

Meditation

The Fifth Sunday of Easter is often referred to as Rogation Sunday. It is an appropriate moment (especially in the context of warmer weather) to reflect upon the wonder of the natural world. *In the Beginning* by Aaron Copland (1900-1990) is an epic American choral work that celebrates the beauty of creation. Lasting about 18 minutes, it is a setting of the first 38 verses of Genesis. Because of its length, it is almost always sung in concert settings, and rarely as part of a liturgy. Nonetheless, it is an extremely vivid setting of ancient scriptures. One of my favorite sections takes place about halfway through the piece, in the portion concerning aquatic life: “And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly.” To bring these words alive, Copland conjures up a slow, dreamy underwater dance.

In the Beginning is also a celebration of shared heritage. Copland was Jewish and this piece, premiered at Harvard’s Memorial Church in 1947, elevates scriptural traditions held in common. Copland chose to end his composition with the words “and man became a living soul.” There is a sudden tonal shift at this moment which seems to highlight humanity’s special role within the wonder of creation.

Below is a very impressive live recording by *San Diego Pro Arte Voices*. The mezzo-soprano soloist is particularly skilled and expressive. To mark Rogation Sunday tomorrow, we will sing the familiar hymn *All creatures of our God and King* as part of our Zoom liturgy.

With all best wishes,

Tim Pyper
Director of Music

Aaron Copland: *In the Beginning*
https://youtu.be/xPsd_8lnXbM

Text of *In the Beginning* (and an additional recording):
<https://www.sjcchoir.co.uk/listen/sjc-live/copland-beginning>

Hymn #400 “All creatures of our God and King”
<https://youtu.be/LY85TzCdqpc>

Hymn #292 “O Jesus, crowned with all renown”
<https://youtu.be/lMA14neod74>