

BBC Radio 4 Prayers for the Day

Monday 25th March

Good morning.

Most of us love to listen to music and it is even more fun if we can sing or play with others. All over the world people do this, though it sounds very different in China or India compared to here. When I was growing up I sang in a church choir and I love listening to the cathedral choir in Salisbury, where I am the bishop. Salisbury is also the home of the Royal School of Church Music, supporting church choirs all over the country. Music and church worship go together.

This week many people will be performing or listening to one of the great Passions by Bach from either St Matthew or St John's Gospels.

Bach was one of the world's finest musicians. It seems inconceivable that he would ever have been held in less than the highest esteem. When in 1723 he was appointed Kantor, director of music, at St Thomas church in Leipzig, he was the third choice, behind Telemann and someone called Graupner, both of whom, for very different reasons, turned the job down.

Bach was a creative genius who worked incredibly hard. I have often wondered if the circumstances of his appointment caused his phenomenal output because he had something to prove. In 1730, disenchanted with the conditions at St Thomas's, Bach sent a memorandum to the church authorities setting out his minimum requirements for well-regulated church music. Their response was to threaten to reduce his salary. When later he asked for a rise they told him that if he wanted to earn more he could go elsewhere.

Today, dear God, open our eyes to the potential of the people we meet that we may see even the most difficult of them as creative people who are made in your image.

Amen