

prayer & action



resources for corrymeela sunday
march 18, 2018

corrymeela 

Welcome to the resource for Corrymeela Sunday 2018. Corrymeela Sunday occurs on the Sunday nearest March 17th (St. Patrick's Day) every year and in 2018 this falls on March 18th.

For this year we have provided the lectionary texts and given some thoughts in the footnotes. These are the beginnings of conversations — for yourself, for your sermon, for your church or friendship group that may discuss these texts. You are welcome to use some or all of the reflections, thoughts, questions or prayers.

For 2018 we will also produce resources on reading Borders & Brexit through the lens of the Book of Ruth. Gathering people who think differently about borders & brexit together, this resource has eight conversation guides for deepening conversation with each other, with the biblical text and with both our prayer and action. For more info contact LPA@corrymeela.org

The theme for this year's resources is Prayer & Action. Indeed, this is the theme for the gatherings of the Corrymeela Community this year too. For us, we see that the inner lives of those involved in reconciliation — whether that's reconciliation between neighbours or political parties — is vital. It takes courage in a moment to reach out, to ask the generous question, to offer understanding to someone whose point of view troubles you. In many situations the person with the other point of view, too, has the same trouble.

In these moments the past and the future pivot.

In these moments the inner life of reflection
can help us reach out for the outer life of reconciliation.

We turn to each other.

We ask the difficult question.

We hear the difficult answer.

It changes us. We turn to each other.

We have the possibility of making something new together.

Our prayer deepens our action.

May we all be reconciled
living in the unity for which all were created.

Thank you for your prayers for the work of Corrymeela.

We hold you in our prayers too.

Pádraig Ó Tuama, leader of the Corrymeela Community, Feb 2018.

Reading from the Hebrew Prophet Jeremiah 31:31-34

The days are surely coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah.* It will not be like the covenant that I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant that they broke, though I was their husband, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put my law within[†] them, and I will write it on their hearts[‡]; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another,[§] or say to each other, “Know the LORD,” for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest, says the LORD; for I will forgive** their iniquity, and remember their sin no more.

* This text was written by the prophet while the people were in exile in Babylon. Most of the population had been taken into exile. Jeremiah was one of the few not taken. The city was in ruins, and the exiles lamented their lost city. But Jeremiah wrote that this would all be worked out in plans to heal and not to harm. This did not make him popular.

† The poem here speaks of things deepening. The initial covenant was broken, the prophet has God say, but now the law of love will be written on the heart.

‡ The Hebrew word for heart is *leb*. The Catechism of the Catholic church has the most beautiful exploration of this word and its place in the literature of Judaism:

Scripture speaks more than a thousand time of prayer coming from the heart. The heart is the dwelling place where I am, where I live, the heart is the place to which I withdraw. The heart is our hidden centre, beyond the grasp of our reason and of others, only the Spirit of God can fathom the human heart and know it fully. The heart is the place of decision, deeper than our psychic drives. It is the place of truth, where we choose life or death. It is the place of encounter, because as image of God we live in relation, it is the place of covenant. (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, § 2562–2563)

§ ‘No longer shall they teach one another’. This piece of the poem puts ‘teaching’ against ‘knowing’ and sees that knowing is deeper than being taught. But deeper than teaching and knowing is forgiveness.

** Forgiveness is the thing that helps a people move from needing to be reminded of the law of love to knowing it. Jeremiah regularly has the word of Forgiveness in the mouth of God in his prophecies, even though it varies in tone. For instance in 36:3, God considers revealing the terrible disasters he plans to bring upon the people in order that they would turn from their ways and be forgiven. Other times the forgiveness — as here — comes from the depth of benevolence. In this we can hear echoes of the prophet struggling to think about what forgiveness means: can it stand alone? does it always need repentance? even if it doesn’t *need* repentance it may be helped by people’s recognition of their wrongdoing. To read the prophet’s wrestling with this throughout the sacred text can bring relief to us who — in our lives of forgiving — move between different understandings of this most life-giving and life-complicating of practices.

A reading from the book of Psalms (Psalm 51:1-12)

Have mercy on me, O God,*
according to your steadfast love;
according to your abundant mercy
blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
and cleanse me from my sin.

