Reconciling Christianities
The Reconciling Christianities Project

Corrymeela has long been active in those places where the barbed points of division between traditions and cultures cause the most hurt and tension. Our intent at these contested places is, and has been, to transform division through human encounter. In the context of Northern Ireland we are conscious that often this tension and conflict is discernible within and between Christian traditions.

The Reconciling Christianities project grew from a desire to test the possibility that as Christian faith leaders we could find a route to discussing our very real differences in ways which could ultimately inform the ongoing discussions about faith in contemporary Ireland.

We chose the title Reconciling Christianities recognising that there are many public witnesses to Christianity on the island of Ireland. By reconciling we indicated that we wish to foster engagements where friendship and feeling are the economy of our relationships, together with truth, prayer and sharing. We had no interest, nor aim, of exploring any consensus on the traditions or practices that divide us, rather we sought to share a table of friendship, prayer and devotion together.

In doing so we were conscious that in our group, each evening when the Gospel text was read, there were a variety of accents from different parts of the world, from Poland, South Africa, USA, New Zealand, England, Scotland and from the north and south of our own island. This added considerable to the richness and diversity of our understanding.

Methodology

The Reconciling Christianities gatherings were a small group of Christian faith leaders from a variety of traditions and very busy lives who met once a month during October-December 2017 and then for a 24 hour residential in January 2018. Each gathering was shaped around a Gospel narrative and ended with an examination of a different prayer form.

We engaged in spirited discussion on the selected texts conscious of how our various traditions often threaten the other in our readings of the text. We sought from the beginning to affirm the credibility of each others confession of faith and to avoid the forms of reading which excluded. Each session began by posing a question from the text that highlighted our differences and then explored how we could hold those differences in a way that bore fruitful witness to our Christianities.

When the time for conversation was ended each participant was given time and space to reflect and to compose a prayer response to the conversation. These compositions were then read or prayed in plenary session together. Over the course of our gatherings we experimented with collects as well as prayers of confession, thanksgiving and petition.

These times together were characterised by hospitality and generosity.

Why gather?

Aside from the warmth of our gatherings, the renewal of friendships and the making of new ones Corrymeela had a number of other desired outcomes which we reached towards with varying degrees of success or otherwise

We wished to encourage the Church to be less tentative on the non-traditional issues that divide us as Christians by modelling healthy ways of disagreeing. Several members of the group often found themselves in media studios on opposing sides of a public debate. We set ourselves the challenge of finding ways of discussing difference which were more productive and edifying than the confrontation which the media outlet often desired.

We also wanted to find ways of moving from the text to the issues that animate the wider world in which we live and thereby to find ways in which theology and theological thinking could be curative on the issues that divide.

And we wanted to be alert to the kind of learning that might emerge in such gatherings and for which it is impossible to plan.

This Document

This document is a form of project report in that it gathers together some of the elements of our gathering and conversations. In particular we have curated here the written prayers of participants across the four events. We are delighted and honoured that all our participants have consented to their prayers being published in this way.

Thanks

This project would not have happened without the imagination, the risk-taking and the financial support of Centre for Anglican Communion Studies at Virginia Theological Seminary. We are grateful for their ongoing partnership.

Glenn Jordan
Programme Manager for Public Theology
Introduction

“Christianity in Ireland — north and south — has long had a reputation of division. In the past generation, it was due to questions of British or Irish sovereignty in Northern Ireland. This continues, but has been added to in recent years, notably on how Christianities speak in public about questions of marriage, inclusion, start and end of life, and other matters of public and moral interest.

Often the witness to Christianity from those who are representing and disagreeing with each other in public continues the idea that Christianity is influenced by an incapacity to disagree well on matters of serious public interest.

