

Lifestyles and laws that threaten the viability of our planet and the sanctity of life in all its diversity, need to be overturned. It is time to examine our own hearts and our own society – to add to the compost heap all that is destructive to the human spirit and our planet earth, all that could be broken down for good.

Our own country's chief gardener (our Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern) has said: *'I was raised in a religious home – I have absolute faith in humanity'*.

Ms Ardern's faith in humanity, her compassion and wise leadership, together with the responses of those targeted, and our diverse local communities (young and not-so-young, churched and patched, indigenous and colonized) have captured attention around the world. We are all immersed in a season of Lent like no other. Yet, as we live into the future, we will be called never to give up, whatever the barrenness or apparent fruitlessness of our efforts. As theologian Peter Varengo has penned: *'This season means accepting the presence of God in absence, loneliness and struggle. It means accepting the lifegiving action of a patient and understanding God even in the midst of human tragedy. It means working tirelessly at nurturing our relationships with God and with each other, when to all appearances we are wasting water and effort on a dead stump of the tree of life. This Lenten season means journeying on, looking at the cross on Golgotha and seeing life bursting from an empty tomb. God will never give up on us, either individually or communally, and our most authentic Lenten practice must be to refuse 'giving up' on ourselves, on each other and on God, no matter what life puts before us and what shape our journey will take.*

As I wrote in reflection last Tuesday: *'the flood of aroha and tears continues to flow through banks of flowers and chalk-messaged footpaths, stretching across our city and well beyond. A river - flowing with compassion, courage and solidarity negotiates boulders of anger, question-filled rapids and still pools of sorrow, all spilling into an estuary of hope to meet the tide of shared humanity ebbing and flowing across our fragile world. God. This is not who we are!'* we cry in lament. *'Out of this darkness I pray NZ will be born again as well as Myself.'*

Will a new stream of consciousness now flow through our hearts, minds, city, nation and beyond....?

A Salaam alaikum. Helen Roud

Lent III 24th March 2019

Readings: Isaiah 55:1-9; 1 Cor.10:1-13; Luke 13:1-9

Reflection:

"Oh, how I hate Lent" a dear and respected colleague confessed as we walked together from the Combined Prayer Service in Latimer Square on Thursday evening. He then enlarged on his impassioned and heartfelt declaration, describing how – after many penitential seasons - he now approached Lent in trepidation, wondering what new catastrophic event was going to bring him to his knees.

This year's Lenten tragedy has, in a sense, brought people across our nation (and the world) to their knees. As one commentator has voiced for the collective: *'We are pained and ashamed that such a terrorist act of evil has happened in our own land. We grieve for our Muslim sisters and brothers who have died in the act of prayer, martyrs for their faith. Our support and love reaches out to all who suffer, especially the families of those who have died. We feel remorse too, at our own past hesitation to embrace difference as healthy and necessary diversity and beauty, and we hope for a future where fear is transformed by love.'* These feelings of conviction, remorse and commitment to change were all expressed in a public meeting at the Transitional Cathedral last Tuesday night.

Back in Latimer Square, it was my turn to confess, admitting that – although it was a Thursday - I had inhabited a 'Holy Saturday'-shaped space all day – feeling numb, worn, empty, overwhelmed, helpless. Yet as my colleague and I walked back to our cars together (on our own proverbial Emmaus journey), holding the pain and horror of the previous days in our hearts, we also recognised the seed of longing, the yearning for conversion, for transformation that in itself is a Lenten 'gift.'

This longing had been given tangible expression at prayer mere minutes earlier, as we had been collectively invited to kneel together in an act of repentance and then sing the familiar hymn attributed to Francis of Assisi: *'Make me a channel of your peace, where there is hatred, let me sow your love, where there is injury, your pardon Lord and where there's doubt, true faith in you.'*

Repentance, longing.....Psalm 63, the psalm set for today, expresses that longing: *'O God, you are my God, I seek you, my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.'* (appropriate words from the lips of David the psalmist, wandering the arid and inhospitable reaches of the Judean wilderness). Yet the psalmist continues:

'So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; I will lift up my hands and call on your name... ..My soul clings to you; your right hand upholds me.'

