

Good Friday Prayer 3 April 2015

Living God we meet with you today so mindful of your love and so mindful of your pain. Out of your love the cosmos was birthed – in pain you witness our desecration of your creation. Out of your love every creature great and small was formed – in pain you witness the thoughtless and selfish extinction of many. Out of your love you fixed your beautiful image in each one of us – in pain you witness the denial of human sacredness through exclusion and exploitation. Out of your love you gave us freedom to choose life or to choose death; to choose love or to choose fear. In your love you pleaded with us to choose life and love. You sent messengers to us to help us – guide us – challenge us and woo us to your ways and in pain you watched us walk away – you witnessed us close our ears and slam shut the doors of our hearts. In your love you responded to our stubbornness by coming to us yourself – in the flesh of Jesus of Nazareth – to unstop our ears so we might hear firsthand of your forgiveness and open our eyes that we may see with our own eyes your endless grace at work in the world – to unlock our hearts that they may be filled with love as you had designed. And yet ignorantly and fearfully we turned away from what we desired and needed the most ... in pain you witnessed us reject the cornerstone without which we could not stand – we could only fall.

We loved the good news of Jesus – we loved hearing we were forgiven – that we were clean and free to enter your presence rejoicing. We loved it when he touched us – healing us to the depths of our soul. We loved being told that we were beloved children of you O God. And if Jesus had just kept it to that we would have honoured him appropriately, but he didn't.

What we didn't appreciate was that all the good news that he shared with us he offered to everyone else too – even our sworn enemies – the Romans and Samaritans ... the gentiles and those who lived immoral lives – lives even clearly condemned in Holy Scripture. He made us equal to everyone else – we were no longer the special chosen we believed we were – or at least now everyone was the special chosen which meant that we weren't more special. Pointing to the ground once, Jesus said he could create children of Abraham out of stones and when we wanted to stone a woman caught in adultery as the Bible commands he told us to put down our stones – not so subtly saying that we were the sinners. Fancy calling us sinners – when we were the only ones following your word.

Though we admired Jesus to begin with – we found him a great disappointment in the end. Everything we had hoped for he seemed to turn on its head. It wasn't long before we agreed he was mad, possessed with an evil spirit – after all who says things like “pay the last first and pay the first last”; who says things like “love your enemies”; or “blessed are those who are poor and gentle and who grieve” – everyone knows they are the cursed. Jesus said, for us to be great we must be the servant of all ... but we were waiting for our turn to be served. So when we heard of plans to get rid of him we understood why. It was because he was messing life up as we knew it – as we believed life was ordained by you to be – we did not step up to protect him – we did not speak up to challenge the trumped up charges against him – after all he had let us down – he had betrayed our dreams – so he was killed and we were part of it ... and yet you still refused to forsake us even though we had forsaken you.

Today O God we want to acknowledge your pain – your pain held in your love for us – your pain the result of us refusing to accept your embracing love. Your pain from us accusing you of not loving us when in actual fact you loved us more than we could imagine or accept. Your pain of helplessness in knowing that your love was what we needed more than anything else and yet because you loved us you would not force it on us ... and all this while we accused you of not loving us. This pierced more than your hands and feet – it pierced your heart.

We dare only to ask for forgiveness because you have said that we are already forgiven. That you have already removed our sin from us as far as the East is from the West. And therefore we come with confidence today because you have said to us that there is nothing that can separate us from your love that Jesus lived to share and died to share even more.

Living God set us free to trust Jesus as your word of forgiving and healing love for the world. To trust him in his dying especially since his death is because we did not trust him in his living.

Amen – so be it.