

LIKE AN ANGEL

2000. This song, was written for the World Diakonia Assembly in July 2001. Like many songs, many things contributed to it. Rick Strelan, in 'Crossing The Boundaries', a commentary on Mark's Gospel, writes, "But his death is not his only act of service. His whole life is a ministry of service to the unclean, the possessed, the poor, the outcasts, the blind, the deaf, the sinners." I read this while preparing for a worship service on Feb 6, 2000, the 5th Sunday after Epiphany. The Gospel for the day was Mark 1:29-39, which includes the healing of Peter's mother-in-law. The Preaching Helps in 'Currents' (from Lutheran School of Theology in Chicago) included this: "There is something beautiful ... in the picture of Jesus and Simon's mother-in-law. Here he is engaged, directly and intimately, with human need. He touches her; her hands become tools for service". Even better, and what really laid the foundation for 'Like an Angel', came from Rick Strelan: "The word used here (diakonia) is the same as that used of the angels in 1:13 ... It is also the word used by Jesus in 10:45, to describe his own purpose in coming. The woman responds to the humanising, healing touch of Jesus by acting in the way that he acts. What is said here of this woman is never said of any of the male disciples. She becomes a miniature model of discipleship, of following in the way of Jesus." Interesting that the word is so often connected to women in the gospels — Mk 15:41, the women who followed him served him after his death, Luke 8:3, the women serving him (Susannah et al). Then there's John 12:26: 'If a person wants to enter my service, (s)he must follow my way; and where I am, my servant will also be.'

1. She was in bed with a fever
when her son-in-law came with his
 friends.
She was embarrassed,
but she was too sick to pretend.
She was in bed with a fever
when he brought all his friends to her
 home.
Jesus took her by the hand
and the fever was gone.

And she served like an angel,
patiently served like an angel;
passionate caring – love is so daring –
just like the angels surrounding the
 Lamb
night and day.

2. He didn't come as a ruler,
didn't act like a Lord or a King –
helping and healing and foot-washing
– that was his thing.
He didn't come as a ruler,
didn't seem like the God they'd expect
–
being a lamb, not a wolf, didn't earn
 their respect.

And he served like an angel,
willingly served like an angel;
passionate caring – love is so daring –
just like the angels surrounding the
 Lamb
night and day.

3. Are we like baffled disciples?
Do we argue for seats on the throne?
Don't want to follow him,
not down the road that he's on.
Save us from being so foolish.
Jesus, teach us that love is the way,
and that we gain the whole world
when we give it away.

So we serve like an angel,
joyfully serve like an angel;
passionate caring – love is so daring –
just like the angels surrounding the
 Lamb –
like an angel,
joyfully serve like an angel . . . night
 and day.

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FOR YOU, DEEP STILLNESS

(also in 'Let's Sing it Again CD & Book)

1997. A Christmas card from Warren and Lorraine Bartlett contained this adapted Celtic (or Gaelic) Blessing. Warren was at that time moderator of the Uniting Church in Victoria, and this blessing had been written for the annual synod of their church. Julie Perrin, a storyteller, had written the words — or rather, she says, 'they were just waiting to be written down'. The song is made really complete with a series of movements devised by Ian Ferguson. (see below) What a great world you've made. Thanks for this country, Australia. May we be reminded of your presence by whatever we see and feel and hear. FOR YOU - DEEP STILLNESS Movements by Ian Ferguson "For you", Each time these words are sung we extend our arms and hands forward and out in a sweeping gesture of openness and offering "deep stillness of the silent inland" We gently bring our hands in to cradle our belly feeling space and stillness in that place — the heart of our land resounds in the centre of our bodies. We offer that feeling. "For you, deep blue of the desert skies" With our extended arms we trace the arch of the sky and lift our faces to the sky, bathing ourselves in the depth and immensity of it — and we offer that feeling. "For you, flame red of the rocks and stones" We clap on 'red', then form one fist on 'rocks', followed by another on 'stones'. We hold our fists together close in front of us, feeling the bite of the flame and the strength of the rock — and we offer that. "For you, sweet water from hidden springs." We form a cup with our hands, scoop that water in front of us, then, with a pouring/flowing/circling action we bring our hands to our chest and then to our sides, letting the water flood into our hearts and out to wash over those around us. "From the edges seek the heartlands" We join our hands with those on either side of us and bring our right hand holding our neighbour's left up to our hearts. "and when you're burnt by the journey" Still holding hands we swing our arms down and let our heads hang in a relaxed motion. "may the cool winds of the hovering Spirit" We raise our heads and swing our arms high above our heads, releasing hands as we reach the top. "soothe and replenish you." We lower our arms slowly down in front of us with a wavelike motion in a gesture of peace. "In the name of Christ," We cross one arm over our chest. "In the name of Christ" We bring the other arm to join the first and bow our heads with arms crossed over our chests before beginning again on 'for you' with a sweeping gesture of open offering. (Words: Julie Perrin. Movements: Ian Ferguson. Music: Robin Mann © 1997)

