

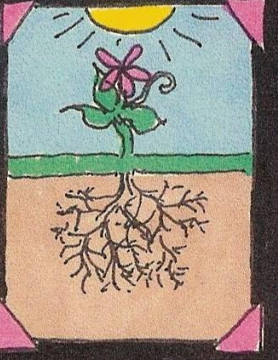
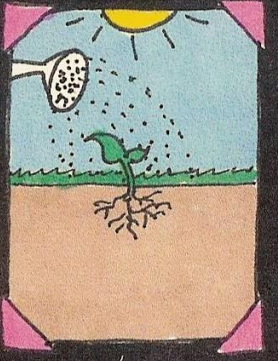
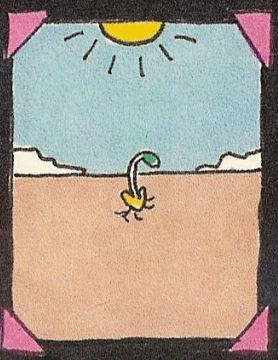
March 25

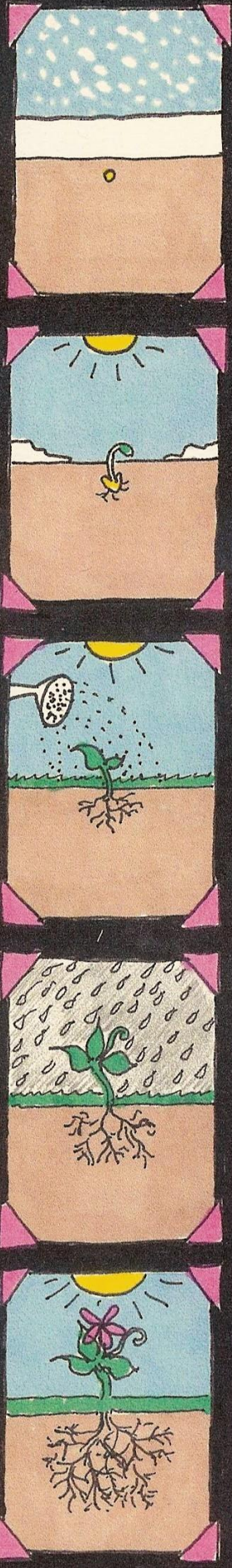
WHEN I SURVEY THE WONDROUS CROSS

Words by Isaac Watts, Music by Lowell Mason

The language of choral music combines the grammars of poetry, melody, harmony, and the descriptive voices of many people. Our choir is preparing a piece that uses these elements to speak of the cross. Most of us have sung the hymn, “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”, since childhood. Its popularity remains high. Creating a choral setting of such a familiar and popular hymn offers significant challenges. What can a composer add to something that is already at the top of the pile?

A student named Gilbert Martin took on this hymn as a college composition assignment in the late-60’s. He turned out an intense setting for choir and organ that quickly found its way into most choir libraries in the country. It’s





dramatic description of the glory of the cross sends forth waves of vocal sound that reach into our very souls and make us utter, “yes, that’s what I believe.”

The setting begins simply, and reminds us of the familiarity of the wondrous cross. It grows slowly, quietly, and one soon realizes that the prairies of familiarity are gradually being replaced by mists of a beautiful sunrise over a mountain, warming the dark places in the valleys of our souls. As the piece progresses, our senses of being lifted increase, until at its climax we find ourselves above the whole realm of nature whose gift fails in the face of love so amazing, so divine.

WE OFFER THIS PIECE ON SUNDAY, MARCH 27

Wishart Bell