For I know my transgressions,
and my sin is ever before me.
Against you, you alone, have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight,
so that you are justified in your sentence
and blameless when you pass judgment.
Indeed, I was born guilty,
a sinner when my mother conceived me.

* This striking psalm of penitence is often put alongside the time when King David was confronted with his abuse of Bathsheba. While David's men were at war, David was at home — an unusual thing for the King who had “slain tens of thousands”. The lion-wrestling BoyKing seems to be acting in an entitled princely way. He sees Bathsheba bathing and summons her to him. Her life changes forever as a result of this invasion. Her husband's death is arranged by David. She falls pregnant as a result of the forced bedding and then the child from that pregnancy dies as a punishment. Now part of the King's household, her husband and child dead, she is associated with the Singing King forever. In the telling of her story, she rarely speaks. In fact, it is only much later in her life, when a later child — Solomon — is coming of age, that she she speaks for the first time in the story. Far from being diminished by the invasions of power in her life, she presents as a political strategist. She makes a name for herself after her own future had been forcibly taken from her. She will make sure that her son, Solomon, emerges as King after David's death, even though there are many others who should be before him in the line of succession.

You desire truth in the inward being;
therefore teach me wisdom in my secret heart.
Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean;
wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.
Let me hear joy and gladness;
let the bones that you have crushed rejoice.
Hide your face from my sins,
and blot out all my iniquities.

Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

* If we are to take it that this is a psalm of lament written by David after his invasion into the life and safety of Bathsheba, we can pose some questions of imagination: What would Bathsheba think of this psalm? Would she see it as a prayer of repentance? Is the repentance good enough? We can hear deep guilt in the language of the psalmist. Did the psalmist ever consider asking forgiveness from the person he'd hurt? Was this a poem, addressed to God, but ultimately a poem that is acknowledging Bathsheba's pain.

What about our own stories? What do we think of forgiveness and repentance and apology? These three words — so powerful in our own lives, and powerful in the lives of faith — are demands. Can we ever perfect apology? Is repentance ever good enough? How do we find ways to live after we have hurt others? Do we deserve to assuage our guilt?

The #metoo campaign can be brought into deep conversation with this psalm and Bathsheba's story. The repentance sought is to acknowledge the truth that women have to negotiate their lives under the shadow of sexual oppression and exploitation — with lives, bodies and intelligence being negotiated in a predatory economy. The demands of acknowledgement, apology and repentance are big. Bathsheba may be something of a matriarch saint for the #metoo campaign — she fights for her own restoration, her own dignity, and her own reputation. It is by her own words and her own actions that she arranges for the career of her generations. Where the psalm is concerned with David's restoration to purity, we see in the story of Bathsheba her own successful pursuit of justice, dignity and power. One wonders about the sources of her own strength, the places she turned to for solidarity, support and vision.

(For a fresh translation of the books of 1st and 2nd Samuel, the texts in which Bathsheba's life is narrated, see Robert Alter's publications of selected books from the Hebrew bible. It opens up the literature, and is both rich and raw. Séamus Heaney called Alter's translations 'a godsend'.)

A reading from the letter to the Hebrews (5:5-10)

So also Christ did not glorify himself in becoming a high priest*, but was appointed by the one who said to him,

“You are my Son,
today I have begotten you”;[†]

as he says also in another place,

“You are a priest forever,
according to the order of Melchizedek.”

In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears,[‡] to the one who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.[§] Although he was a Son, he learned obedience through what he suffered; and having been made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him, having been designated by God a high priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

* This reading from the fifth chapter of Hebrews is almost an echo of the beautiful hymnody of the letter to the Philippians where Jesus is praised: “who, though he was in the form of God / did not regard equality with God / as something to be exploited, / but emptied himself.”

† This reminder that the incarnation of God in the human body and story of Jesus of Nazareth needed the support of two things is timely. Jesus is in need of having a sense of being loved and having a sense of meaning. We are meaning-making story-telling creatures, us humans. To be embedded in our own lives, with all their loud cries and supplications, we are served well if we have connection with meaning and vocation. This is to say that these are permanent unchanging fixture of certitude, but rather a loving conversation.

