A Musical Meditation on Good Friday Themes April 15, 2022 at 6:30 PM Käthe Wright Kaufman, organist Glenn Memorial United Methodist Church

Canzona in D Minor, BWV 588 Johann Sebastian Bach (1685-1750)

Trivium (3 mvmts) Arvo Pärt (b. 1935)

from 3 Psalm-Preludes, Set 1, Op. 32 Herbert Howells (1892-1983) I. Ps. 34, v.1: *This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles*

Attende Domine Jeanne Demessieux (1921 – 1968)
*Hear us, O Lord, and have mercy upon us, for we have sinned against thee.*

Erbarm dich mein, o Herre Gott, BWV 721 J. S. Bach

Program Notes

**Johann Sebastian Bach’s** **Canzona in D minor** is written in a style reminiscent of the Italian tradition of Girolamo Frescobaldi (1583-1643), whose *Fiori Musicali* Bach was known to have owned and studied. In a structure of two parts, the first section is in duple meter, while the second is in a more lively triple-meter. As in all Bach, there is contrapuntal imitation between the different voices. Especially in the second section, the chromatic lines suggest a sense of solemn lament (not unlike the lament bass in the famous aria by Henry Purcell, “Dido’s Lament,” for example). At the conclusion of the piece, the motion comes to a sudden halt, and after a significant pause, the final two measures (labeled *Adagio*) bring the piece to a hopeful close on a major chord.

**Arvo Pärt** wrote his three-movement piece, **Trivium** in 1980. The word ‘trivium’ originally meant a place where three roads met, but in Pärt's piece it is one of many instances of three: three voices interact in a tripartite structure. The work uses Pärt’s own minimalist style of *tintinnabuli*, in which he combines a melodic voice (the M-voice) with a bell-like voice outlining a triad (the T-voice). This tintinnabular structure is highly mystical for Pärt; while the M-voice represents sin, mortality, and earth, the T-voice represents godliness and redemption, and thus the combination of these two voices relates the cohabitation of the eternal with the mortal, and good with evil. There is a balance of divine order with earthly disturbances, which is especially seen in the relation of consonances and dissonances in the middle movement. In the final movement, the melody in the left hand (which is present in the other two movements, though not as obviously) is chant-like in nature. One cannot help but think that the holy Trinity (and the combination of all three parts to make one, that is, God) is also being represented in this piece. It is also worth noting that this evening, we are in the middle of the three holy days leading up to Easter (Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, and Holy Saturday), which is called the Holy Triduum.

A towering icon in the world of Anglican sacred music, English organist, composer, and teacher **Herbert Howells** was no stranger to loss and tribulation, having lost his son Michael to polio in September 1935. Understandably, Howells was deeply affected by this tragedy, and he attempted to channel his grief into music. This **Psalm-Prelude** was written before these tragic events, in 1915 during the War, but it is clear that Howells was already very skilled at painting intense emotion through musical notes. At this time, not only was Howells evidently affected by the events of World War I (which would go on to claim the lives of so many, including his friend and fellow composer Ivor Gurney), but he was also coming to terms with a recent diagnosis of Graves’ disease, for which he received radium injections as treatment. Having initially been given a prognosis of only six months, Howells lived to the ripe age of 90. Inspired by the sixth verse of Psalm 34 (quoted above), Howells leads listeners on a journey fraught with desperation and tension. The repeated motif of syncopated falling second evokes a pleading voice, which grows more and more insistent and intense. After a massive climax, the piece winds down into a state of peacefulness and quiet acceptance.

One of the most talented organists of her time and a student of Marcel Dupré, **Jeanne Demessieux** was known for her impeccable technique and artistic flair. A skilled composer, she wrote hugely difficult études that pushed organists to the absolute brink of their technique. She also wrote a collection of Twelve Chorale Preludes on Gregorian Chant Themes, from which **Attende Domine** is taken. The piece is based on what is known as the Lent Prose, a 10th century Mozarabic hymn. Demessieux places the melody of the plainchant in the soprano voice and accompanies it with solemn chord progressions. The English translation of the hymn begins thus:

Hear us, O Lord, have mercy upon us: for we have sinned against thee.
To thee, Redeemer, on thy throne of glory:
lift we our weeping eyes in holy pleadings:
listen, O Jesu, to our supplications.

The text of the solemn chorale upon which **Erbarm dich mein, O Herre Gott** is based is Psalm 51: “Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions…” This text is featured on Ash Wednesday and throughout Lent as an expression of penitence and the yearning for renewal and conversion (v.10: “Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.”). **J. S. Bach** illustrates this yearning through slow, repeated chords underneath a mournful solo voice, crying out to God.