Prayers for Peace, Hope and Justice

Wednesday this past week will perhaps be looked back on as a telling moment in our country's more recent history. Nearly 16 million South Africans went to the voting stations, and it became clear fairly quickly that many had lost faith in the existing structures and had chosen to put their trust in someone different. Leading up to an election, one becomes a little more acutely aware of the injustices in countless communities, of the lack of basic human rights that have been promised for decades, of the corruption that has cost the poor and vulnerable access to good education and health care. Political parties are very good at pointing out the failures of their opposition. And then we have all the electioneering, the rallies, the promises made, the T-shirts handed out, all in an attempt to seduce us to make a mark in their favour. Through all this noise, though, I was reminded that God is not interested in superficial rituals, or big assembles and rallies; God is not interested in our offerings and sacrifices; in our empty promises and our songs. All God desires is justice. All we should desire is justice.

As we light the Candle this week, we pray that the outcomes of our voting on Wednesday, will bring a never-ending river of justice, so that our people may have peace, and a future of hope.

My prayer this week focuses on a hymn and an anthem that so often unites all the peoples across our country. Part of it is sung in churches, in schools; it's sung before national sports matches, and big running races, often bringing passion and emotion, and a unified love for our country and each other. After this week, when perhaps a renewed love for our country and each other is needed, and is being offered, I turn to these beautiful words in prayer.

Nkosi sikelel' iAfrika
God bless Africa
Nkosi sikelel' iMsanzi
God bless South Africa
Maluphakanyisw' uphondo lwayo
May her glory be lifted high.

Lord, may your glory be lifted high in this land. But your glory has been tarnished by injustice, inequality and poverty, by corruption and theft, by hatred and violence. We acknowledge that what is happening now in our country is not what you intended for her.

Yizwa imithandazo yethu
Hear our petitions
Lord, hear our prayer.

Nkosi sikelela, thina lusapho lwayo.
God bless us, we Your children.

But bless us not with wealth and prosperity, not with power and domination over others. But rather bless us with anger at the injustices and inequalities in our communities; with anger at the destruction and exploitation of your earth. Bless us with discomfort at half-truths, deceit and hypocrisy. Bless us with courage to stand up for what is right and brings life, and to stand up to those who choose wrong and bring death. Bless us with tears to shed for those who suffer pain, rejection, hunger and war. Bless us with your heart of compassion.

Morena boloka setjhaba sa heso.
O fedise dintwa le matshwenyeho.
God, we ask You to protect our nation.
Intervene and end all conflicts.

Prince of Peace, we know your intervention cannot be something supernatural, but rather is through the obedience, courage and commitment of your people following in the ways of Jesus here in our land. Open our eyes to the discrepancies of living a worldly way, versus living your way. Open our hearts to be more willing and able to live with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. We are your vessels for intervention.

O se boloke, O se boloke setjaba sa heso
Setjaba sa, South Afrika.
South Afrika!
Protect us…

Merciful God, protect each one of us, from selfishness, complacency, prejudice, self-righteousness, superiority, and intolerance.

Protect our nation, our nation South Africa.
South Africa!

Protect this, your beloved nation, from greed, power, corruption, injustices, inequalities, racism, xenophobia, violence, and fear. Fear, from which everything else stems, and which casts out all love.

Uit die blou van onse hemel
Uit die diepte van ons see.
Oor ons ewige gebergtes,
Waar die kranse antwoord gee.
Ringing out from our blue heavens,
From our deep seas breaking round.
Over the everlasting mountains,
Where the echoing crags resound.

Creator God, this country is a thing of absolute beauty and diversity. All around us, from north to south, and east to west, there is indescribable, contrasting beauty. What you had given us was beautiful and perfect. And we confess, we have messed it up.

Your people of this nation are creations of beauty and diversity, each one unique and perfectly made. Each one filled with your breath. And again, we confess, we have looked past the fact that we are all One. We have chosen not to live in communion with each other and with you. We have messed up. Forgive us.

Sounds the call to come together
And united we shall stand.
Let us live and strive for freedom,
In South Africa, our land.

Lord, we acknowledge that it is only by your grace that we can stand united as one people in this country. We cannot do it on our own. Help us to heed your call to come together in love, tolerance and forgiveness, so that this precious nation may know a freedom never known to it before. A freedom only you can provide.

Come Holy Spirit, come.
Woza Umoya, oyingcwele. Woza.
Amen.