

# **Approaching the Altar of My God**

[based on Psalm 42/43]

## **Introductory Notes**

In Psalm 42/43 the Psalmist speaks of his anxious soul that is disturbed and would retreat rather than encounter the Lord God who is most worthy. He is assailed with doubts and confusions. His resolve is weak. Yet the Psalmist has heard God's call, and the deep longing of his heart is to hurry to worship the God he knows loves him.

And so the Psalm oscillates between a confident approach and a doubting retreat. This shows itself in a kind of liturgical stammer, a conflicted hesitation that is not readily resolved.

If we are honest with ourselves, we often find ourselves in a similar position of hesitation as we enter into worship, though the reasons may be different. It is not likely that we have had to endure the overt taunts of scoffers. But we continually encounter the strident claims of a host of authorities that court our attention and our allegiance. We become confused as we face situations in which the obedient response is not always clear. And we are sometimes properly daunted by our unworthiness to approach the living God and awed by his glory and holiness.

**Approaching the Altar of My God** is a choral reading that begins the worship service and is meant to serve as a transition zone from our workaday world to a time of worship before our God. It gives voice to the uncertainties we feel, to our doubts and confusions. It disarms us of the presumptive familiarity with God we are prone to fall into. It reminds us of the huge distance between us a frail creatures and our creator God in his glory and righteousness that we can never bridge on our own. And it also reminds us of our longing and need for God.

But it is God who has called us. We hesitate but proceed in the confidence buoyed up by God's call and offer of grace.

The three readers may be positioned at the front or the back of the sanctuary, or perhaps more effectively, standing in the congregation.

## **Approaching the Altar of My God**

a choral reading in three voices

based on Psalm 42/43

A As a deer longs for streams of running water,  
B living water  
A so my soul longs for you, O God  
C for the living God  
[  
A I will go to the altar of my God  
to God the joy of my youth  
C I cry out  
A When can I go and appear in God's presence?  
When can I stand before the face of God?  
[  
ABC O Lord, hear my prayer  
and let my cry come unto you  
[  
B Why are you disturbed, O my soul?  
Why are you cast down  
disquieted within me  
[  
A Wait for God!  
C Put your hope in God!  
B For I will again give thanks  
I will yet give praise to my God  
for the saving help of his presence  
[  
C These things I remember  
as I pour out my heart:  
A How I used to walk along with the great throng to the house of God  
shouting and giving thanks  
shouting and giving thanks along with the crowd  
[  
B I cannot eat  
I weep day and night  
for all day long they say to me  
A "Where is your God?"  
B My tears have been my food day and night  
C My soul melts within me  
[

B I will go to the altar of God  
 to God  
 the joy of my youth  
 [  
 A When my life was ebbing away  
 I called out to the Lord  
 ABC O Lord, hear my prayer  
 and let my cry come unto you  
 [  
 C When shall I come  
 and see the face of God  
 B and know in my heart God's presence  
 C and know in my life God's presence?  
 [  
 B I have been lost in the farthest regions  
 where deep calls to deep  
 A One deep stream calls out to another  
 C in the roar of your waterfalls  
 [  
 A I will go to the altar of God  
 to the God who gives me joy and gladness  
 [  
 B Why are you disturbed, O my soul?  
 Why do you sigh within me?  
 [  
 A Wait for God!  
 C Put your hope in God!  
 B For I will yet give thanks  
 to my God for his saving help  
 ABC You are my stronghold  
 the God who shelters me  
 [  
 A Our help is in the name of the Lord  
 ABC who made  
 heaven and earth

Presentation time: 2 minutes

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