

A much-loved hymn that many hold dear is Geoff Evans' "Be Still for the Presence of the Lord." It is a beautiful hymn in so many ways, and of course, made famous by the then 12-year-old Aled Jones. Aled has since re-recorded it as an adult and also with his son. It wouldn't surprise you that this is one of the United Kingdom's top ten hymns, as voted by "Songs and Praises."

Inspired by three readings from the Hebrew Scriptures, or Old Testament, it is a song rich in imagery and depth. It may surprise you that it is based on the Old Testament and not the New. Still, on this commemoration of All Saints and Souls, the imagery is appropriate for us to explore today.

The first image that inspired Evans was that of Jacob's Ladder. In Genesis 28, we hear how Jacob had left his father's home, having cheated Esau out of his inheritance. Journeying to Haran, he found an excellent stone to lay his head on and slept. During sleep, the presence of the eternal one entered his night vision. Jacob dreamed of a ladder between heaven and earth; on that ladder, the messengers of God, the angels, were ascending and descending. At the top of the ladder, the voice of God spoke to Jacob.

"I am the LORD, the God of your father, Abraham and Isaac. I will give you and your descendants the land on which you now lie. [14 Your](#) descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and east and north and south. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you and your offspring. [15 Look](#), I am with you, and I will watch over you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. For I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you."

In this promise, as we will hear Jesus say later, God identifies the divine presence by referring to the living and departed. The presence of God was with Abraham. The presence of God was with Jacob's father, Isaac. And now, the presence of God was with Jacob. This is the living God, revealed and revered by the ages before and now in the present, known to Jacob. And all this happened whilst Jacob was still and sleeping.

[16 When](#) Jacob woke up, he thought, "Surely the LORD is in this place, and I was unaware of it." [17 He](#) was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God; this is the gate of heaven!"

Immediately, Jacob took the stone and placed it on the ground as a pillar. He poured oil on the stone and consecrated it to the Lord God. That place, the house of God, in Hebrew, is called "Bethel" to this day, even though it was previously known as Luz. It was on this sight that Abram first pitched his tent.

It is considered near Ramallah, in Palestinian-held territories on the West Bank. This is North of Jerusalem. Sadly, this is under threat of attack. And one of the reasons justifying an attack is that this was land given to Jacob and consecrated to the Lord. Jacob was eventually known as the one who strives with God after wrestling all night with the angel of the Lord. To strive with God, in Hebrew, is Israel. This land is Israel.

Yet, in the place where Abram first pitched his tent, and Jacob slept in the stillness of the night, the presence of the eternal Divine was there.

<cue>

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here;
come bow before him now with reverence and fear:
In Him, no sin is found- we stand on holy ground.

Be still, for the presence of the Lord,
the Holy One is here.

There was an outlaw from Egypt who was wanted for murder. This was no ordinary fugitive. This one had been raised in royal chambers since the day he was found abandoned in the reeds of the Nile and found by Pharaoh's daughter. His name was Moses. Having killed an Egyptian for attacking a Hebrew enslaved person, he fled from the land. He went to the ground thought to be modern Sinai. There, he married and tended the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro, a priest of the Midian people. Midian was a son of Abraham.

Whilst tending the sheep near the mountain of God, Horeb. Scholars argue about where this might be, but it appears again in the story of Moses and the Ten Commandments. There, on the side of the mountain, on a calm and pleasant day, when something extraordinary happened.

[2 There](#), the angel of the LORD appeared to him in a blazing fire from within a bush. Moses saw the bush ablaze with fire, but it was not consumed. [3](#) Moses thought, "I must go over and see this marvellous sight. Why is the bush not burning up?"

[4 When](#) the LORD saw he had gone over to look, God called out from within the bush, "Moses, Moses!"

"Here I am," he answered.

[5](#) "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for where you are standing is holy ground." [Then](#) He said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (Isra-el). There is a pattern starting to emerge. Jacob was on the run from his brother Esau, the hairy one. Moses was on the run, fearing specific execution. Both have a connection back to Abraham.

