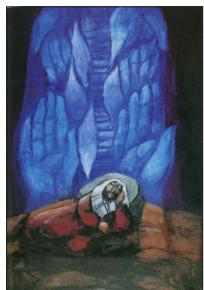


Jacob's ladder by Sieger Köder

Thresholds

A Book of Prayers



Thresholds: A Book of Prayers, 2011

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preface

The following collection of prayers gives voice to the different thresholds that mark and shape our lives. Some crossings are so familiar, taken for granted and ritualised that they call for the unfamiliar – prayers that direct us to God with images that unsettle our predictable routines and reactions. Other crossings are so unfamiliar that they make us hold on to the familiar – prayers with well-known words that have sheltered us in moments when we needed to feel the embrace of our spiritual ancestors and the communion of our brothers and sisters.

So many of the thresholds we encounter echo crossings Jesus himself had to make, and remind us that we are not alone in those moments. A crosser of thresholds from the time of his incarnation, he became truly one of us, fully human. In the words of an early Christian hymn, ‘he emptied himself of all power’ (Philippians 2) and shared our fragile, vulnerable, limited lives from birth to death. He too had to accept the paradoxes of human existence: of no light without darkness, no faith without doubt, no love without loss, no victory without defeat, no life without death.

How can the thresholds Jesus faced and the thresholds he invited others to take illuminate our own crossings, enrich our understanding of them, give us the courage to be fully present to them and offer us images and words to inspire and guide us in our prayers? The following collection of prayers attempts to illustrate such a process by mapping various movements: from heart to heart, from fear to trust, from naming to being known, from knowing to unknowing.

The prayers might not only resonate with your own threshold experiences but also echo some of Jesus’ difficult crossings. We invite you to make those connections and to allow the prayers to weave new movements and patterns that deepen your life in the midst of the managed chaos and attack on meaning around us and within us.

heart to heart



Turning point by Sieger Köder

*Face to face.
Heart to heart.
The closest we may come
to innocence.*

~ Michael Leunig

Dear God,

*When we are confronted with hunger that overwhelms,
may we meet Jesus in his places of vulnerability,
be bold enough to offer the little we have,
and trust in the abundance of your grace.*

It was evening and the disciples wanted to send the people home. They had counted their savings and knew that there was too little money to feed 5,000 men, not including the women and children. Were it not for the courage and innocence of the child who offered his two fish and five loaves, the miraculous feeding would never have happened. But the boy trusted that the little he had would be enough in Jesus' hands. What a wondrous exchange – face to face, heart to heart.

Jesus must have been deeply moved by the needs and expectations of the crowd. He could have called it a day. But instead he was inspired by the generosity and trust of the child and responded with similar courage and innocence. He made himself vulnerable, running the risk of public failure, and entered an uncertain place of dependency in which he completely relied on God to respond. As he took the fish and the bread and offered them to God he became a channel of both human hopes and God's grace. It was not unlike Peter's challenge of stepping out of the safety of the boat and walking on water. Would his faith and trust in his parent God carry him?

In our amazement at the miraculous feeding of the 5,000 we often miss the wonder of such trust and vulnerability at the heart of the story. The Jesus of John's Gospel calls us not to dwell on the miracle, though, but to see moments such as these as signs – windows into the heart of God. The signs assure us of a parent God ready to make his face shine upon us and to lift his face up towards us, as envisaged in the ancient Aaronic blessing.

The following prayers invite us into a similar place of vulnerability and uncertainty. They speak to us of trust and dependency, a child-like innocence, and the gift of unexpected transformation. The little we have to offer is enough. What is important is into whose hands we entrust it.



new vulnerability

Blessed are the poor ...
not the penniless
but those whose heart is free.

Blessed are those who mourn ...
not those who whimper
but those who raise their voices.

Blessed are the meek ...
not the soft
but those who are patient and tolerant.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for justice ...
not those who whine
but those who struggle.

Blessed are the merciful ...
not those who forget
but those who forgive.

Blessed are the pure in heart ...
not those who act like angels
but those whose life is transparent.

Blessed are the peacemakers ...
not those who shun conflict
but those who face it squarely.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for justice ...
not because they suffer
but because they love.

~ P. Jacobs

*To fold your hands in prayer is the beginning
of resistance against the world's disorder.*

~ Karl Barth

the gift of holy discontent

Beckoning God –
who called the rich to travel toward poverty,
the wise to embrace your folly,
the powerful to know their own frailty;
who gave to strangers
a sense of homecoming in an alien land;
and to stargazers
true light and vision as they bowed to earth;
we lay ourselves open to your signs for us.

Stir us with holy discontent over a world
which gives its gifts to those
who have plenty already
whose talents are obvious
whose power is recognised;
and help us
both to share our resources with those who have little
and to receive with humility the gifts they bring to us.

Rise within us like a star
and make us restless
till we journey forth
to seek our rest in you.