For those of us whose sense of being loved, or held in a sacred call to our deepest humanity is strained, well for that there is the gospels central thesis: that we are loved, that we are called to show love, even when we [sometimes / often / rarely] feel like we have it to show.

‡ Like the Philippians text, this excerpt praises Jesus in his humanity, particularly the parts of his humanity that are a struggle: the reference to his loud cries and tears, his prayers and supplications paint an image of the incarnate God entirely embedded within the complexity of human life, much like our own.

§ This reference to God as “the one who could have saved Jesus from death” and the subsequent reference to obedience is worth exploring. To put this another way, we might imagine the writer here saying that Jesus’ life of faith faced undesirable consequences. And in the face of undesirable consequences he did what he always did: include; not be frightened to be associated with those whose friendship he enjoyed; prayed; participated in the life of faith; spoke out against abuses of power. So much is uncertain, but what is certain is that in the face of uncertainty, powerful practices of hospitality, courage, friendship and love will always serve us.

A reading from the gospel of John (12:20-33)

Now among those who went up to worship at the festival were some Greeks. They came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida in Galilee, and said to him, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew; then Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.* Jesus answered them, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Very truly, I tell you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains just a single grain; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. Those who love their life lose it, and those who hate their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me, and where I am, there will my servant be also. Whoever serves me, the Father will honor.

“Now my soul is troubled.† And what should I say—‘Father, save me from this hour’? No, it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.” Then a voice came from heaven, “I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again.” The crowd standing there heard it and said that it was thunder. Others said, “An angel has spoken to him.” Jesus answered, “This voice has come for your sake, not for mine. Now is the judgment of this world; now the ruler of this world will be driven out. And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.” He said this to indicate the kind of death he was to die.

* The sequence of this interaction seems curious unless you read it in light of the previous chapter. Jesus has just raised Lazarus from the dead and has said “I am the resurrection and the life”. Jesus’ signs in John’s gospel have all been accompanied with Jesus saying “I am the...” and they are building in their audacity as the signs continue. Now, by calling himself “life” Jesus is portraying himself as divine. And so a plot to murder him begins.

While the gospel traditions portray the death of Jesus in the light of both faith and resurrection, it is important to recognise the pure panic that a death threat brings. So many people involved in peace work in our part of Ireland — people from all backgrounds and perspectives — have received threats. And there were enough attempts to render every death threat as serious. So here we are, in the narratives before the abduction, torture, false trial and execution of Jesus, and some Greeks are seeking him out. There is a chain of protection in place. Like people in many situations in our world today, Jesus is needing to exercise canniness alongside faith. It is practical, this, guarding. Perhaps Jesus is the only one anticipating that it, too, will fail, but it is working for now.

† The texts for this Sunday in the lectionary do point towards a Jesus who is not a stranger to trouble or distress. It is, in a strange way, comforting. When we are in distress it can be that we feel furthest from faith, or friendships or support. In these Lenten texts we are reminded that Jesus’ life would have been exhausting at times.

All the more poignant and powerful, then, to read of Jesus’ prayer life. The texts for this Sunday turned to prayer over and over. Jeremiah’s prayer is that the people will experience a conversion of the heart. The prayer of the Psalmist is a clumsy apology and acknowledgement in prayer. The letter to the Hebrews depicts the prayer experiences that sustained Jesus and now we see Jesus, under a death threat, using his distress as the ground of his prayer.

Prayer for Corrymeela Sunday

Collect for the Day.

Jesus of Nazareth
In the face of distress
your friends gathered round
to shelter you
and you turned to prayer.
In your prayer you were held
by something as old as thunder.
In all our distresses
may we be sheltered by our friends
and supported by our prayer.
Because both of these helped you
be your truest self
even in the face
of torture.
Amen.

A prayer for Reconciliation

Where there is separation
there is pain.
And where there is pain
there is story.

And where there is story
there is understanding
and misunderstanding
listening
and not listening.

May we — separated peoples, estranged strangers,
unfriended families, divided communities —
turn toward each other,
and turn toward our stories,
with understanding
and listening,
with argument and acceptance,
with challenge, change
and consolation.