The Corrymeela Community has a longstanding interest in how divided peoples can argue well. This is, for us, an indication of moral action around issues that split moral analysis. To argue well is not easy. This is not a saccharine proposal for a ‘live and let live’ attitude, or a polite tone-policing approach towards important matters of disagreement. There are Christian people who disagree seriously, and we need a serious form and forum for our disagreements. Christianity is big enough and long enough and strong enough for people to hold significantly different viewpoints. Sometimes, we recognise, these disagreements are so significant that people have a difficult time in recognising the Christianity that is espoused by someone else.

We speak of Christianities here because there are many platforms on which people build their Christianity. For some, their focus on the salvific news of the gospel is the immediate starting point. For others, the focus on incarnation informs their theological engagement. Still others see the purpose of Christianity’s engagement in the public square as a narrative that invites all to respond, and others see the narrative purpose of Christianity as the beginning of a critique of power, not least their own. The starting points of faith can often influence the outcomes of faith-informed dialogues.

Corrymeela has an interest in the practice of faith-informed disagreements. We know that peace can be deepened when people who disagree seriously — indeed, people who may find it difficult to share a room together — can find a language of approaching one another in a new way. Disagreements can continue to flourish, but hopefully — and this is the hope of peace — in a new and more creative way.

Christianity is, of course, a vision that informs its adherents’ opinions on contemporary political, moral and civic issues. It is also a language and lens of prayer. As such, we wished to bring Christians together — from across so-called liberal and conservative belongings, and explore the intimacy of prayer with each other. Prayer raises the heart towards the One from whom the heart comes. The heart is the dwelling place of God, as well as a place of deception. We asked participants to write prayers — sometimes along formal lines — towards the end of our gatherings with each other. This practice brought discomfort sometimes: not everyone was comfortable to share the intimacy of prayer with everyone else. Nevertheless, we approached prayer together: sometimes a person would share their prayer, other times a person would feel more comfortable reading out their prayer, rather than reciting it as a prayer. However it worked for the participants, it worked. This journey towards each other was always going to be lumpy, and we appreciated the courage and generosity of people to meet each other in difference and devotion.

For us at Corrymeela we were interested in how new formed relationships — relationships away from the media’s spotlight — could deepen the intimacy of our engagements with each other; engagements in both public and private contexts. Too often, Christianities’ witnesses wound each other in public. At times in our meetings, someone took an extraordinary risk: they asked a question like:

“Do you trust me?”

“Do you think I hate you?”

“Do you think that I am a Christian at all?”

It is not only difficult to ask questions such as these; it is also difficult to answer them.

This is the task of Reconciling Christianities. Not that we agree, not at all; not that we avoid these questions, not at all — but that we create a place that has enough intimacy and trust to engage in these most serious of questions.

My sincere thanks to all the people who took part in this project: coming to meet with people whose version of Christianity is different can be a demanding thing, and I am moved by the kindness and heart people brought to these engagements. My thanks, too, to Rev Robert Heaney Ph.D, D.Phil and Ms Hartley Wensing from the Center for Anglican Communion Studies for their initiative, imagination and insight in supporting and partnering with us in this project. Finally, my thanks to Glenn Jordan, a colleague and friend of the heart.

Pádraig Ó Tuama
Leader of Corrymeela Community
Thanksgiving 7
Petition 13
Confession 16
Collects 27

The four sections which follow correspond to the four gatherings that took place as part of the programme. On each occasion we reflected together on the particular bible text presented here, and the prayers are those written by the participants in the light of our conversations.

1 The Birth of Jesus Foretold

26 In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, 27 to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. 28 The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you.” 29 Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. 30 But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor with God. 31 You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, 33 and he will reign over Jacob’s descendants forever; his kingdom will never end.”

Mary Visits Elizabeth

39 At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, 40 where she entered Zechariah’s home and greeted Elizabeth. 41 When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. 42 In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! 43 But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? 44 As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. 45 Blessed is she who has believed that the Lord would fulfill his promises to her!”

Mary’s Song

46 And Mary said:
“My soul glorifies the Lord 47 and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, 48 for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, 49 for the Mighty One has done great things for me— holy is his name. 50 His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. 51 He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts.
52 He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble.
53 He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty.
54 He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors.”