~ Kate Compston



*Even when the gates of heaven
are shut to prayer,
they are open to tears.*

~ From the Talmud

a place to cry

Jesus, we see you standing on a hill
overlooking Jerusalem
crying over her children.
We share your despair and pain
as we imagine ourselves on our own mountain
overlooking our city.

We too cry over our children:
small and vulnerable,
angry and violent,
hurt and addicted,
abandoned and misled,
abused and unnoticed.

We cry over ourselves
as you must be crying over us,
our sense of powerlessness,
our inability to protect,
our doubt that things can change,
our fear to move beyond
what we know and can control,
our hesitation to take more risks or speak up.

Jesus, we see you standing on a hill
overlooking Jerusalem.

As we follow you
we stand in awe
of your determination
to share our place of pain,
despair and anger.

You are our Immanuel.
God is with us and for us
not only when we feel strong
but especially when we feel weak and empty.

You allow us to be honest about our failures,
to make weakness the beginning of new strength,
for your forgiveness energises us,
your compassion gives us courage,
your dedication moves us to action.

As we stand on our own beautiful mountain
we find comfort in our tears,
for they are your tears
blessing the broken in spirit,
the mournful, the peacemakers,
the gentle, the pure in heart.

~ Robert Steiner



*May the power of God this day enable me,
the nakedness of God disarm me,
the beauty of God silence me,
the justice of God give me voice,
the integrity of God hold me,
the desire of God move me,
the fear of God expose me to the truth,
the breath of God give me abundant life.*

~ Janet Morley

weaving bonds of love

God, you weave and invite us to join you.
The tapestry you call us to make
is new and daring and multicoloured –
a wondrous vision of your kingdom on earth.

We find ourselves entwined with each other in it –
beautifully so with strong bonds of love
in intricate patterns;
but also painfully entwined –

There are bonds that are broken,
knots we cannot undo.
Where we used to be supple
the tenderness between us has hardened;
our strands have frayed.
We want to cut ourselves lose
from those who hurt us.

Fear has taught us to hide our true colours.
Paranoia has made us shun others.
Distrust interrupts our efforts
and we retreat in pain,
leaving the work unfinished.

God, we look to you for healing,
for faith that the blind can receive sight,
broken relationships can be restored,
perpetrators can recover innocence,
out of death can come fuller life.

Weaver God,
the tapestry of your kingdom
is new and daring and multicoloured
We long to see it come
on earth as it is in heaven.
Resurrect us to love as you love.

~ Helen Hacksley



*The limits of my language
mean the limits of my world.*

~ Ludwig Wittgenstein

startling encounter

Strange God,
God of the stranger,
you speak – we hear you murmur – you cry out,
but the windows of our hearts are blackened
the doors tightly sealed
where no wandering wind can enter,
no light can penetrate.
Anxious for ourselves,
we feel cold and alone.

We long for freedom
and hear you laughing.
We long for comfort
and hear you weeping.
We long for power
and watch you dying.
We long for reward
and shun the undeserving and feeble.
We long for knowledge
but you evade understanding.
We long for beauty,
scorning that which we find ugly.
We long for contentment
but you unsettle and surprise.

Stumbling, we long for a straight, sure road
but you confuse, contradict,
lead us down strange paths.

You are not what we expect
nor where we expected you would be.
In our fragility we long for a strong God –
powerful, unchanging, immovable,
but you are startlingly vulnerable,
rich in imagination,
bountiful in newness.

You have a thousand flavours,
you sing in a hundred different tongues,
you are frustrating, inconvenient,
destroyer of convention,
you are strange,
you dwell in the stranger.

Strange God,
you speak – we hear you murmur – you cry out.
Tease away our defences;
open wide the door of change;
flood our souls with your light
that we may not miss encountering you
in the strange, in the stranger.

~ Helen Hacksley



*Living God, take our hands, take our lives,
ordinary as wheat, daily as bread –
our stumbling generosity, our simple actions,
and find them good enough
to help prepare the feast
for all your people.*

~ Janet Morley

prayer of a reluctant leader

You asked for my hands
that you might use them for your purpose.
I gave them for a moment then withdrew them
for the work was hard.
You asked for my mouth
to speak out against injustice.
I gave you a whisper that I might not be accused.

You asked for my eyes
to see the pain of poverty.
I closed them for I did not want to see.

You asked for my life
that you might work through me.
I gave a small part that I might not get too involved.

Lord, forgive my calculated efforts to serve you,
only when it is convenient for me to do so,
only in those places where it is safe to do so,
and only with those who make it easy to do so.

Father, forgive me, renew me, send me out
as a usable instrument
that I might take seriously the meaning of your cross.

