



from Garth...

### A cold New York evening

It was a cold New York evening, snow coming down. My son Joe and his wife Lisa live in New York, in Harlem, and we were heading out to B B King's blues club down on 42nd street to hear **Aaron Neville**. I was really excited to hear him live - it was a mid December evening – a birthday treat for me! - and he was doing a Christmas concert – what could be better.



I mentioned it to several people and was surprised how few seemed to know of him! He was part of the Neville Brothers, they came from New Orleans and they'd been a very successful group. But he has done a lot of material on his own, including some beautiful gospel music – well worth checking out. The characteristic feature of Aaron Neville is his beautiful high voice that makes it one of the most distinctive soul voices I have ever heard; some years back a group of us were riding on the back of a truck in Corn Island just off the Nicaragua coast - as

we passed a building a door opened, and we heard two or three notes of a song and immediately recognized that voice - ah, that's Aaron Neville!

His background has included addiction and jail but out of this he has come back to a strong Catholic faith which he reflects in his concerts. Before he came on, the band was playing and as the drummer introduced him he said, **“There's too much hate in the world, so we are bringing love tonight to New York City!”** And on comes the very individual Aaron Neville.

## **Sing Aaron Sing - the voice of a battered angel**

You'd never know he was 77 - tattooed and bulging muscles with this beautiful unexpected voice. I'm writing a song about the evening and the chorus goes -

Sing, Aaron, sing,  
Fly, Aaron, fly,  
Let our spirits soar  
As your voice goes high.  
Sing the Christmas prayer,  
Make it a holy night,  
Through the voice of a battered angel  
We are led towards the light – so  
Sing Aaron sing.



He has a song called **Christmas Prayer** he sang that night, which is very beautiful - these are some of the words from it:

**To all those who are hungry  
May they never miss a meal  
All the broken hearted may they find a way to heal  
And all the homeless and the needy  
That they might have a coat to wear  
This is my Christmas prayer**

**From my little house upon Valance Street  
I'm sending out these hopes to high above  
That this whole earth just might someday be  
A little better place for the human race  
This is my wish, it may be a lot to ask  
But I'm hoping that a miracle  
Will finally come to pass...  
This is my Christmas prayer**

As his first encore he sang Ave Maria, as he usually does - and an absolute hush came over the venue. I read a review of one of his concerts recently and it said "Aaron brings redemption into the room when he sings". Well – that's how it felt – a little burst of joy and hope. I reflect this in a verse of the song, "Sing Aaron Sing"

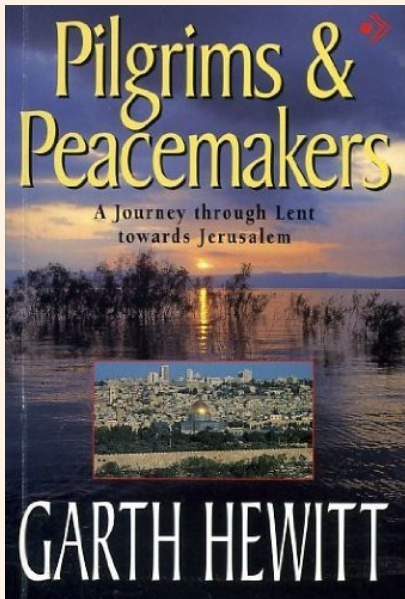
As Aaron sings his song  
The whole place goes very quiet  
'Cos Aaron brings redemption

Into the room tonight  
Says he's hoping for a miracle  
Says he wants a better place  
For the whole of the human race  
And he's here to bring some Grace... to New York City

Thank you Aaron.

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## The return of Pilgrims and Peacemakers



**Amos Trust** has been doing some clearing out of the tower room in St Clement's Church, Eastcheap, where they are based. Lo and behold we found some copies of the book **Pilgrims and Peacemakers** which I wrote as a Lent book back in 1995 – we thought it had completely sold out. The book is a journey in the Holy Land specifically heading towards Jerusalem which is where the journey of Jesus goes as we head towards Holy Week.