56 Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home.

2 The Birth of Jesus

2 In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2 (This was the first census that took place while Lysanias was governor of Syria.) 3 And everyone went to their own town to register.

4 So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5 He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6 While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7 and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. 8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying,

14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.”

15 When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.”

16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.

20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

21 On the eighth day, when it was time to circumcise the child, he was named Jesus, the name the angel had given him before he was conceived.

“May it be to me as you have said.”
Luke 1:38

Father, Thank you for Mary’s Yes! That Yes! that brings your Kingdom amongst us.

Thank you for daily opportunities You give us to say Yes! To start again, in every present moment, To choose your will, To love, To love those you put next to us.

Grace has entered the world and yet it is so full of fear.

Even at his presentation in the Temple, Mary is warned that a sword would pierce her heart also.

Mary and Elizabeth’s stories are intertwined. Elizabeth’s shame is that she has not had a child. Mary’s public shame is that she is pregnant, but not married.

These stories are countercultural today, in that there is no shame associated with either.

But a key part of the incarnation is the taking on of shame.

What are the traditions we follow to protect ourselves from shame and indignity? What would I never do to avoid looking like a shameful Christian?
And she gave birth to her firstborn, a son.
Luke 2:7

Thank you heavenly Father for
This room tonight,
This conversation between us
These gracious people here.
Thank you for your voice of reassurance
Unspoken perhaps,
That you inhabit my world,
My space, my fractured place
And make it holy,
Filled with gentleness and compassion.
Thank you for your embrace of this fearful world
Filled with its contested claims
And ugly insistent demands.
In your silent, wordless infancy
You speak softly of a different way.
Thank you.

“Do not be afraid. I bring you
good news of great joy that will be
for all the people.”
Luke 1:51

Lord I believe, but
There were majestic angels
and pregnant virgins.
There were heavenly songs
and traveling strangers
and untrustworthy messengers.
And all around me this winter
There are untrustworthy messengers
And frightening strangers.
There are siren songs
And privacy-invaded teenagers
And not many majestic angels.

But I am thankful this Advent,
For the surprise of Elizabeth
And the obedience of Zechariah.
For the trust of Mary
And the loyalty of Joseph.
For the joy of angels
And the curiosity of shepherds.
And hopeful too that my mean gifts,
of shaky faith
And stumbling obedience
Can be like the gold, and frankincense and myrrh
Of the wise travellers.
A m e n

Boundaries are constantly being crossed in this story: a word to disrespectful shepherd; angels leaving heaven to come to earth. But circumcision rites are still followed. Jesus is within the tradition, but breaks it too.
“This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many”
Luke 2:34

Lord,
I thank you that you work in
The mess of our lives.
Yours—no tidy resolution of all the difficulties.
Yours—no sparing of us
from our fears and traumas.

Yet your work in us is real,
Your presence true,
Your intervention a promise that all
Your purposes will one day be fulfilled.

Help us Lord, to see that our mess
Is neither purposeless nor irredeemable.
But like Mary we must bear that piercing sword,
We must walk through all that human frailty
Will expose us to.

Amen

5 Introduction to the Sermon on the Mount
1 Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them.

The Beatitudes
He said:
3 ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.
5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.
6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.
7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy.
8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.
9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.
10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
11 ‘Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.”
Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. Matthew 5:1

O God who sits upon mountains, You open your mouth and speak all things into being. You open your mouth and recreate us with words of blessing. Visit us in this valley, and remove our tablets of stone: our pronouncements, our certainties. Give us hearts of flesh and the courage to speak our needs, that we may open our mouths to tell and taste your presence. For you sit and speak and walk among us. Amen

and he began to teach them Matthew 5:2

Almighty and loving Father
Please open my mind and purify my heart,
So I can be a blessing to all who I encounter,
And a witness to your everlasting and unconditional love.
Through Christ our Lord
A m e n