Because if God is to be found,
God will be found
in the space
between.

Amen.

Suggested prayers of intercession.

Today we pray for those who carry the pain of the past.

In violent conflicts many lost their lives

and many still live who are affected by that loss.

May we listen to and learn from their lives, their truth and their witness.

May we all admit our responsibility

to shape a better present and a better future.

God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

Jesus of Nazareth turned towards those who knew their need.

Today we think of those who know their need.

We think of those who are leaving homes behind because of war,

those who are plunging into the sea because it's safer than the land,

and we think of those who are crying out for justice and shelter.

May we turn towards their need. God in your mercy: **Hear our prayer.**

We give thanks for the gift of our land, for the fertile earth of Ireland.

We give thanks for the cultures, languages and stories from here.

And we pray that we can be wise custodians of this land.

May we tend the earth well. May we lead our communities well.

May we govern and negotiate and debate well.

May we all — whether leading, farming, resting, working, looking for work — be generous with resources and welcome. God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

We give thanks for the witness of Corrymeela.

And more than that, we give thanks for the witness of those

thousands of people who have made Corrymeela what it is:

people of bravery, pain and truth, people who shared their story,

people who offered a hand of friendship even when their hand was shaking.

We honour them and we give thanks for them.

We pray for every person who has come through the Corrymeela doors
and sat drinking tea at our tables.

May they, and all their loved ones, be blessed.

And may we walk deeper into reconciliation because of their witness.

God in your mercy:

Hear our prayer.

A Prayer for Times of Lumpy Crossings.*

God of the earth

We were brought to a rocky outcrop,
a place of islands:

Rathlin, Ireland, Britain, Islay, Jura.†

The crossings are not wide, but they are deep.

In this in-between place,
this place of lumpy crossings,
we have been formed.

And now we are at a time
where our crossings with each other
are deep and dangerous.

May we be sustained by the hope of reconciliation:
may our difficult differences not divide us
may our encounters with each other be transformative
may our listening bring understanding,
may our resistances be changed by generosity,
may our love — feeble as it sometimes is — lead to more love.

We ask this,
as a people on pilgrimage
towards our deepest vocation,
to be one, as God is one. Amen.

* The meaning of 'Corrymeela' is obscure, coming from Old Irish. Where at the community we were told it meant "Hill of Harmony" we learnt ten years later — years during which the Troubles had broken out, years during which people had died, years during which the complicated crossings of being in community together — that it meant something more akin to 'Lumpy Crossing Space'.

† These are the names of some of the islands that can be seen from the vantage point of Corrymeela.

Reflection

Corrymeela Community member Yvonne Naylor travelled to Korea in late 2017, together with Colin Craig (former Executive Director of Corrymeela) and Dr. Dong Jin Kim, a Korean theologian who is spending two years with Corrymeela & the Irish School of Ecumenics exploring theologies and practices of reconciliation.

I was humbled and delighted to receive an invitation to go to South Korea by Okedongmu Children (O.C.) and Dr Dong Jin Kim (Jin) in September to share more about reconciliation. Humbled because I really felt I had more to learn than to teach folk in South Korea; delighted because I had met some of the Korean delegates in February at the Irish school of Ecumenics in Dublin and enjoyed their friendship, warmth and interest in all that we were doing in Corrymeela.

So it was that Colin Craig and I travelled together to Seoul with Dr Jin in November to spend four very full days generously hosted by Okedongmu Children in Korea and the Centre for Unification Education at the Seoul National University of Education to address the question, 'Can Peace Education make a Difference?' The visit was sponsored by the Ministry of Unification, Republic of Korea.

Okedongmu is a Korean word meaning a symbolic gesture of friendship, putting arms around each other's shoulders – an expression of full understanding and affection so 'Okedongmu Children' contains a wish to see North and South Korean children doing Okedongmu together. The children of North and South Korea represent hope for a more peaceful future, living well together. Their mission is to build confidence among the children, especially between North and South Korea and East Asia, through peace education and to become a bridge for reconciliation, understanding and interchange.

