

Anthem Notes for February 26, 2017

There is a Balm in Gilead African American Spiritual
Arr. R. Kevin Boesiger and Mary McDonald

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole,
there is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.*

*Sometimes I feel discouraged
and think my work's in vain,
but then the Holy Spirit
revives my soul again. Refrain*

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole,
there is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.*

*If you cannot preach like Peter,
if you cannot pray like Paul,
you can tell the love of Jesus
and say, "He died for all."*

*There is a balm in Gilead
to make the wounded whole,
there is a balm in Gilead
to heal the sin-sick soul.*

This lovely African American Spiritual is known and sung by many people. It comes out of a heart of faith and belief that Jesus is the healer and the one who tends to all our wounds.

In the Old Testament, Gilead was the name of the mountainous region east of the Jordan River. This region was known for having skillful physicians and an ointment made from the gum of a tree particular to that area. Many believed that this balm had miraculous powers to heal the body.

In the book of Jeremiah, God tells the people of Israel that though many believe in the mysterious healing power of this balm, they can't trust in those powers for spiritual healing or as a relief of their oppression. He reminds them that He is ultimately in control, and only He can relieve their suffering. In the New Testament, God answers the suffering of His people by sending His own son to take

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our place. Jesus becomes our “balm in Gilead.” It is Jesus we are called to turn to in our times of trial for healing and comfort. We can sing this song with that assurance: no matter our hardships or supposed shortcomings, Jesus loves us enough to take our suffering upon Himself. There is, however, a powerful paradox in this hymn. Jesus is our balm, our healer, and yet He could only bring us healing by being wounded Himself.

Composers R. Kevin Boesiger and Mary McDonald have created a calm, assuring and comforting choral arrangement of this spiritual. As in a few other anthems sung by the Sanctuary Choir recently, the choral lines alternate between men and women and are also presented in four-part harmony. The music is mostly restrained with the musical high point occurring on the text ‘and say he died for all.’ The anthem then resumes quietly, repeating the refrain and ends very quietly and prayerfully.

R. Kevin Boesiger is the Creative Arts Pastor at a large church in southeast Nebraska and was previously the choral conductor for the Southeast Community College in Beatrice, Nebraska, where he directed the choir and served as the musical director for their stage productions. He performs and conducts for many community events, including the Beatrice Regional Orchestra. His music is widely published and he is a regular contributor to a new online music resource magazine.



Mary McDonald, composer, arranger, producer, pianist, and organist, was a sacred choral editor for The Lorenz Corporation for nearly twenty years. She serves as the organist for Central Baptist Church in Knoxville. She has composed more than 600 published choral anthems, several Christmas and Easter cantatas, and numerous keyboard collections, and still serves as an editorial consultant for Lorenz. She is also active as a choral clinician. She is on the board of the John Ness Beck Foundation and is a member of the American Guild of Organists (AGO) and the American Society of Composers, Authors and Publishers (ASCAP).