~ Joe Seremane

the God who keeps us

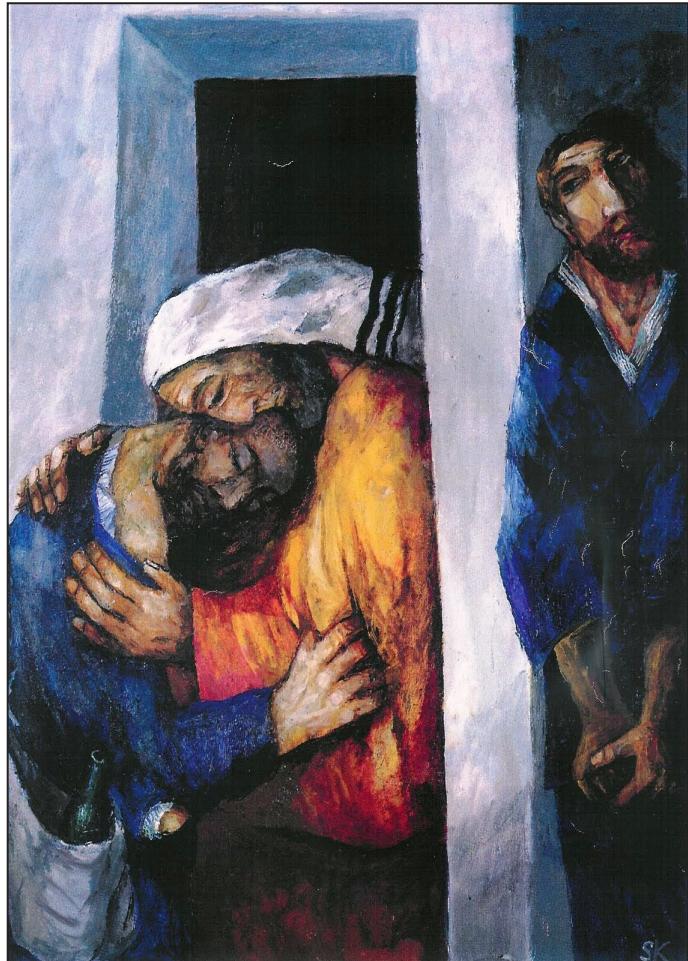
You keep us waiting,
You, the God of all time,
want us to wait
for the right time in which to discover
who we are, where we must go,
who will be with us, and what we must do.

You keep us looking,
You, the God of all space,
want us to look in the right and wrong places
for signs of hope,
for people who are hopeless,
for visions of a better world which will appear
among the disappointments of the world we know.

You keep us loving,
You, the God whose name is love,
want us to be like you –
to love the loveless and the unlovely and the unlovable;
to love without jealousy or design or threat;
and, most difficult of all,
to love ourselves.

And in all this,
you keep us.
Through hard questions with no easy answers;
through failing where we hoped to succeed
and making an impact when we felt we were useless;
through the patience and the dreams
and the love of others;
and through Jesus Christ and his Spirit,
you keep us.

fear to trust



Home by Sieger Köder

Dear God,
When we fall, let us fall inward. Let us fall
freely and completely, that we may find our
depth and humility – the solid earth from
which we may rise up and love again. Amen

~ Michael Leunig

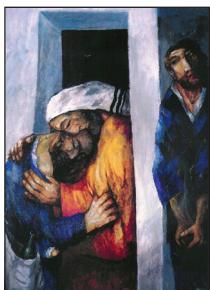
The first words of the risen Christ to the disciples in the upper room were ‘Peace is yours’. But how hard it is to receive such a generous gift that promises a new beginning, a new life shaped not by fear but by trust.

Criticism and condemnation are sometimes easier to hear, because they resonate with our feelings of inadequacy and failure and play on our desire to become better people. Unconditional acceptance is much more difficult to embrace, for deep inside we feel undeserving of such love and trust. And yet we know from our own lives that the experience of another person trusting us, when we do not even trust ourselves, is by far more healing, energising and transforming than ongoing criticism.

It is when we are allowed to let our defenses down, when we no longer feel the urge to justify ourselves, when we can be honest about our brokenness, that we sense new strength and vision like living water being pouring into the dry, empty chambers of our inner selves.

For Mary, Thomas and Peter the gift of peace presented itself as an invitation to cross painful thresholds. Mary’s despairing grief gave way to a new sense of belonging, Thomas’s honest doubt was rehabilitated as the other side of faith, and Peter’s feelings of guilt were turned into a strong sense of calling.

There are prayers that activate this gift of peace, remind us of our original blessing, tap into a divine generosity of spirit that is at the heart of our universe, and allow us to begin each day as if it is the very first of our lives.



The wind and the sun argued one day over who was the strongest. They spotted a man travelling on the road and decided that the proof of strength would be who could remove the man's coat. The wind began.

He blew strong gusts of air, so strong that the man could barely walk against them. But the man clutched his coat tight against him. The harder the wind blew, the tighter the man held onto his coat. The wind blew until he was exhausted, but he could not remove the coat. It was now the sun's turn. He came out from behind a cloud and shone quietly upon the man until the man became so warm that he took off his own coat.

