

ADDRESS

22 MARCH 2015

Seniors' HymnFest

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Amazing grace! This is one of the best-known hymns in the English language, a hymn written from personal experience by a slave trader whom God called to be one of his saints, and who became rector of the London church which William Wilberforce attended. Wilberforce was fired by John Newton's sermons to begin the campaign which finally abolished slavery in the British empire. The hymn has been sung to more than 20 different tunes, but the one we've just sung is a fusion of two tunes from the deep South, probably tunes which were originally sung by oppressed African-American slaves.

God's amazing grace! The grace which sets us free from slavery to our own desires and longings. This is what we celebrate here at St Mark's every week, in our worship here on Sunday and Wednesday mornings, and in our services in four local nursing homes.

There are at least 20 texts in the Scriptures that tell us about God's amazing grace – from the prophet Jeremiah in the 7th C BC, who saw God's grace at work among the people of Israel travelling from slavery in Egypt to freedom in the Promised Land to the writer of the first letter attributed to St Peter, around the turn of the 2nd century, who was certain that *the God of all grace, who has called you to his eternal glory in Christ, will himself restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish you.*

Another great text comes from the first chapter of the gospel according to John, in the 14th verse, *We have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.* The great religions of the world have many things in common, but Christianity has a unique claim, that we can come to know the God who created us and all things, through Jesus, his beloved Son. We are created in his image, and he has called us to share his glory. This is his grace and his truth.

We all have some tough times as we go through life, and they often seem to get worse as we grow older. But if we claim God's grace for ourselves, we find new strength to deal with our problems because, as we have just sung, he will be with us as long as life endures, which means for ever. If you have problems which seem too much for you, we invite you to speak to Peter or one of the ministry team, who will help you to claim God's grace, through prayer and reading the Scriptures, and through surrendering more of your own will to the will of God. The Lord be with you.