Some aspects of the book are out of date of course - there was no separation wall at that time cutting off the majority of the West Bank - we never thought then that things could get as bad

for the Palestinian people as they have now.

And Jerusalem, originally planned by the UN to be a Corpus Separatum which is Latin for Separated Body - the term used to describe the Jerusalem area in the 1947 United Nations Partition Plan. That UN plan was for Jerusalem and Bethlehem to be a shared place, open to all, but this year it seems unlikely that many Palestinian Christians will be able to go to Jerusalem for Holy Week and Easter as would be their custom.

President Trump's declaration about Jerusalem has caused an increased problem for the Palestinian community and peace seems such a long way away.

So in our Lenten journey perhaps we can be remembering the people of Palestine, and particularly the Palestinian children in Israeli prisons - around 400 at the moment, including of course Ahd Tamimi who slapped a heavily armed Israeli soldier who had entered the yard of her house - after her cousin had been shot in the head with a rubber coated bullet.

**In our Lenten prayers remember Palestinians and Israelis – the route of justice and equality is the way of hope – no more domination or oppression.**

**Justice and only justice  
Is the only way to peace  
The only way to hope  
Is through the door of justice.**

*Words from a song used in the Balfour liturgy in St. Georges Cathedral on November 2nd 2017 – inspired by Canon Naim Ateek*

So perhaps using **Pilgrims and Peacemakers** as a seven week journey to Jerusalem during Lent could also be a time to stop and pause, and to pray for justice and peace for the deeply wounded land once known as holy. The book has a daily Bible reading, comment, and prayer or meditation.

**As we've found all these extra copies we thought if anyone would like to use it for your Lenten journey this year, we'd make a special offer which you can read about at the end of this newsletter.**

*Archbishop Desmond Tutu was kind enough to say this about Pilgrims and Peacemakers:*

In Pilgrims and Peacemakers Garth Hewitt takes us on a fascinating Lenten journey through the geographical areas that Christ himself would have travelled.

In doing so he shares the stories of Christians living in those places today – people who are sacrificially Christ-like in their efforts to bring peace, healing and hope to strife-torn lives. Their witness and example are a worthy challenge indeed as Garth Hewitt ably and sensitively leads us through Scriptures, meditations and prayers on themes arising from their lives and work.

I commend this book to you as a valuable journey through the examples of contemporary saints to the ultimate example of Christ's death on the cross – and his resurrection.

*Archbishop Desmond Tutu*

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## **A Lenten Prayer**

**O God as we enter Lent**

May we remember we are walking with you on a journey towards Holy Week –

**May we pause and pray and meet with you.**

Your teaching has been about the kingdom or community of God,

**A way of life and a community that goes up against the empires of domination –**

As relevant now as it ever has been.

The empires of greed favouring the rich and powerful,

**Instead of your way reflecting justice for all.**

As you head to Jerusalem you are witness to this on Palm Sunday

**As you ride in with non-violence,**

**From one side of Jerusalem gentle and riding on a donkey –**

From the other side the army of empire, injustice, greed and oppression.

**As you turn the tables of oppression,** so the empire wants you killed

The powers who rule, crucify you: the sin of the world kills you

**But on Easter Sunday God affirms you** and all you have done –

There is the rising again -

God's community of love continues forever.

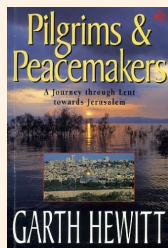
**May we be in the community of love -**

**The community that is never silent**

**And so a community of the Gospel bringing justice and hope to all.**

*Amen*

*Garth Hewitt*



Garth is offering his Lent book *Pilgrims and Peacemakers* for £4 including postage and packing, if you email [isobel@garthhewitt.org](mailto:isobel@garthhewitt.org) by 21st February with your name and address, stating whether you would prefer to pay by cheque or bank transfer

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