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

(last time, add 'in the name
of Christ' once more)

Music © Robin Mann 1997

YOU WERE IN THIS PLACE

1987. An Australia Day service is organised each year in the city of Adelaide. For the 200th anniversary of white settlement, repentance was as much in mind as celebration. The story of Jacob's dream at Bethel (the original stairway to heaven!) was central in the service. This song rose out of that story, and especially from Jacob's statement when he wakes up from his dream: "God is in this place, and I didn't know it!"

1. At the dawn of the ages
you pulled land from the sea.
With your word you invented
all we know, all we see:
creek and desert and forest,
red and grey kangaroo.
You were in this place—
but we never knew.

2. Paintings seen on the rock face,
footprints left in the sand,
campfire next to the river,
songs that rise from the land:
signs that seem so elusive,
shadows just out of view.
You were in this place—
but we never knew.

3. Do we take after Jacob,
blind to what lies at hand,
needing dreams to inform us
God is here in this land?
See him suffering and dying,
bread and wine tell the news.
You were in this place—
but we never knew.

4. Jesus, open our senses,
help us see you today
in the person beside us,
as we work, as we play.
While we love you and serve you,
may it never be true:
you were in this place—
but we never knew.

Words and music: Robin Mann © 1987

STRANGEST WAYS

(also in 'God.Version 1.0' CD & book)

You've got the strangest ways, ...
how can I understand you?

1. Man say take it, take it, take it,
you say give it away.
Woman say hold it, hold it, hold it,
you say let it go.
You say living starts with dying,
you say happiness starts with crying,
you say rich is poor, and poor is rich,
and I never heard you lying.

2. Man say bigger, he want bigger,
you come ever so small.
Woman say stronger, she want stronger,
you come ever so weak.
They were looking for a strong man,
a hero with a strong hand,
you came with peace, you came with love,
they thought you were the wrong man.

3. When man say failure, I'm a failure,
you say that's my boy.
When woman say loser, I'm a loser,
you say that's my girl.
You say don't be scared to stumble,
you might meet me when you tumble.
You say first is last, and last is first,
the way with me is humble.

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I HAVE SEEN THE LORD

2000. A sunny afternoon, sitting at the table under the pergola, working on services for Easter. The opening line from the WJK Lectionary Commentary on the gospel for Easter Sunday, John 20:1-18, started the song: 'At the heart of the Gospel reading for Easter is the resurrection appearance of Jesus to Mary Magdalene, leading to her confession, "I have seen the Lord." All the Easter Sunday texts for Year B contribute: John 20:1-18, 1 Cor 15:1-11 (also the rest of the chapter, though I didn't read it at the time; especially v.54-57)Ps 118:1-2, 14-24, Acts 10:34-43. Specifically, John 20:16,18; 1 Cor 15:54-57; Luke 24:30-35; John 20:20,25; 1 John 1:1. The phrasing of the refrain "Jesus Christ is living though he once was dead" is related to the 'The Waiting Father' parable, Luke 15:24,32, but even more to Rev 1:18. Also Rom 6:9.

1. 'I have seen the Lord', Mary told them all.
Then she told them what the Lord had said.
She was overjoyed when he spoke her name.
Jesus Christ is living though he once was dead.
Everything has changed—death is overwhelmed!
Life will never ever be the same.
She was overjoyed when he spoke her name.
Jesus Christ is living though he once was dead.

2. We have seen the Lord,
we have heard his voice —
recognised him when he broke the bread,
opened up our eyes, set our hearts on fire.
Jesus Christ is living though he once was dead.
Everything has changed—death is overwhelmed!
Life will never ever be the same.
Opened up our eyes, set our hearts on fire.
Jesus Christ is living though he once was dead.