~ Aesop's Fable of The Wind and the Sun

winds of fear, rays of trust

God, there are many winds that buffet us –
cold winds of fear that make us retreat,
violent winds of anger that blow us off course,
relentless winds of regret that wear us thin.
We experience forces that would strip us bare
and fight hard against them, fearing exposure.
We cover our nakedness, fearing separation.

Experience has taught us to protect ourselves.
We have learnt that often truth
means disappointment and rejection.
Afraid of being exposed in our humanity,
we clothe ourselves in protective outer layers,
masks of beauty, importance, cleverness, righteousness.

God, where are you amidst our fear?
Are you impatient wind
pushing us where you want us to go?
Are you judging force,
pulling down our defenses,
exposing and condemning?

Or are you gentle sun,
trusting that if you shine long enough on us,
we will lose our fear,
drop all pretences,
and turn towards your light?

Son of God,
Light of the world,
we turn to you in your incarnation.
In you we see a God who lets down every defense
who enters into life naked and helpless
and dies the same way.
In your unmasked love and passion
we see another way of being.
And so we turn to you
amidst the destructive storms
that tear us apart from each other.

Shine on us with your warmth and grace,
that in the light of your humanity
we may be moved from fear to trust
and enter into new life.

~ Helen Hacksley



The soul cycles and twists, repeats and reprises, echoing ancient themes common to all human beings. It is always circling home. Its odyssey is a drifting at sea, a floating toward home, not an evolution toward perfection.

~ Thomas Moore

metamorphosis

God

If there is fear in our lives,
let it be a fear that is not devoid of hope;

if there is loss,
let it be a loss that can become
an empty space that some gain can fill.

If there is sorrow,
let it be a sorrow that can bring happiness
into sharper focus;

if there is seeking,
let it be a seeking
that is capable of questioning.

If there is doubt,
let it be a doubt that eventually helps
to reinforce our trust
in that which cannot be known fully;

if there is a turning away from love,
let it continue
until it becomes
a turning towards love.

~ Shabbir Banooobhai

sharing secrets

O God, you are the God of all truth
and call us to be truthful
with you, with others and with ourselves.

You are the God from whom no secret can be hid
and we are people with many secrets.
There are secrets we want to tell
for the sake of our lives
and then there are secrets we dare not tell
because they are deep and painful.

But they are our secrets –
we hold them close to our hearts.
They are our truth, rooted deep in our lives.

O God, you are the God of all truth,
You are the God of our truth:
the truth of grief unresolved,
the truth of pain unacknowledged,
the truth of fear too childlike,
the truth of hate as powerful as it is deep,
the truth of being taken advantage of and manipulated.

But in all of this, O God,
we trust the great truth of your wondrous love,
and we will not sit still for it until you hear us,
for we know and believe that
our truth, when it is heard by you,
will make us free.
So be the God of all truth,
In the name of Jesus
whose love has become our way,
our light and our truth.

~ Walter Brueggemann



mothering God

Our Mother,
who brooded over the earth before it was formed
and breathed new life into us with cries of wonder,
bright and bold are the dreams you have for us.

You form and reform us in your image
and call us good.
You place oceans of possibility within us
and call us co-creators.
You breathe love into our hearts
and call us beautiful.
Bright and bold are the dreams you have for us.

Mothering God, we are your children –
you feel the pain of our every fall,
you enfold us when we mourn,
you continually labour to deliver us from our evil,
you wean us of our dependency and self-interest,
you reach out to us when we lose our way,
you teach us to walk on our own,
you tend our fragile seeds of faith
until they blossom into the fruits of your spirit,
you embrace us with a love that encircles all of creation,
you nourish us with words of trust –
bright and bold are the dreams you have for us.

Give us faith in ourselves to follow your vision,
for yours is the life-force, the mystery, the imagination,
now and forever.

~ Helen Hacksley

*in loneliness before it is filled with warmth
in clouds before they become rain
in ink before it is turned into words
is the birthplace of your presence*

~ Shabbir Banooobhai

discerning voices

God, we are surrounded by many voices:
some innocent and some seductive,
some violent and some coercive,
some accusing and some forgiving,
some deceptive and some genuine.
They pull us in many directions.

Amid such a cacophony
we hear other voices
throughout the ages too:
voices that attest to
your desire to create and bless,
your openness to unmask and forgive,
your longing to counsel and guide,
your passion to comfort and heal,
your vision to restore and renew,
your willingness to die,
your determination to rise.

These voices become our calling,
echoing your first creative words,
bringing order out of chaos,
rooting us deeply in your original blessing.

~ Robert Steiner
based in part on a prayer by Walter Brueggemann



There is a sacredness in tears. They are not the mark of weakness, but of power. They speak more eloquently than ten thousand tongues. They are messengers of overwhelming grief ... and unspeakable love.

