

Prayer for Peace, Hope and Justice

Yesterday, 10 December, was the 74th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, signed at the end of a sequence of two catastrophic world wars. It is a declaration stating that the inherent dignity and the equal rights of all members of the human family are the foundation of freedom. We could look more widely around the world at rising nationalism and populism, not to mention a planet that is rapidly being destroyed, but I think we have enough to focus on in our own country. When Mark Heywood, one of those at the forefront of activism in South Africa for decades, starts to worry about whether he should give up, I find do myself tempted to join him. “How do you shame a shameless government?” he says. “How do you litigate against a state that claims to have no money to realise core socioeconomic rights? How do you enforce judgments against government departments which have shown themselves incapable of carrying out court orders?”

Yet, after processing his despair, he emerges at the end saying, “At the end of the day I can’t abandon hope, because if I did, what would I do with the remains of my life?” He quotes from the book, *The Purpose of Power*, written by the activist, Alicia Garza; “Hope is not the absence of despair – it is the ability to come back to our purpose, again and again.... My work is to transform grief and despair and rage into the love that we need to push us forward. I am not, and we are not, defined by what we lack – we are defined by how we come together when we fall apart.”

Please pray with me as we come to our God who has never given up and never will.

Loving and all-powerful God, if ever there was anyone who demonstrated the transformation of grief, despair and rage into love, it was you. Your entire life, and perhaps your death even more, demonstrated this in ways often beyond our understanding. Your final command to us was to love each other in the ways you lived out love. You have asked us never to tire in doing good because, at the right time, we will harvest a good crop if we don’t give up (Gal 6:9). You have encouraged us to take every opportunity to work for the benefit of all, to walk with integrity, to mirror your love to all we meet and to live as a beneficial presence in the world (Ps 101).

Loving parent, we confess to you that we have at times allowed ourselves to tire and to sink into despair and hopelessness in our attitudes and our speech when we have opportunity rather to season our words with hope and edification to those around us. You place a high value on unity and peace-making within your human family and we confess too that our attitudes have not always been aligned with yours (Eph. 4:1-4). We have at times sunk into cynicism, criticism and divisiveness, where we could have chosen opportunities to build each other up, to foster unity and to promote peace.

However, the beauty of you, this wonderful God we serve, is that no sooner have we acknowledged this truth about ourselves, than you are ready and willing to forgive and no sooner have we chosen to turn away from these attitudes and actions, than you are there to support us in new ways, your ways. With our hands in yours, we choose life this day; to draw encouragement from you, who endured such opposition from people as bad as those around us today, so that we will not get tired and lose heart. We choose to remember also the multitudes who have gone before us, demonstrating perseverance, hope and faithfulness (Heb. 12:1-3). Please stay close to us, loving God, and lead us in your ways of hope and love.

And, in light of this we pray together, God bless Africa and all the world, Guard our children, Guide our leaders, And give us peace. Amen