

Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice

I would like to focus this morning on our responses to all the death that constantly surrounds us and, in it, to bring ourselves to God in prayer.

In the last few weeks, we have perhaps become more accustomed than usual to reading or hearing about death. The war in Ukraine has become a key focus in our news as we have been hearing regular reports of people being killed. Though we don't hear as much about it, it continues in Yemen, in Syria, Central African Republic, eastern DRC, in Myanmar and in many other places not on our reporting radars. And then there are the indirect causes of death due to war such as the failure of health services with resultant poor drug supply and inadequate access for patients. Closer to home we have become accustomed to hearing about political killings, gang murders and many other deaths so much more common in our poorer communities. Within the last fortnight we have seen the report of the tragic murder of another activist, Ayanda Ngila, from Abahlali baseMjondolo, now bringing the total in that organisation to twenty in recent years, allegedly fuelled by greed and corrupt leadership.

If we stop for a moment to reflect on this, we have to see the harsh reality that every death is a family tragedy; someone loved in a family, in a community, has been taken away, forever. Many of us have felt this very acutely in the last two years of the pandemic with countless heart-rending experiences of loss of much-loved family members. Most of us have probably attended funerals or memorial services, remembering so much good in that unique person's life and all that he or she has meant to friends, family and work colleagues. Are all the deaths we hear about any different?

Please pray with me

Ever-loving God, who became one of us and touched and felt life in every way that we do, we come to you this morning, as the psalmist said, to a rock of habitation to which we can continually come, needing guidance in how to live, in how to face and manage all of life as it unfolds around us. We know that, with your huge heart for all of humanity, you confronted and engaged with death in so many of its forms – the death of the soul, the death of relationship, the death of true religion, the death of humanity and indeed physical death. We remember one story, surely of many others during your life, in which you too engaged with the heartfelt loss of a family member as you cried with Lazarus' family.

We ask you therefore this morning that, as we try to be like you, we would remain deeply conscious of the deep reality of every death we read or hear about and ask that our hearts would not become immunised. We want to keep in our hearts and mind that no one deserves to die, whoever he or she may be and however we may try to justify it. Please keep us sensitive to the deep reality of every loss and what it really means, every time.

As we look in horror at the inhumanity of those involved in these acts of murder, we confess too where we too are not without fault. We are reminded by James that each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his or her own desire, and this in turn gives birth to sin, and that, when fully grown, brings forth death. More directly to the point he later says that when we desire and do not have, we commit murder. How true this is, not only in war but also at the root of so many of the large news items out there. We acknowledge too that these same seeds of death, desire and covetousness, are ready and waiting in us for fertile ground in which to grow. In all this we are so grateful that you are forever merciful and ever present to transform us into your likeness as we yield to you. Transform us, oh God, into people with a heart like yours.

In closing, we open our hearts for a moment to all those suffering the profound finality of the loss of one close to them – in our own families, our communities, our country, our continent and the world over as we pray, God bless Africa and all the world, guard our children, guide our leaders, and give us peace. Amen