~ Washington Irving

painful absence

O God,
so much in our world is not what it should be,
so much within us yearns for something more.
In our most honest moments we wonder where you are,
why you are so slow to act
why we do not feel your presence.
Like the Psalmist we too cry out
'Why are you so far from us O God?'

And yet we are blessed by the great mystery,
revealed to us in Christ,
that our anguish, our grief, our sense of helplessness,
is perhaps the moment when you are closest to us;
that our prayer of forsakenness
will be our homecoming.

You are a God who weeps with those who weep.
Our cries and your tears mingle together as one,
creating the possibility of something new,
a ray of hope,
a spirit lifted,
a heart softened,
the dawn of a new era.

~ Suellen Shay

seeking rest

O God, our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you:
restless because of fear,
restless because of guilt
restless because of grief,
restless because of pain.

O God, our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.
for you are generous in mercy,
deep source of yearning,
startling comforter,
bearer of darkness,
unmaker of old paths,
bringer of strange joy,
abundant, disturbing, healing and tender,
beauty so ancient and so new,
beyond our busy imaginings,
far above our elevated constructions of thought.

In the dust you meet us,
your footprints cross ours,
behind us and before us you tread the path,
you lead the way,
you bow low,
you lift us up,
you look upon us through the face of the poor
you bless us in the nurture of friendship,
you challenge us in the cries for justice,
and the weeping for hope.

O God, our hearts are restless till they find their rest in you.
Lift us from our restlessness that we may see your vision,
know your wisdom and find our rest in you.

~ adapted by Robert Steiner
from prayers by William Loader and Janet Morley



In token of our deep and abiding love, we would lay aside all disturbing thoughts, all misunderstandings, all unworthiness. If things have gone awry, let neither of us lift an accusing finger. Who is to blame is not important; only how we shall set the situation right.

~ F. Alexander Magoun

for love in the time of conflict

When the gentleness between you hardens
And you fall out of your belonging with each other,
May the depths you have reached hold you still.

When no true word can be said, or heard,
And you mirror each other in the script of hurt,
When even the silence has become raw and torn,
May you hear again an echo of your first music.

When the weave of affection starts to unravel
And anger begins to sear the ground between you,
Before this weather of grief invites
The black seed of bitterness to find root,
May your souls come to kiss.

Now is the time for one of you to be gracious,
To allow a kindness beyond thought and hurt,
Reach out with sure hands
To take the chalice of your love,
And carry it carefully through this echoless waste
Until this winter pilgrimage leads you
Towards the gateway to spring.

~ John O'Donohue

in sunshine and in rain

May the blessing of light be on you,
light without and light within.

May the blessed sunlight shine upon you
and warm your heart
till it glows like a great fire
and strangers may warm themselves
as well as friends.

And may the light shine out of your eyes
like a candle set in the window of a house,
bidding the wanderer to come in out of the storm.

May the blessing of rain be on you;
the soft sweet rain.

May it fall upon your spirit
so that little flowers may spring up
and shed their sweetness on the air.

And may the blessing of the great rains be on you,
to beat upon your spirit
and wash it fair and clean;
and leave there many a shining pool
where the blue of heaven shines,
and sometimes a star.

May the blessing of the earth be on you,
the great round earth.

May you ever have a kindly greeting for people
As you're going along the roads.

And now may the Lord bless you,
and bless you kindly.

~ Celtic blessing

naming to being known



Trust by Sieger Köder

*No matter how far we fall
let us remember that we cannot fall deeper
than into the hands of God.*

*We no longer drive out demons.
Instead we drive out human beings.*

~ Gerd Theissen

The ‘crazy’ man from Gerasene must have been surprised to see someone daring to come so close to him. He was used to being shunned, shamed and removed from the living. He was acknowledged as the one possessed by evil spirits. He himself was painfully aware of the struggle to remain in control of his emotions and thoughts. He faced impulses so strong they overpowered him. But this man from Galilee was not afraid of him. Jesus listened to his anguish and did not reduce the man to the voice that came out of him. Instead, with an authority that was both gentle and determined, he named what the man himself feared to name. In that moment whatever trauma, pain, grief or guilt bound him and kept him buried alive lost its hold. Forces beyond his control left him and instead drove a whole swine herd over the cliff. A threshold was crossed in a strange and dramatic exchange.

The story reminds us of how much power there is in naming. Jesus saw what needed to be named, confronted and revealed to enable the man to experience a new sense of knowing and being known. The threshold was crossed from humiliation to dignity, from fear to love, from despair to joy, from anger to harmony. No longer alienated from himself and others, the man could find wholeness.

Mary of Magdala had a similar experience of profound naming and liberation from ‘seven demons’. Since then she was known by name and a simple ‘Mary’ was enough to roll away the stone and birth new life for her. At the centre of Jesus’ ministry was his willingness to listen to and name the unnamed in order to release the captives, restore their identity and bring them back into society.