Words and music: Robin Mann © 2000

HAND IN HAND

(also in 'God.Version 1.0' CD & book)

1. When I consider God's design,
raging seas and searing sand,
I hold my breath,
but even more, I stand in awe
when all creation joins in praise,
hand in hand, hand in hand.
All creation joins in praise,
hand in hand.

2. When I consider Jesus Christ,
beaten, killed and broken man,
I hold my breath,
but even more, I stand in awe
when broken people come to him,
hand in hand, hand in hand.
Broken people come to him,
hand in hand.

3. When I consider human kind,
feuding tribes from every land,
I hold my breath,
but even more, I stand in awe
when black and white return to Christ,
hand in hand, hand in hand.
Black and white return to Christ,
hand in hand.

4. When I consider God's own church,
sinful sort of saintly band,
I hold my breath,
but even more, I stand in awe
when sinners come to share God's meal,
hand in hand, hand in hand.
Sinners come to share God's meal,
hand in hand.

Words: Norman Habel; Music: Robin Mann © 1997

EVERYTHING WE GOT

1999. On Wednesday, February 3, a fax came from St Stephen's reminding me that the service on Feb 14 (which I was co-ordinating) was going to be a Harvest Thanksgiving service, and including the readings for the day. As I was hanging out the clothes soon after, this song started to take shape, the chorus and verse 1 just made up in my head (the best way to do it), the other two verses on paper after I'd played it through with the guitar.

Everything we got — you give us!
Everything we got — you made!
Everything we got —
teach us to care for it,
teach us to share. [repeat chorus]

1. Thank you for giving us the water,
thank you for giving us the land.
Though it's a complicated order,
everything moves just like you planned.

2. You make the lightning and the thunder —
electric power in the sky.
Each tiny cell in every creature —
how do you make them multiply?

3. Thank you for food and drink and shelter,
thank you for all that we receive.
Thank you for healing our diseases —
help us to live as we believe.

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WHY DO YOU LOOK AMONG THE DEAD?

Halle, halle, hallelujah [4 times]

1. It was dark, it was early in the morning
when the women came to the tomb.
And although the boulder had been shifted,
they did not see him in the gloom.
Why do you look among the dead
for someone who is alive — he is alive!

2. Suddenly, there were two men standing,
dressed in clothes so radiant and bright.
They said, “Remember what he told you:
he would rise after he was crucified.”
Why do you ...

3. Don't look for the one who has risen
in the place where the dry bones lie.
It was never ever God's intention
anyone, anyone should die. Why do you ...

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IS THE LORD WITH US — OR NOT?

1999. The Old Testament reading for the 18th Sunday after Pentecost is Exodus 17:1-7. The last line sparked this song. (Written at the time of the East Timor occupation by Indonesia)

1. 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?

2. Some are hungry, some are greedy,
and there's always a war.
So we keep on asking loudly, "What for?!" (chorus)

Is the Lord with us
when the house is burning to the ground?
Is the Lord with us when a child is dead?
Is the Lord with us
when we have so much it weighs us down,
while a countless number don't even have bread?

3. Though we know your love in Jesus,
in his dying and pain,
reassure us when the world seems insane. (chorus)

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PATIENTLY WAITING FOR YOU

1. God of night and day,
sun and moon obey,
only you know where the future goes.
God of month and year,
teach us not to fear,
but rely on, keep our eye on you.

Patiently waiting for you,
there's nothing more we can do,
We are completely dependent,
like beggars, it's true.
We've got no life of our own,
lie in a valley of bones.
By the pain of your dying,
with your blood and your loss,
give us your life, give us your life,
give us your life.

2. Like the Israelites
fleeing in the night,
at the Red Sea, Pharaoh coming fast;
you prepared a way
on that wondrous day;
there was dry land, water on each side.

3. Heal the broken bones,
bring the restless home;
give us vision, your reality:
see with Easter eyes,
know the dead will rise,
keep on hoping till the final joy.

