

A New Song Even Though

A poem prayer by Rev. Loren McGrail, written for World Communion Sunday 2014

So I have been wrestling for days on writing an opening prayer for World Communion Sunday on October 5th. It is the day the Church remembers through the holy sacrament of communion that we are members of one body. Sometimes we do this by sharing different kinds of bread remembering that Christians celebrate this holy event in a variety of ways. Other times we lift up Christians in other parts of the world. Some believe the wine and bread are changed. Some believe they are symbols. All are asked to remember the night Jesus broke the bread and poured the wine. Some celebrate communion every Sunday, others once a month. Some come forward to receive, others sit and are served. Some dip and others drink. For myself I need to remember that the body was whole and then broken. It is a holy moment to stand before the congregation and hold the bread and break it apart in front of them and say, "Eat in remembrance of me." Remembering wholeness and brokenness in the same breath is not easy.

And so it seemed appropriate that one of the missionaries assigned to Israel and Palestine should offer a prayer from the Holy Land, from Jerusalem, the city that still knows no peace for her church. But I couldn't. I couldn't write; I couldn't figure out how to talk about a body sacrificed after a summer of genocide in Gaza and nightly violence literally outside my doorstep. I couldn't write at night because the sounds were too scary and the morning was filled with memories of the night. So instead, dear ones, I wrote a poem and the poem led me to the prayer. I humbly offer it to you as both a reflection and food for your journey.

The day is breaking
but my room
is composed of a long night.

—*Nazim Hikmet*

Birds on the fence and the cry of a small kitten
wake me from a vigilant sleep
night prayers of worry still hang in the fresh air
like laundry that should have been brought in
days ago

The long night of violent attacks and counter attacks
is silenced but my body holds onto fear
like a dirty blanket familiar and soiled

My mind relives the sound details
searching for evidence of how much death
or destruction this time
as if the count of explosives is any real measurement

Yesterday mourners gathered to go to the cemetery
They delivered huge pots of chicken and rice
for the after meal into a darkened doorway
A shopkeeper said, "Don't worry, it's just a funeral.
God's death not Israel's."

I didn't know there was a difference.
Is there?

Last night the moonlight in my garden
of olive and orange trees and a single majestic pine
made the feral felines appear bigger than they are
The sweet fragrance of the jasmine blended
with the putrid smell of fresh skunk water
to make an intoxicating perfume

The incessant beat of arab disco
was background to the steady firing
of sound bombs and firecrackers
and the whoosh of tear gas
and the secret moans
of lovers completing each other

This went on for hours
as I sat trying to write a prayer
the call to the table of holy communion

Jesus knew when he broke bread
his body would be broken open
He knew when he poured the sabbath wine
his blood would be spilled

These boys know they could become martyrs
in a flash, their bodies destroyed
They know their rocks and firecrackers
are no match for the firepower waiting for them

They know their spirit of resistance
outweighs the orders to wound, injure, destroy or
kill them they know this truth
just like He knew

that death is final
but not victorious

So come to the table
dear ones just as you are
to be reminded that His suffering is yours
their suffering yours
that you are one body
condemned and redeemed
not because of the suffering
but in spite of it

Come eat and share the bread of life

Come to the table
dear ones just as you are
to remember that the wine
is both spilled blood and
the fruit of the harvest
it is the blood of the lamb

Come drink from the cup of blessing

Come for all things are ready
and all are invited

Come confess
how the long nights have colored your mornings
how your sins have crowded out your good traits
how your pettiness has overshadowed your generosity
how your need for security has overtaken your ability to share
how you tried to make yourself numb by saying it is normal
how you silenced yourself so you didn't have to speak about the pain

You who are hungry
eat this bread

You who are thirsty
drink this wine

You will be filled

You who are hungry for peace
come and be fed so you can feed others

You who are thirsty for justice
come and be filled so you can pour yourself out for others

You will be filled

Come
for the world needs you strong and humble
to stand in the streets
to weep with the prophets
to sing above the explosions

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