



## GRADUATION ADDRESS | Friday 06 December 2019

---

### Making Songs for Sinner/Saints

♪ *Come Hither ye children O come one and all  
to visit the manger in Bethlehem's stall  
and see what the Father in heaven so true  
has done to prepare a bright Christmas for you.*

When I was a child, in the week after Christmas, after tea our family would sit around the Christmas tree and sing carols (acapella of course – no-one played an instrument). Including that old German one, a favourite of mine. I can still hear Dad's voice singing it.

I grew up in a Lutheran family, weekly worship. I don't remember a time when I didn't love hymns. I also had older siblings who were fans of '50s pop songs and I loved singing them too: The Great Pretender, A White Sports Coat, Bye Bye love.

I was going to be a minister, but an angel called Dorothy helped me find a better way! Not preaching sermons, but singing songs. The songs I write are predominantly to nurture the faith of Christians. – just like the sermons that ministers preach!

Dorothy is going to join me for some song bits in what follows. Dorothy and I will celebrate our 50th Wedding Anniversary in 2 weeks' time. My journey in music would have been utterly different, may not have even happened, if we hadn't got together.

#### 1. Let's sing the Faith

♪ *Father welcomes all his children to his family through his son;  
Father giving his salvation, life forever has been won.  
Little children, come to me, for my kingdom is of these;  
life and love I have to give, mercy for your sin.*

Again and again we need to remind each other what it is we believe, on what are we basing our life's journey. This is always true but especially in a society that doesn't believe in the God who makes the world. It's easy to lose the plot. So, let's sing the basics: God loves us, one and all,



includes us, no matter who we are, and baptism tells us that God has decided to make us part of the family.

## 2. Let's use singable tunes and plain language

♪ *So I'm walkin' down the road, ... walkin' down the road with you.*

If we want to encourage people to sing together, we need to provide tunes that are singable, not always simple, but ones that people easily pick up and readily relate to.

Likewise, if we want to communicate with songs we need to use language that people understand. And we're in Australia so let's sing about it, in ways Australians understand.

♪ *Here we are, under this sky – oh, what a land to live in.  
How did we come to be in such a place?  
A sky that talks day after day, telling of endless glory,  
the glory of God, the work of his own hands.*

*But how do we say our thankyou's? Anything would be far too small.  
How do we show we care? We could try to share*

Let's talk plainly, sing plainly. Jesus used the language of the day and everyday images. Let's follow him. God became a human being: completely God, but completely human. It baffles me that so many want to use language, lyrics and music, which tries to take us somewhere else – up there, out there. It can't be done - God's here, now.

## 3. Questions and doubts are OK

♪ *They were moving through the desert – they were hungry and sore –  
and they started asking loudly, "What for?!"  
Why are we here? Where are we going? Don't like the scenery, don't like the plot.  
Is the Lord with us, Is the Lord with us, Is the Lord with us, with us or not?*

Exodus 14 – the people cross the Red Sea. Exodus 15 – celebration. Exodus 17 – complaints, Is the Lord with us, we wish we were back in Egypt. Us fickle humans! The Old Testament songbook, the Psalms, cover the whole gamut of human emotions. Our songs can do the same. We believe in the almighty God, but God invites us to relate as kids, asking silly questions, complaining, protesting ...

## 4. Water and word, bread and wine

Coming from Lutheran roots and still firmly in this tradition, I've made a lot of songs that are directly or partly about baptism and communion. While 'Father welcomes' and 'Feed us Now' (both in 'Together In Song') are the best known, there are many others. One grew out of the name given to a special baby.

♪ *From the air and from the light, from the water and the ground,  
God, you gave this world its shape, made it smell and feel and sound:  
from the crisp of early dawn, colder than our skin can bear,  
to the heat of rock and sand boiling in the summer glare.*



*And you made this little child - God, your act of love is good -  
though the process may be known, still it's hardly understood.  
This new life is one more sign of your kindness to us all,  
born of closeness, two made one; like the rain these wonders fall.*

I've also written several communion songs, including 'Bread of Angels', which began from Psalm 78.

♪ *You're like the sun that warms me, with wind and clay you formed me,  
and yet we touch and taste you here, you are the bread of angels.*

*You are the heart of laughter, the beauty we're all after,  
the perfect joy in every dream, you are the bread of angels.*

## **5. Let's tell the story**

The Christian faith is not passed on as a set of propositions but in a story, the story of God active in the world. From Genesis to Revelation, culminating in the story of Jesus, the Word become flesh. The story continues – let's keep telling it, and singing it.

♪ *Let's remind each other how the world was won –  
not with mighty army, nor with soldier's gun;  
his unlikely palace: Mother Mary's womb;  
Operation Jesus from a borrowed room.*

*Flesh and bone, so fragile, his strategic way:  
with a broken body Jesus won the day.  
Cluster bombs and rifles — he had none of these.  
They were never needed for his victory.*

*May I lie beside you, in your manger bed,  
Will I know or care what danger lies ahead?  
If I feel your breath upon my face, I know  
heaven's power is with me everywhere I go.*

As you begin a new chapter in your life we'd like to finish our part of the evening with a blessing for all of you. Julie Perrin's words made this traditional blessing Australian, with images of our country.

♪ *For you, deep stillness of the silent inland, For you, deep blue of the desert skies  
For you, flame red of the rocks and stones, For you, sweet water from hidden springs.  
From the edges seek the heartlands and when you're burnt by the journey  
may the cool winds of the hovering Spirit soothe and replenish you.  
In the name of Christ, In the name of Christ*



---

## ABOUT THE SPEAKER

### Dr Robin Bruce Mann, Doctor of Divinity (honoris causa) 2019

Robin Mann is a writer, musician, worship leader, performer and practical theologian. He is celebrated across Australia for his contribution to theological scholarship over the last fifty years through original composition that advances the celebration of Christian communal life and identity.

Robin is a prolific songwriter with over 120 songs published, including eight songs in the Australian hymn book *Together in Song*. He is in regular demand by schools, churches and conventions of many denominations to perform his music at services and concerts.

Throughout his career, Robin has served the Lutheran Church of Australia as a layworker, worship-music coordinator, and board member for the Lutheran Church of Australia Radio, Television and Department of Hymnody.

Robin is married to Dorothy, a schoolteacher, fellow musician and editor. Robin and Dorothy regularly perform and record music together.

In 2000, Robin was awarded the Servant of Christ Award from the Faculty of Luther Seminary and in 2008 Robin and Dorothy shared the Lutheran Education Australia Service Award for services to Lutheran schooling.



Office of the Vice-Chancellor  
**University of Divinity**  
21 Highbury Grove, Kew, Victoria 3101  
Australia  
[www.divinity.edu.au](http://www.divinity.edu.au)