

## SERMON IN MUSIC

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- i) Never weather beaten sail – Parry
- ii) Verleih' uns Frieden – Mendelssohn
- iii) Greater Love – Ireland

Part of the Summer Music in City Churches Festival marking the centenary of the end of WW1.

**'Never weather beaten sail'** is the third of a set of six 'Songs of Farewell' composed towards the end of the composer's life. At this time Parry was still active as a major figure in the British musical establishment – he remained Director of the Royal College of Music until his late sixties and was also involved in setting up the 'Music in Wartime' committee to provide fund-raising concerts for the war effort – but these pieces are more a reflection of a private man approaching the end of his life. Although much of his choral music uses Biblical texts, he was also frequently inspired by English visionary poets – most notably in his setting of Blake's 'Jerusalem', but also in 'Blest pair of Sirens', which takes its text from Milton. The 'Songs of Farewell' continue this interest, with settings of words by Henry Vaughan and John Lockhart, as well as this text by the Tudor poet/composer Thomas Campion. Although there is plenty of drama and word-painting in the music, the general atmosphere is much more reflective than in the grander, more bombastic works of Parry's youth – the songs were completed in 1918, shortly before his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, when he wrote in a letter to a friend, "I have reached the last milestone." He died later the same year and these pieces are a fitting epitaph.

**'Verleih' uns Frieden'** (Grant us thy peace) is one of a set of short choral pieces composed by Mendelssohn in 1830 in response to a friend's gift

of a book of Lutheran hymns. The text of this piece is by Martin Luther and the music retains some of the hymn-like character with the main melody, first sung by the basses, repeated several times. The piece also features some canonic writing in the accompaniment, first heard at the start, which would originally have been played by the divided cello section of the orchestra. The inclusion of this piece is a reminder of a period of happier relations between England and Germany (Mendelssohn was a popular figure in this country and composed his great oratorio 'Elijah' for Birmingham) and also celebrates the peace which was finally achieved in 1918.

Translation:

*Grant us peace graciously, Lord God, in our time;  
there is indeed no other who could fight for us than you, our God, alone.  
Give our rulers and all lawgivers peace and good government,  
that under them we might lead a quiet and peaceful life in all blessedness  
and honour. Amen.*

John Ireland studied composition under Sir Charles Villiers Stanford at the Royal College of Music. He held church appointments for much of his life, notably at St. Luke's Chelsea from 1904 to 1926, although he actually composed little church music. **'Greater love hath no man'**, composed in 1912, and dedicated to the choir of St. Paul's Cathedral, has been popular with choirs ever since. Its text, whose central point is the verse "Greater love hath no man than this: that a man lay down his life for his friends", has an obvious connection with the theme of Remembrance, and the Swords and Ploughshares theme of the Summer Music in City Churches Festival. Most of the music in tonight's Evensong, including the psalm chant by Henry Walford Davies, is by 20<sup>th</sup> century English composers with a distinguished record of wartime military service.