He said: “Blessed are…” Matthew 5:2-3

God of Blessing
If this is a scorecard I’m lost, I’ve failed and fallen
And cast a long shadow over those who I’ve sought to drag down, cast out and castigate
My given riches have been stolen
And I am poor
My gloating victory has turned to ashes and I am grieving
My arrogant reach has shortened and I am humbled
My greed for more has been met and I am empty
My foolish heart has deceived me and I am blind
My warring spirit has caused devastation and I am orphaned
Do not abandon me for that would be more than I could bear right now
Help me to hear that I am loved even when I get it wrong
A m e n

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness Matthew 5:10

Many named Jesus
You heard it all: Liar, fool, fraud, friend, god-enfleshed, devil, deluded, dead.
And somehow you kept steady till the end.
May I — and those I misname — be sustained through the winter, because you had things in you to keep you breathing even when others rejoiced at your bleeding.
A m e n
14 Jesus Anointed at Bethany

1 Now the Passover and the Festival of Unleavened Bread were only two days away, and the chief priests and the teachers of the law were scheming to arrest Jesus secretly and kill him. 2 “But not during the festival,” they said, “or the people may riot.”

3 While he was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head. 4 Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume? 5 It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

6 “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 7 The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me. 8 She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare for my burial. 9 Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

The Trial, Crucifixion and Burial of Jesus

The Last Supper

12 On the first day of the Festival of Unleavened Bread, when it was customary to sacrifice the Passover lamb, Jesus’ disciples asked him, “Where do you want us to go and make preparations for you to eat the Passover?” 13 So he sent two of his disciples, telling them,

“Go into the city, and a man carrying a jar of water will meet you. Follow him.14 Stay to the owner of the house he enters. ‘The Teacher asks: Where is my guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’ 15 He will show you a large room upstairs, furnished and ready. Make preparations for us there.”

16 The disciples left, went into the city and found things just as Jesus had told them. So they prepared the Passover.

17 When evening came, Jesus arrived with the Twelve. 18 While they were reclining at the table eating, he said, “Truly I tell you, one of you will betray me—one who is eating with me.” 19 They were saddened, and one by one they said to him, “Surely you don’t mean me?” 20 “It is one of the Twelve,” he replied, “one who dips bread into the bowl with me. 21 The Son of Man will go just as it is written about him. 22 But woe to that man who betrays the Son of Man! It would be better for him if he had not been born.”

23 While they were eating, Jesus took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, “Take it; this is my body.” 24 Then he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 25 “This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,” he said to them. 26 “Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the kingdom of God.” 27 When they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives.

Jesus Predicts Peter’s Denial

27 “You will all fall away,” Jesus told them, “for it is written: ‘I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep will be scattered.’” 28 But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee.” 29 Peter declared, “Even if all fall away, I will not.” 30 “Truly I tell you,” Jesus answered, “today—you, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.”

Gethsemane

32 They went to a place called Gethsemane, and Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.” 35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

37 Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Simon,” he said to Peter, “are you asleep? Couldn’t you keep watch for one hour?” 38 Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

39 Once more he went away and prayed the same thing. 40 When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. They did not know what to say to him. 41 Returning the third time, he said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Enough! The hour has come. Look, the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. 42 Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

Jesus Arrested

43 Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. 44 Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” 45 The moment Jesus said this, Judas went over and kissed him and said, “Rabbi!” to show him which one it was.

32 Then Jesus said to his disciples, “Sit here while I pray.” 33 He took Peter, James and John along with him, and he began to be deeply distressed and troubled. 34 “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death,” he said to them. “Stay here and keep watch.” 35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 “Abba, Father,” he said, “everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

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Jesus predicted Peter’s denial with the words, “today—you, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times.” This was a significant event in the life of Jesus, as it foreshadowed the betrayal of one of his closest disciples, Peter. The night before Jesus’ crucifixion, he took his disciples to an olive grove called Gethsemane, where he prayed fervently that he might not be led into temptation. Despite his prayer, he was betrayed by Judas Iscariot, who kissed him and identified him to the arresting party. This event marked the beginning of Jesus’ arrest, trial, and eventual crucifixion, a pivotal moment in the history of salvation and the foundation of the Christian church.
with their fists, and said, “Prophesy!” And the guards took him and beat him.

