1970, a good year for music

May I speak in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

1970 was a good year, a great year, for rock and pop music! That is 50 years ago. It was the year that The Beatles released Grammy award-winning ‘Let it Be’ and American folk-rock duo Simon and Garfunkel released another Grammy winning song ‘Bridge Over Troubled Water’.

Pop music epitomises the ephemeral. Pop music comes and goes and mostly it is forgotten. But, I want to defend the lyricism of these two timeless songs 1970 by The Beatles and Simon and Garfunkel.

Paul Simon, of Simon and Garfunkel, is considered to be one of the greatest lyricists of the 20th Century, writing lyrics to songs like ‘The Sound of Silence’, which includes lines like ‘Hello darkness, my old friend’, and ‘Graceland’, which includes ‘But I’ve reason to believe; We both will be received; In Graceland’.

Bridge Over troubled Water was Simon and Garfunkel’s final original studio album together and even this masterpiece contains within it a record of the struggles they were having as a duo. Garfunkel thought Paul Simon had not written enough for the song, so the third verse beginning ‘Sail on silver girl’ was added. This album is still considered a masterpiece of modern music and was a world-wide smash hit for them. But read the lyrics as poetry and there is a deep challenge there for how we should be to a friend in need:

‘When you’re weary, feeling small
When tears are in your eyes, I’ll dry them all
I’m on your side, oh, when times get rough
And friends just can’t be found
Like a bridge over troubled water
I will lay me down’

In that same year, English rock band The Beatles also released their final studio album Let it Be. It had been recorded the year before and was then released after Abbey Road. By the time the album was released, the group had already broken up. Yet what a gift are these lyrics, these words by singer-songwriter Paul McCartney:
When I find myself in times of trouble
Mother Mary comes to me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.
And in my hour of darkness
She is standing right in front of me
Speaking words of wisdom, let it be.
Let it be, let it be.
Whisper words of wisdom, let it be.’

Paul McCartney’s mother was Mary McCartney and he has said at times that the song is about her. At other times he has said it is up to the listener to work out whom the song is about.

Both McCartney and Simon are adept at using the language and imagery of faith in their music and both these songs pay their respects to Gospel and faith traditions in their melodies and lyrics.

These songs like so many others are an ongoing gift – their words both sustain and challenge. This is not to say that we do not have a huge repository of powerful faith-filled lyrics in the canon of hymns – we do – but pop music at times can give even hymn lyrics a run for their money.

What great rock, pop or folk songs from 1970 inspire you in your faith and mission and why?

Author’s note: I had some somewhat gentle pushback for not including Don McLean’s ‘American Pie’ in this reflection. Alas, this classic was released in 1971.

Sunday Devotions • Monday 24 February 2020 • By The Rev’d Scott Windred

Sunday Devotion: 1 March 2020, First Sunday in Lent

Forgive me Lord, for I have sinned

Main Readings: Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7; Psalm 32; Romans 5.12-21; Matthew 4.1-11

Supplementary Readings: Psalm 91; 2 Corinthians 10.1-7; Exodus 24.1-11; Psalm 51.1-17; Matthew 26.1-35

“Then I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not hide my iniquity; I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,’ and you forgave the guilt of my sin.” (Psalm 32.5)

I once asked my grandfather how he thought we could understand spiritual maturity. His response was that “spiritual growth has to do with knowing who God is, and knowing who we are.” We went on to talk about how regular repentance is part of this knowing God and knowing self. God is God – perfect, almighty, eternal, Creator and King. We are not perfect, but we are still loved as his children. We may enter his throne-room confidently – but with reverence and awe.

When we begin to understand these truths, it makes living this Psalm possible. We sin against our all-powerful and all-knowing God, but there is no need to be afraid of acknowledging our sin to Him. In this Psalm, it seems that repentance has not come easily to David. Before David came before God, he was “groaning all day long”. But then he stops wrestling and decides to let go and declare his iniquities. David now willingly confesses his transgressions.

In Lent, we come before God in humility, reverence, and with a deep sense of awe – but also as God’s children whom God loves, cares for, and showers with grace and mercy. This Lent, let us acknowledge our sin against God to God, as well as to our brothers and sisters for our transgressions against them.

Through God’s perfect grace and mercy, anything is possible.