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THE BREAD OF ANGELS

(also in 'God.Version 1.0' CD & book)

1997. For the August student service we had chosen the theme from Psalm 78:25 “They ate the bread of angels; he sent them all the food they could eat.” The gospel for the day was John 6:24–35, focusing on “the bread of life, the true bread from heaven”. Through cross referencing in my Jerusalem Bible I was led to Wisdom 16:20–29, and the central theme of the song emerged: “You gave them the food of angels, from heaven untiringly sending them bread already prepared, containing every delight, satisfying every taste. And the substance you gave demonstrated your sweetness towards your children... ..so that your children, Lord, might learn that the various crops are not what nourishes humankind, but your word which preserves all who trust in you.” Not a quick song, it required a fair bit of editorial assistance from Dorothy. She suggested one note change in the last line of the verse which picked up the melody considerably. She was also unimpressed with some of the words I had. Only verse 5 remained unscathed from Mark 1 of the song. Pastor Bob Kempe was the chief culprit behind the theme of this verse — he preached on 'The Compassion of God' (Mark 6:30–34) the week before. The musical beginnings of the song — its structure and overall style — started to develop after I heard Dylan's 'Knocking on heaven's door', though it's hard to see a connection in the final result. Dorothy and I both detected a borrowing from an old hymn we have affection for 'Now rest beneath night's shadow'. Dorothy's Dad always used verse 4 of the hymn after baptisms: “...let angel guards sing o'er me: this child of God shall meet no harm.”

1. 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.

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

In the desert they defied you,
they protested, they complained,
“Give us banquets, keep us happy,
entertained.”

3. Can any book contain you?
No system can explain you.
How can a myst'ry be defined?
You are the bread of angels.

4. But here you are before us —
to comfort and restore us.
With heaven's host we praise and
sing:
you are the bread of angels.

We are hungry in our desert.
You can give us what we need —
you alone are satisfaction
guaranteed.

5. Compassion is your nature —
no gift was ever greater.
Your blood and body feed us all,
you are the bread of angels.
(repeat last 2 lines)

Robin Mann © 1997.

YOU CALL ME TO LOVE

(also in 'God.Version 1.0' CD & book)

1998. Written while holidaying at Middleton — the annual summer jaunt. Based, obviously, on 1 Corinthians 13, the reading we chose to focus on for the monthly student service in February. It's the epistle reading for the 4th Sunday after Epiphany in Year C. The idea of the call comes from the Old Testament reading for that Sunday, Jeremiah 1:4-10. Themes from 1 John 4 and Matthew 11 also got in to the act. God shows us so well these qualities of love in the life and death of Jesus. We, on the other hand, have still got a lot of work to do. Musically, family members found 'Fool on the hill' strongly represented in the verse.

1. You call me to love,
and you show me the path.
You tell me the burden is easy,
"Love is so simple,
just be like a child,
trust me for all that you need."

2. You call me to love,
if I'm old or I'm young.
You tell me, you show me it's meaning:
it's not what we do,
but what God has done,
sending his Son for us all.

If I could sing like an angel,
if I had faith to move mountains,
nothing would change,
death would remain,
nothing would change without love.
Nothing can live without love.

3. You call me to love,
to be patient and kind,
never jealous or boastful,
but humble.
Love isn't selfish or angry or rude,
love doesn't count others' wrongs.

4. You call me to love,
to rejoice in the truth,
to be loyal and faithful forever.
Fill me with hope,
keep me growing in you —
help me to love as you do.

If I could sing like an angel . . .

Robin Mann © 1998

EXAMINE MY HEART

1998. Chapter 3 of Richard Foster's book Prayer was the spark for this song. We were on our annual summer holiday at Middleton. Having read the chapter on the Friday, I woke early next morning. I listened on headphones to a track of kd lang, followed by several songs on the ABC's 'Rage', the last of which was Mariah Carey's Butterfly. All of these elements played a role in the final product. Ps 17: 3 Ps 26:2-3 Ps 139: 2-3

1. Lord of every mystery,
maker of the land and sea,
you know every atom, each and every galaxy.
Still you come to listen and to speak with me
like a parent, lovingly.

Examine my heart, explore my mind,
find the fears that lie hidden from my sight.
Open me up and let me see
how you work in my life,
you move in my life.
Examine my heart, explore my mind,
what's behind every action that I take.
And as I learn more than I knew,
may I learn even more
how deeply I'm loved by you.

2. Jesus, you're the light, the way;
let me hear your voice today
in the quiet, in the busyness of work and play.
Speak to me in happiness or misery.
Redirect me when I stray.