This is holy ground. The presence of the Lord is here. Revealing the eternal divine presence further, the bush could give Moses the one name that would be known forever. It was a name that would resonate through the aeons. To this day, out of respect to the descendants of Israel, it is never spoken but substituted with the word "Adonai". In our English Bibles, you will recognise the name of God as being The Lord, written entirely in capital letters.

[13 Then](#) Moses asked God, "Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is His name?' What should I tell them?"

[14 God](#) said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM.^h This is what you are to say to the Israelites: 'I AM has sent me to you.'"

[15 God](#) also told Moses, "Say to the Israelites, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers—the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob—has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is how I will be remembered in every generation.

An imperfect person once again sanctified by God and entrusted with the news of salvation to the current generation. The eternal presence of the Divine is shining all around.

<cue>

Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around;
He burns with holy fire, with splendour he is crowned:
How awesome is the sight – our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.

The third verse is a realisation that the eternal presence of the Divine is not defined. Every place in creation is holy or consecrated to the Lord. The presence of the eternal one is not limited by location, time or generation. Each revelation is to the present we are in now, and the promise of things eternal is still to be revealed. But there is one thing about this song that we are asked to do. "Be still."

For Elijah, the great prophet who stood with Jesus and Moses on the mountaintop, he was also on the run. Despite the tumult around him, earthquake, wind and fire, God was revealed in the silence, the still small voice. This Old Testament saint was greeted with the words, "And what are you doing here, Elijah?"

The pattern continues. A fugitive. A quiet moment. A revelation of the eternal presence of God.

The Transfiguration is important to keep in mind. It is Peter, James and John who look at the transfigured form of Jesus and recognise Moses and Elijah. Drawing on the past, the light of the present enabled them to see the glory of God. Immediately, they realised the greatness of what was being shown. Presently, they offer to build three booths, or in Hebrew, tabernacles, for the divine trio. A tabernacle is where God has pitched the tent between humanity and heaven. They wake from their vision to see Jesus alone as he moves back down the mountain to continue his ministry of grace and healing.

Throughout the generations, it is the saints that we look back on in history that have brought to light for us the presence of the eternal love of God. As we look back with fondness on the stories of the saints, some of them, to be honest, quite gruesome and violent, others peaceful and holy, it is in the quiet remembrance that we glimpse God's glory.

For Jacob, Moses, and Elijah, together with Peter, James and John, the past sheds light on the future and the reality that God is not only of the past and future; God is very present now. There are many saints and holy people who indeed enable us to shed light on the work of God's grace, but are we too busy to notice? God is not in the tumult. God is found in the peace and stillness that allows us not only to see with our inner mind but to experience the grace and warmth of God in our lives.

And all we are asked to do before we, as the body of Christ, the saints of Gisborne, is to be still. Be still for the presence of the Lord. Our loved ones, our cherished saints and prophets, may all be in the past, but to God, they are in the land of the living. We, too, are in the land of the living. Still, suppose we allow the busyness, procedural necessities and raw emotions to blind us. In that case, the presence of God is hard to encounter.

Be still my soul; the Lord is on thy side.

Be still and know that the Lord is God. Psalm 46.10

Be still and know that today is holy. Nehemiah 8.11

Be still you inhabitants of the coastlands Isaiah 23.2

"Be still, and know that I am God! I am exalted among the nations; I am exalted in the earth." Psalm 46

Another way of saying "Be still" is also to know it means "Stop striving" and stop fighting. Desist. To Israel of today and Hamas, be still.

The Lord is moving in this place. The holy ones of Israel, the holy ones of Hamas, the holy ones of this generation are being still for the presence of the Lord. The Lord is moving in this place.

<cue>

Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place;

He comes to cleanse and heal, to minister his grace –
No work is too hard for him. In faith receive from him.
Be still, for the power of the Lord is moving in this place.