There are prayers that name what we cannot name ourselves and give expression to our painful loss of control and experience of confusion and disorientation. May we in such moments of naming also experience the gift of being known by name and take courage to find our liberation by naming what overwhelms us.



*Dear God, be good to me.
The sea is so wide and my boat is so small.*

~ *Fisherman's prayer*

for a prisoner

Caged in a cold, functional cell,
Far from the comfort of home
With none of your own things,
In a place that is grey and grim,
Where sounds are seldom gentle;
Amidst the shuffle of dumbed feet,
The crossword of lost voices,
The one constant note
Is the dead, trap-shut sound
Of unrelenting doors that
Make walls absolute.

Though you have lost the outside world,
May you discover the untold journey
That awaits you in the inner world.

May you come to recognise
That though your body is imprisoned,
No one can imprison your mind.

May all the time you have on your hands
Bring you into new friendship with your mind
So that you learn to understand and integrate
The darkness that brought you here.

Within this limited space,
May you learn to harness
The stretch of time.

* * * *

May your compassion awaken.
May you learn to recover the self
You were before you lost your way
And draw from its depths
Some balm to heal your wounds.

Behind the harsh rhythms of prison life,
May you find a friend you can talk to
And nurture the natural kindness
To become more free in your heart
And lighten the outer constraints.

May your eyes look up and find
The bright line of an inner horizon
That will ground and encourage you
For that distant day when your new feet
Will step out onto the pastures of freedom.

~ John O'Donohue



*I believe in the sun
even when it is not shining.*

*I believe in love
even when feeling it not.*

*I believe in God
even when He is silent.*

~ *Anonymous*

who am I?

Who am I? They often tell me
I step out from my cell
calm and cheerful and poised,
like a squire from his manor.

Who am I? They often tell me
I speak with my guards
freely, friendly and clear,
as though I were the one in charge.

Who am I? They also tell me
I bear days of calamity
serenely, smiling and proud,
like one accustomed to victory.

Am I really what others say of me?
Or am I only what I know of myself?
Restless, yearning, sick, like a caged bird,
struggling for life-breath, as if I were being strangled,
starving for colors, for flowers, for birdsong,
thirsting for kind words, human closeness,
shaking with rage at power lust and pettiest insult,
tossed about, waiting for great things to happen,
helplessly fearing for friends so far away,
too tired and empty to pray, to think, to work,
weary and ready to take my leave of it all?

Who am I? This one or the other?
Am I this one today and tomorrow another?
Am I both at once? Before others a hypocrite
and in my own eyes a pitiful, whimpering weakling?
Or is what remains in me like a defeated army,
Fleeing in disarray from victory already won?

Who am I?
They mock me,
these lonely questions of mine.
Whoever I am, thou knowest me;
O God, I am thine!

~ Dietrich Bonhoeffer



*Let it go. Let it out.
Let it all unravel.
Let it free and it can be
a path on which to travel.*

~ Michael Leunig

darkness, my closest friend

O Lord, the God who saves me,
day and night I cry out before you.
May my prayer come before you;
turn your ear to my cry.
For my soul is full of trouble
and my life draws near the grave.
I am counted among those who go down to the pit;
I am like a man without strength.
I am set apart with the dead,
like the slain who lie in the grave,
whom you remember no more,
who are cut off from your care.

You have put me in the lowest pit,
in the darkest depths.
Your wrath lies heavily upon me;
you have overwhelmed me with all your waves.
You have taken from me my closest friends
and have made me repulsive to them.
I am confined and cannot escape;
my eyes are dim with grief.
I call to you, O Lord, every day;
I spread out my hands to you.
Do you show your wonders to the dead?
Do those who are dead rise up and praise you?

Is your love declared in the grave,
your faithfulness in Destruction?
Are your wonders known in the place of darkness,
or your righteous deeds in the land of oblivion?

But I cry to you for help, O Lord;
in the morning my prayer comes before you.
Why, O Lord, do you reject me
and hide your face from me?

From my youth I have been afflicted and close to death;
I have suffered your terrors and am in despair.
Your wrath has swept over me;
your terrors have destroyed me.

All day long they surround me like a flood;
they have completely engulfed me.
You have taken my companions and loved ones from me;
the darkness is my closest friend.

~ *Psalm 88*



*O God who gave us life,
and in whose arms we die,
you know us as we are,
understand what we have been
and see what we shall become.*

*We give you back our lives
that you may make them new.*

~ Janet Morley

for the parents of one who has committed a crime

No one else can see beauty
In his darkened life now.
His image has closed
Like a shadow.

When people look at him,
He has become the mirror
Of the damage he has done.

But he is yours;
And you have different eyes
That hold his yesterdays
In pictures no one else remembers.

Waiting for him to be born,
Not knowing who he would be,
The moments of his childhood,
First steps, first words,
Smiles and cries;
And all the big thresholds
Of his journey since . . .

