

About...

For the sake of the poor

...how and why it was written

This song's creation remains something of a mystery to me. And I often say I wonder how much I wrote it, and how much God simply gave it to me.

I had been spending the morning preparing for a worship session I had been asked to lead to help people respond to climate change and its effects on poor communities. Not the easiest thing to do with the repertoire of worship songs I thought would be known widely... I'd actually been getting on pretty well finding songs which through use of visuals, or context, I could apply more directly to the issue, but I felt something was missing. We needed one song, even if it was just sung over people at the beginning, focussing in more specifically on climate change itself, enabling the congregation to deal with their questions, fear and anger honestly before God.

I went downstairs and made a cup of tea, thinking to myself – no one can write a worship song about climate change. And certainly not me! Where on earth would you start?

Suddenly, the opening couple of lines came into my mind... and though I was thinking 'no way' the whole time, I thought I might as well go back to my keyboard and see where it went. When I did I was pretty amazed, as the whole song (which has a very structured lyrical approach) came out spontaneously – ready formed.

I didn't quite know what to make of it – it was quite early in my song-writing, and it felt very different from anything else I'd written before. (Now I can see how it fits into a slightly dysfunctional family of "heart-cry for justice" songs).

In the end, the session was cancelled, but when my manager at the time asked me if I'd written anything on climate change, this song was unearthed and became the soundtrack to a reflective film for Christian Aid week in 2008.

People's reactions to it were astounding. I still don't fully understand what it is about the song that makes it so powerful – but I think it carries a sense of lament, and of questioning that people were struggling to express at the time.

The more we can be honest with God about our struggles and questions, the more he can come into them, transform us, and make us part of the answer to our own prayers.

...how, where and when it could be used

I have never used this song in congregational sung worship and I am in two minds as to whether it could work – particularly because it is quite specific, and isn't necessarily the kind of song you would want to sing again and again.

However, used as a backdrop to intercession times, as part of a special service, or to raise the issue so that people can respond, it seems to be incredibly effective.

...it's place on the journey to where world and worship meet

I remember once having a conversation with my close friend Rebecca Hamer about words we thought sounded really weird in worship following a spontaneous time of intercession where we had sung quite a number of more modern words... I seem to remember community was high up our list – it just sounded strange and out of place.

Somehow we need to get past the place of always talking in familiar, religious language, or only in symbols. These are good things. But we must make space for new, relevant words and concepts too, and for our songs to tackle all the key issues we face today.

It has been brilliant to see a number of song-writers bringing in reference to the shaking of financial systems and institutions into songs about God's faithfulness recently, and it is my hope and prayer that we will all continue to be bold, honest and current – not for the sake of it, but to ensure that there isn't a disconnect between the world we inhabit, and the worship we offer.