

Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice

I have had the word “hospitality” ringing in my ears for some time. The constant threat of Operation Dudula, Dr Ramathuba’s rant at a Zimbabwean patient, the general hostility towards people living on the street and our own experience as a church of having the refugees in the sanctuary have urged me to explore the word more in the candle prayer today. I am indebted to Christine Pohl’s research on this topic as it has informed much of this prayer.

Jesus, in your time on earth, hospitality was not a new concept. Yet, as is your way, you took it deeper and broader to demonstrate a different understanding that true hospitality is a state of one’s heart and thinking. For you, hospitality will always include those who are marginalised, those often viewed with hostility. In your times of giving and times of receiving you emphasised that each encounter held an interchange of roles...a giving and a being given to. And you showed us so beautifully that a deep respect for the other’s dignity was the primary task of hospitality, the “I see you” that makes all the difference.

In such contrast, we become aware of how often we get it so wrong. Our lives have grown progressively insular over the years. We name the needs of our family and friends as reasons why we cannot welcome those we know you would bring with you should we dare to invite you. We have made an industry of hospitality and leave various NGOs to look after the needs of others for us. We define those we encounter outside our homes, by their needs and exert a power in the exchange that is not only inhumane, but is so very far from what you had in mind. We talk about “the homeless”, “the refugees”, creating a comfortable distance from the individuals whose stories would break us if we ever heard them. We refuse to see, and learn from, the incredible courage that lies behind each person living on the streets, each person seeking refuge.

For these, our ways, please forgive us.

Where we have given of true hospitality and been burnt by the brokenness of this world, we ask for a restoration of hope and trust that your ways of justice, love and mercy remain the only paths to peace.

Help us to become a community that refuses to reinforce the messages so frequently expressed in social media and in reports of government’s scapegoating; messages that must resound for these unseen individuals that they are worthless that no one cares. Help us to remember the times of our own strangeness in situations and allow that to begin to inform our responses. And most of all help us to see that no amount of wrongdoing or neediness should prevent us from seeing the dignity that lies within each individual we encounter.

And especially for us here at CMM where we listen to these candle prayers each week, and are exposed to the pain in this world, let us not delude ourselves into thinking that by knowing we are acting...

Amen