(At end of final chorus repeat last two lines
two times)

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ORDINARY MIRACLES

(also in 'God.Version 1.0' CD & book)

Britpop — represented especially by groups like Oasis and Blur — was big when I wrote this. I was trying to write songs that would communicate with the younger crowd, thinking especially of our long-running student service at St Stephen's. I was also preoccupied, in a more conscious way than previously, with what I perceive as escapist religion. Whether it be in traditional or modern dress, it always seems to be popular. One of the central pillars of Christianity is the incarnation of God as Jesus and the implications that follow. So although we may see God in extravagant religious experiences — and people continue to do so — Jesus reveals a God who is found in 'ordinary miracles'.

Thank you, Jesus, for ordinary miracles,
thanks for seasons and birds in a line.
We keep wanting escape to another place —
you say this place is just fine.

Thank you, Jesus, for average humanity,
thanks for making the people I know.
When we're tired of our humble reality,
come and drop in, say hello.

Some say you're up in the sky, in a cloud, but
you put your feet on the ground.
Help us to love what we are,
being human — colour, action, sound!

Thank you, Jesus, you startle the centuries:
stepping into our bloody affairs.
Your solution to so much calamity —
up on the hill in the air.

Thank you, Jesus, that life is a mystery;
any moment's adrenalin time.
Lead us into the way to prosperity —
you are the treasure we find.

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GOD.VERSION 1.0

(also in 'God.Version 1.0' CD & book)

This song was sparked by a book called "Redemptive Intimacy" by Dick Westley. It's a journey into faith, or from one kind of faith to another. For me, it was a book full of resonance – "Yes, that's right. That's how I feel!" etc. I was pleased recently to see the book quoted by another American Catholic writer, Brennan Manning, in "The Relentless Love of Jesus". It's in the first chapter, 'Healing our image of God and ourselves'. I'm writing this the week after our city was visited by a major American evangelist. I wish that people could have heard Brennan's message instead. There certainly seems to be plenty of scope for healing. My understanding of God continues to change and develop, but I'm surprised again and again to find myself back at the place where I first started. "Version 1.0" I had thought was a bit jokey, but maybe it was more serious at the same time. ["...we do not believe in God, that mythical being who sits on a throne in a far-off perfect land. Nor do we believe in the Monster-God, who lies in wait to punish us for mistakes and crimes." Westley, p.85 'Redemptive Intimacy']

I don't believe in a God up in the sky
who sits in heaven and never hears me cry.
I don't believe in a God who's far away —
I believe in Jesus living here with us today.

I don't believe in a watchmaker above,
set this world going but now is not involved,
who from a distance is watching as we fall —
I believe in Jesus' God who suffers with us all.

I don't believe in a God who keeps a shop,
who checks each item and puts a price on top,
who wants a dividend on each investment made —
God is always giving and refuses to be paid.

I don't believe in a tyrant on a throne
who wants to punish us for every wrong we've done,
who keeps a tally of each mistake and crime —
God wants to have mercy on us
each and every time.

I don't believe in a patriarchal chief,
a judge who never had mercy on a thief,
the Lord and Master who must be waited on —
God is mother-sister just as much as father-son.

God is beside us, God has no other home,
no other family, we are God's flesh and bone;
He-She is with us and with all humankind —
loving his creation always occupies her mind.

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WHEREVER I GO

(also in 'God.Version 1.0' CD & book)

I woke up out of a dream where people were asking me to sing songs with some kids before a big outdoor service. I knew that they didn't know my songs, but I thought I'd try an oldie with them, 'Walkin down the road'. I woke up thinking I needed to write an updated version of the song. This is it. That I used the opening words of our wedding Bible text (Genesis 28:15) was completely unknown to me at the time. I only realised it later. Dorothy helped to improve the chorus, while Thom wrote the melody of the bridge and had various other suggestions that improved the song.

Wherever I go, whatever I do,
whoever I am, I'm going with you.
No matter the time, no matter the place,
however I move, you walk at my pace.
On every day of every year
the weather may change,
but you're still here.

Jesus, you're the light for the journey,
you're the destination and the road.
You provide the signs along the highway,
you're the best companion I know.

We could be delighted or dejected,
at the beach or standing in the rain,
Jesus, you will never ever leave us,
we can trust your blood and your pain.

Take all our fear,
make us brave, make us strong;
earth is our home,
this is where we belong.

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