He is yours in a way
No words could ever tell;
And you can see through
The stranger this deed has made him
And still find the countenance of your son.

* * * *

Despite all the disappointment and shame,
May you find in your belonging with him
A kind place, where your spirit will find rest.
May new words come alive between you
To build small bridges of understanding.

May that serenity lead you beyond guilt and blame
To find that bright field of the heart
Where he can come to feel your love

Until it heals whatever darkness drove him
And he can see what it is he has done
And seek forgiveness and bring healing;
May this dark door open a path
That brightens constantly with new promise.

~ John O'Donohue



*God give us strength.
Strength to hold on and strength to let go.*

~ Michael Leunig

living with Parkinson's disease

My legs and my hands may be shaky,
But may my courage and my faith be firm.

My muscles may become stiff and hard to move,
But may my mind not become inflexible,
nor my heart unmoved.

I might lose my balance,
But may I continue to be balanced
in outlook and personality.

My hand-writing may become small and squiggly,
But may I never become small- or woolly-minded.

My face may take on a deadpan look,
But may I always be able to express joy, love and peace.

My movements may become slower and slower,
And may I also become slow to get irritated
and lose my cool.

My voice may become very soft and croaky,
But may I not give up on communicating with others.

May I never lose the vital spark that is me.

~ Isobel de Gruchy

knowing the difference

Lord, we pray,
‘Give us grace to accept with serenity
the things that cannot be changed,
courage to change the things that should be changed,
and the wisdom to know the difference.’

I also pray,
Give me compassion
to help when help is needed,
kindness to stand back when help is not wanted,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Give me openness
to share something of my journey if helpful,
humility to keep quiet if I’m only boasting,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Give me gentleness
to ask concerned questions,
reticence to probe intrudingly,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Give me willingness
to organise and advise freely,
patience not to interfere,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

Give me courage
to be honest in my response if that is called for,
Sensitivity to refrain from honesty
if that would be more compassionate,
and the wisdom to know the difference.

~ Isobel de Gruchy

knowing to unknowing



Insight by Sieger Köder

*God, help us to look for you, not only
where it appears that you obviously must
be, but also where it appears that you
obviously cannot be.*

~ Shabbir Banooobhai

We keep creating God in our own image instead of being created in God's image. How hard it is to let go of the familiar and invite the unfamiliar to shape and form us. Jesus preached 'Be compassionate as God is compassionate', and thereby challenged the priestly instruction to 'Be holy as God is holy'. The traditional purity system that classified people into pure and impure, holy and unholy, was replaced by a radical vision of compassion. Rigid, merciless socio-religious boundaries were challenged in the name of a God who was concerned not with the ninety-nine righteous, but with the one lost sheep.

So many of Jesus' encounters bear witness to the powerful transformations possible with a new experience of God. Zacchaeus, the despised tax collector, for example, experiences restoration through Jesus' ministry and becomes a grateful host. The parable of the Good Samaritan illustrates how inhumane purity laws could be and how the one shunned, impure foreigner became God's agent of bold compassion and healing.

Jesus' vision of radical compassion challenged the 'known' God and demanded an uncomfortable 'unknowing' that was willing to question accepted, sanctioned demarcations. But even Jesus himself needed to be challenged in his vision of God. It still proved to be too narrow when a Syro-Phoenician woman, a privileged member of a foreign elite that exploited Galilean farmers, approached him and pleaded for him to heal her sick daughter. She remained adamant that God would want to heal her daughter and was willing to suffer humiliation for the sake of her daughter. It was she who helped Jesus to see that he had not been 'sent only to the lost sheep of Israel', but that God's compassion knows no boundaries and his mission was to the whole world.

The following prayers invite us to embark on a similar journey of 'unknowing'. Unraveling and uncomfortable as the journey into the unknown is, it promises to mould us more and more into God's image. It allows us to find God in new, surprising places and to see that his love and compassion know no limits.



*Slow me down, Lord.
Steady my hurried pace
with a vision of the eternal reach of time.
Give me, amidst the confusion of my day,
the calmness of the everlasting hills.*

~ Wilfred A. Peterson

slowing down

Dear God,

We pray for another way of being:
another way of knowing.

Across the difficult terrain of our existence
we have attempted to build a highway
and in doing so have lost our footpath.

God lead us to our footpath:
lead us where in simplicity
we may move at the speed of natural creatures
and feel the earth's love beneath our feet.

Lead us there where step-by-step
we may feel the movement of creation in our hearts.
And lead us there where side-by-side
we may feel the embrace of the common soul.

Nothing can be loved at speed.
God lead us to the slow path;
to the joyous insights of the pilgrim;
another way of knowing:
another way of being.

Amen.