I spoke at the conference presenting six case studies of peace education and good relations practice; visited a junior school using resources and games addressing identity and belonging; and facilitated a workshop for about 40 teachers and leaders, exploring differing ways out of conflict. These events were all very well attended, and the organisers were pleased.

On the day in between the conference and school visit/workshops we had an opportunity to visit the Demilitarised Zone (D.M.Z.), a Peace Centre and an observation post in the restricted area. The DMZ land strip is 4 km wide on average, the military demarcation/division (MDL) line is 248 km long from the west to east coasts of the Korean Peninsula, dividing North from South Korea. The civilian zone falls within 10 km from the MDL and it was in a part of that zone that we found Peace Life Valley. Chung, Sung Han the chairman of this residential Centre took us on a tour pointing out their green energy

initiatives, where they grew their own herbs and vegetables and commented on the many healing properties of the various plants and trees. We also spotted a couple of decommissioned South Korean tanks amongst the trees and shrubs, painted white or rainbow striped with flowers cascading from the guns.

There was a film crew with us making a documentary and they accompanied us to the restricted area and an observation post in Ga-Chil peak where the distance between North and South Korean guard posts is as short as 780 metres. This visit was for me a humbling and sobering experience as the DMZ remains both a memory of the nation's tragedy and agony and the actual space of live confrontation and division. To reach this post we passed miles of barbed wire fencing, guard posts and an inspection to count us in and out. We also travelled around Hae-an, Punch Bowl village, where many thousands of people died during the Korean war. The film crew interviewed us outside the observation post information centre. Asking why I came, I reflected how during the conflict in N. Ireland I was uplifted by the visits of friends from England at a time when many people were afraid to come and the hope and reassurance that gave. My hope was to support the courageous work of Okedongmu Children and share tools they might wish to incorporate into their peace education programmes and leave behind resources I had brought with me. The film-maker noticed I had been drawing on our way to the restricted area and I told them they were the symbols of hope we keep in the Croí (the heart) and the place where we hold daily worship at Corrymeela. I also brought these symbols with me – the Celtic cross, a book of prayers written by our leader, and a candle and holder wrapped in a cloth bearing the Celtic blessing. These I presented to Sung Han at the Peace Centre where groups from Okedongmu Children have come for residential camps in the summer. I couldn't help admiring the natural beauty of this place, the mountains uniquely wrinkly like an elephant's skin, and an area which is acknowledged for its rich ecological and bio-diverse wildlife giving a home to 38% of the country's endangered plant and animal life – surely a symbol of hope itself.

In the light of all that I heard and saw about the history of relationships between North and South Korea and the complex nature of those relationships with the external players in the conflict, the more I admired the courage and hope constantly displayed by our friends and partners in peace, Okedongmu Children in Korea. They reminded me of the five wise girls in the parable of the ten who took extra oil for their lamps during their long wait for the arrival of the bridegroom. The task of waiting and keeping hope alive is an active waiting and preparation for peace. I was moved and inspired by their work.

Yvonne Naylor

Prayer for Courage

Our morning prayer at Corrymeela is simple. A bell rings calling us to silence. We gather in silence — in great thanks to our friends the Quakers for their practice which inspires and holds us. We sit in silence for 25 minutes. At the end of 25 minutes a small bell is rung and a person reads a text, a few names of volunteers and community members and an intention for the day. Then we all join in the Prayer for Courage.

The word Croí is the name of the prayer space at Corrymeela. A beautiful circular building with a living room that burrows into the earth. The word ‘Croí’ is Irish for ‘heart’. It is pronounced ‘Kree’.*

Courage comes from the heart
and we are always welcomed by God,
the Croí of all being.

We bear witness to our faith,
knowing that we are called
to live lives of courage,
love and reconciliation
in the ordinary and extraordinary
moments of each day.

We bear witness, too, to our failures
and our complicity in the fractures of our world.

May we be courageous today.
May we learn today.
May we love today.
Amen.

* If you would like more prayers from Corrymeela, you are welcome to purchase ‘Daily Prayer with the Corrymeela Community’ (Canterbury Press, 2017) either directly from our office in Belfast or order it anywhere you find books.

We run retreats, open events, trainings and day-gatherings throughout the year. More information on www.corrymeela.org/events

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