

Reflection for November 2018 Peter Millar

In Advent

This year I was invited to write some thoughts for Advent for the Iona Community. You can find them as an e-book. The link is:

<https://www.ionabooks.com/e-liturgies-prayers/advent-christmas/the-light-which-illuminates-the-world-pdf-download.html>

Having finished the advertising, one of the themes that is central in Advent is that of liberation. In Luke's gospel we read these words: "Stand upright and hold your heads high because your liberation is near." (Luke 21:28.) In many of the world's great religions this theme of liberation is present. Liberation in body, mind and spirit is, we are promised, a gift of the divine. With millions of others through the generations, I believe that is true even if my own faith is often stumbling and unsure of its direction. In relation to this promise of liberation I would like to quote a couple of paragraphs from the reflection which I have written for the Iona Community. I wrote this.

"..... Some religions teach us that liberation, the freeing of the soul, implies a major move away from the sordidness and pain of the world, into a place of release, of quietude, often distant from worldly concerns. This emphasis is also present in some expressions of contemporary Christianity. In this interpretation the world is considered a totally sinful place from which Christ frees us. In my understanding liberation in Jesus is much more about finding a place of inner hope and healing within the contradictions and questions of daily living. Over the centuries an incarnational Christianity has been committed to holding a vision in which our Christian convictions are always intertwined with everyday happenings. Therefore the message of Advent directly connects to the pluralities and surprises of society. Certainly we can hold our heads high because liberation is at hand, but always in the midst of the market place.... "

Yet the word "liberation" is one which we must use in these days with sensitivity. Millions of our sisters and brothers are living under oppressive regimes from which they long to be free. I know that when Dorothy and I went to live in India in the 1970's it took us some time to understand that during a government imposed state of emergency, people of integrity who had spoken out for justice could disappear and never return home. And silence followed within the family circle. Fear of power is very much a fact in human existence. And today when voices are raised for liberation in various countries, many deaths follow, often after torture. So as we think about the liberation theme within Advent let us not forget those who today are giving their lives in order to restore even basic human rights within their communities.

Liberation in its Christian context also propels us to solidarity with our neighbours and the wider world. It is not possible for us "to be free in Christ" while ignoring human suffering. The reality of God's liberation within our personal living allows us day by day to live within that wider frame of meaning in which the pain of others is also to some degree our pain. Only thus can we experience Christ's shining.

The liberation theologian Jon Sobrino who was living amidst the suffering of his people knew that truth when he wrote: "In the pain, misfortune, oppression and death of the people God is silent. God is silent on the cross, in the crucified. And in this silence is God's word, God's cry in solidarity as God speaks the language of love.

Our hands that bless

Blessed be the works of your hands, O Holy One.
Blessed be these hands that have touched life.
Blessed be these hands that have nurtured creativity.
Blessed be these hands that have held pain.
Blessed be these hands that have embraced with passion.
Blessed be these hands that have tended gardens.
Blessed be these hands that have closed in anger.
Blessed be these hands that have planted new seeds.
Blessed be these hands that have harvested ripe fields.
Blessed be these hands that have cleaned, washed, mopped, scrubbed.
Blessed be these hands that have become knotty with age.
Blessed be these hands that are wrinkled and scarred from doing justice.
Blessed be these hands that have reached out and been received.
Blessed be these hands that hold the promise of the future.
Blessed be the works of your hands, O Holy One.

Diann Neu, in *Earth Prayers*, Harper, San Francisco

Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion is to take off our shoes for the place we are approaching is holy and we may find ourselves treading on another's dream. More serious still, we may forget that God was there before our arrival.

Words shared in a cross-cultural workshop

People come and go in the market place;
they see others in different hues;
here there are black and white, indigenous and immigrant,
a rainbow people but truly together,
a people of one family.
We seek to bear each other's burdens;
we seek to share each other's joys;
we share our happiness and our sorrows;
why then to do some make us enemies?
We are one family, God's people,
a rainbow people whose song is love.

Geoffrey Duncan (ed.), *Wisdom is Calling*, Canterbury Press,
Norwich

*All the broken hearts shall rejoice;
all those who are heavy laden, whose eyes are tired and who do not see,
shall be lifted up to meet with the Motherly Healer.
The battered souls and bodies shall be healed, and the hungry shall be fed.
All earthly children shall regain joy in the reign of the just and loving one -
coming for you, coming for me, in this time, in this world.*

from - Asian Woman's Theological Journal

The world is full of your love, O God;
People who know you and do not know you do good things.
Blessings abound, as do opportunities to share in your work of love.
Sue Walker's words, based on Psalm 77.

Peter's email: ionacottage@hotmail.com