~ Michael Leunig

*Once one has seen God,
what is the remedy?*

~ *Sylvia Plath*

helpful interruptions

Disturb us, Lord,
when we are too well pleased with ourselves,
when our dreams have come true
because we have dreamed too little,
when we arrived safely
because we sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord,
when with the abundance of things we possess
we have lost our thirst
for the waters of life.

Disturb us, Lord,
to dare more boldly,
to venture on wider seas
where storms will show your mastery;
where losing sight of land,
we shall find the stars.

We ask you to push back
the horizons of our hopes;
and to push into the future
in strength, courage, hope and love.

~ attributed to Sir Francis Drake



*Where the darkness of pain,
sorrow and loneliness
threaten to overtake us,
you are there.*

*Where the hopeful and the sceptical
come together, seeking solutions to
seemingly intractable problems,
you are there.*

*Where dreams and visions
will not die,
you are there.*

~ Suellen Shay

discovering a new presence

God

In the second before a feeling hardens
in the instant before a sound is heard
in the helplessness we feel when language
is no longer sufficient to express
all that we want to say
in hope before it gives way to despair
in doubt before it changes to certainty
in certainty before it turns to doubt
in the familiar before it becomes wondrous
in the wondrous before it becomes stale
is the birthplace of your presence.

~ Shabbir Banooobhai

seeing God

We cannot see you
and yet in so many ways we have seen you,
We cannot touch you
but we have experienced and felt you.

You have been in the full moon
and the early morning mist,
the bright blue sky
and the cool night air
after a scorching day.

You are the rock
that anchors us in uncertain times,
You are the hope
that keeps us going on a road with few signposts,
You are the presence
when we feel disoriented and estranged.

You are the compassion
that knits us even to strangers,
You are the justice
that tugs at our complacency,
You are the joy
that unexpectedly overwhelms us,
You are the love
that banishes all fear.

We praise you for revealing yourself to us
in all these ways -
and for Christ, your full revelation.

~ *Suellen Shay*



*God, help us to understand that when
a boundary is formed, something of
the unknowable becomes knowable.*

*When a boundary is removed,
something of the knowable
becomes known.*

~ Shabbir Banooobhai

a thousand tongues

You speak, God,
and we answer.

You speak -
words which interrupt our comfort,
disarm our judgement,
embrace our stubbornness,
touch what we cannot bear to name
and surprise our guilt
with the grace of your welcome in Christ.

You speak, God,
and we answer.
A thousand times we answer,
in a thousand tongues.

We answer -
with a language of love unheard of before,
with a grammar of trust once unknown,
with a dictionary of words not spoken,
with a punctuation of hope unfamiliar,
with a page of sentences untamed.

You speak, God,
and we answer.

We answer and draw close to you.
And in answering we are changed:
we discover a new freedom,
unexpected joy enters our darkness,
our hearts burn with new insight,
we grasp you in the broken bread,
we let go of our familiar grief,
and the scars we kept hidden
are turned into marks of truth.

Speak to us, God,
and grant us the strength and wisdom
to answer.
a thousand times,
in a thousand tongues.

~ adapted by Robert Steiner,
from prayers by Walter Brueggemann and Janet Morley



*Better to be present
to what is happening
than to be lost
in our ideas and beliefs.*

~ Shunryu Suzuki-Roshi

significant turnings

Almighty God,

We praise the diversity of your creation.
Your symbols are the cross,
the crescent and the star of David.
Christians, Muslims and Jews
all worship and adore you.
You are the God of Protestants, Catholics
and Orthodox believers.

You are the God
of Black and White and Asian.

You hear the prayers
of the Xhosa and the Afrikaner,
the English, the French and the German,
the Russian and the American.

You are the God of male and female;
the God of heterosexual
and homosexual love.

You are the God of the wealthy and the poor;
the healthy and the disabled.

God, we hold ourselves before you
in all our diversity.
May we who are wealthy understand the needs
of the poor and the disadvantaged.
May we who are healthy understand the courage
of the disabled and the suffering of those who are ill.
May we of different genders
understand, appreciate and value
both male and female as equal before you.
May we who are heterosexual
understand, appreciate and value
gay, lesbian and bisexual men and women
as equal before you.

God, help us to turn
from ignorance to understanding,
from intolerance to compassion,
from prejudice to acceptance,
from revenge to forgiveness,
from fear to trust and
from hatred to love.

~ Peter Krummeck



*If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life
is thank you, it will be enough.*

~ Meister Eckhart

unexpected blessings

May God bless you with discomfort
at easy answers, half truths and superficial relationships,
so that you may live deep within your heart.

May God bless you with anger
at injustice, oppression and exploitation of people,
so that you may work for justice, freedom and peace.

May God bless you with tears
to shed for those who suffer from pain,
rejection, starvation and war,
so that you may reach out your hand to comfort them
and to turn their pain into joy.

And may God bless you with enough foolishness
to believe that you can make a difference in this world,
so that you can do what others claim cannot be done.

Amen

~ Franciscan blessing

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