These words of David are the words of one who longs, who yearns to be close to God, to grow in relationship, to rest in the One who is Steadfast Love, who is justice and mercy, the One who draws us into the mystery of suffering and full humanity.

On Thursday evening in Latimer Square, with the Transitional Cathedral as a backdrop, Bible passages from the Hebrew and New Covenant (the prophets and the Gospel) were read; the Lord's Prayer was offered in Te Reo Maori and passages from the Koran were chanted – passages then translated as follows: *'We are all members of one body – and when one part suffers, we all suffer.'* *'We are all parts of the same building, and every part is needed'* Do those words sound familiar? Are they not words we hear in Paul's letters of teaching and encouragement to the early church? We are all called to live in unity, honouring diversity. Or as the catch phrase proclaims: *'You are us!'* Solidarity, hope, love, faith....

I had another most profound experience this past week – a meeting of solidarity, fellowship, food and prayer at the Suzanne Aubert Catholic Worker Cottage in Addington. A group of about twenty-five folk from various walks of life gathered to share Eucharist, singing hymns and psalms of both lament and praise. I was seated next to John Osmer, New Zealand-born anti-apartheid activist and retired bishop of East Zambia (some of you may recall his story). As we joined hands to sing, Bishop John offered me his right arm and I had the privilege of gently holding his stump - the result of his losing his hand (and the front of his legs) in 1979, to a parcel bomb planted by South African Security. It was a very clear reminder of our call to take up our cross – a reminder that when we stand for love and the fruit of righteousness, there will be push-back. Yet, *'We are all members of one body – when one part suffers, we all suffer'* and...*'You are us!'*

Last Friday, how humbling it was to wear the hijab in solidarity with my Muslim sisters, and to hear & share the Islamic call to prayer in Hagley Park, opposite al-Noor mosque. For the Muslim community gathered (including the injured hospital patients in their wheelchairs), the call to prayer was such a witness to their devout faith and commitment to God, even in the face of profound grief, shock and pain: "God is the greatest - I acknowledge there are no other gods but the One God - Come to prayer - Come to salvation - God is the greatest - There are no other gods but the One God" What an incredible proclamation resounding across the sports grounds. (Similarly, in Deuteronomy 6, the Shema Yisrael of our Hebrew brothers and sisters proclaims: *"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one"* and from the lips of Jesus recorded in Luke's gospel: *'Love the Lord your God, with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself'*)

From the mouths of our Muslim brothers and sisters, strengthened by their faith, and having received over the past week, the outpouring of love and solidarity expressed locally and beyond - by all faiths and none – came words of conviction and grace: *'We are broken-hearted but we are not broken'* *'Love will overcome hate'* *'We are one'*

Just as the words of Isaiah called the Israelites exiled in Babylon to a future of abundance and hope, we too – as human citizens of this good earth - many centuries on - are now urged to mature into a future of abundance and hope. Only last night I heard the story of a four-year-old boy who had been told - in an age-appropriate way - of the terrorist attacks – *'How did that man lose all his goodness?'* he asked his mother.

We have not given up our goodness. And God has not given up on our goodness. Our young people have gathered in Cathedral Square, claiming a future where the earth is cared for and saved from catastrophic decline. They have rallied, sung and haka-ed in lament and have marched for love, wearing bright colours of hope. They have lived through the trauma of our quakey city and now, in growing maturity, confront our society's barren fig tree. A fig tree of Western consumerist society with an underbelly of racial (and other) intolerances – an underbelly of self-interest, apathy and fear. The fig tree is under threat, but has been granted another year in which to bear fruit – fruit of compassion and kindness, fruit of relationship-building, understanding and unity. A year of opportunity to manure with love, a year of opportunity to change gun laws, composting weapons of destruction, composting racial hatred and fear of difference.