~ THE REVD MARTIN CAMROUX:**

O Lord, take our mouths and speak through them;  
Take our hands and work through them,  
Take our minds and think through them,  
And take our hearts and set them on fire.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all evermore.

**~ All:  
Amen**

**~ ORGAN:  
Choral Song (S.S. Wesley)**

**Sunday Worship came from Trinity Church, Sutton. The leader was The Reverend Mike Dales and the preacher The Reverend Martin Camroux. The music director was Stephen Haylett and the organist was Joy Williams. The producer was Simon Vivian.**

**Next week, Sunday Worship comes from St Mary's Episcopal Cathedral, Glasgow.**