Peter Disowns Jesus
66 While Peter was below in the courtyard, one of the servant girls of the high priest came by. 67 When she saw Peter warming himself, she looked closely at him. “You also were with that Nazarene, Jesus,” she said. 68 But he denied it. “I don’t know or understand what you’re talking about,” he said, and went out into the entryway. 69 When the servant girl saw him there, she said again to those standing around, “This fellow is one of them.” 70 Again he denied it.

After a little while, those standing near said to Peter, “Surely you are one of them, for you are a Galilean.” 71 He began to call down curses, and he swore to them, “I don’t know this man you’re talking about.” 72 Immediately the rooster crowed the second time. Then Peter remembered the word Jesus had spoken to him: “Before the rooster crows twice you will disown me three times.” And he broke down and wept.

15 Jesus Before Pilate
1 Very early in the morning, the chief priests, with the elders, the teachers of the law and the whole Sanhedrin, made their plans. So they bound Jesus, led him away and handed him over to Pilate. 2 “Are you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate. “You have said so,” the chief priests and scribes had told him. 3 The chief priests accused him of many things. 4 So again Pilate asked him, “Aren’t you going to answer? See how many things they are accusing you of.” 5 But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.

6 Now it was the custom at the festival to release a prisoner whom the people requested. 7 A man called Barabbas was in prison with the insurrectionists who had committed murder in the uprising. 8 The crowd came up and asked Pilate to do for them what he usually did. 9 “Do you want me to release to you the king of the Jews?” asked Pilate, 10 knowing it was out of self-interest that the chief priests had handed Jesus over to him. 11 But the chief priests stirred up the crowd to have Pilate release Barabbas instead. 12 “What shall I do, then, with the one you call the king of the Jews?” Pilate asked them. 13 “Crucify him!” they shouted. 14 “Why? What crime has he committed?” asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, “Crucify him!” 15 Wanting to satisfy the crowd, Pilate released Barabbas to them. He had Jesus flogged, and handed him over to be crucified.

The Soldiers Mock Jesus
16 The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace (that is, the Praetorium) and called together the whole company of soldiers. 17 They put a purple robe on him, then twisted together a crown of thorns and set it on him. 18 And they began to call out to him, “Hail, king of the Jews!” 19 Again and again they struck him on the head with a staff and spit on him. 20 And when they had mocked him, they took off the purple robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him out to crucify him.

The Crucifixion of Jesus
21 A certain man from Cyrene, Simon, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was passing by on his way in from the country, and they forced him to carry the cross. 22 They brought Jesus to the place called Golgotha (which means “the place of the skull”). 23 Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it. 24 And they crucified him. Dividing up his clothes, they cast lots to see what each would get. 25 It was nine in the morning when they crucified him. 26 The written notice of the charge against him read: the king of the Jews.

27 They crucified two rebels with him, one on his right and one on his left. 28 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, “So! You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, 30 come down from the cross and save yourself!” 31 In the same way the chief priests and the teachers of the law mocked him among themselves. “He saved others,” they said, “but he can’t save himself!” 32 Let this Messiah, this king of Israel, come down now from the cross, that we may see and believe.” Those crucified with him also heaped insults on him.

The Death of Jesus
33 At noon, darkness came over the whole land until three in the afternoon. 34 And at three in the afternoon Jesus cried out in a loud voice, “Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani?” (which means “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”). 35 When some of those standing near heard this, they said, “Listen, he’s calling Elijah.” 36 Someone ran, filled a sponge with wine vinegar, put it on a staff, and offered it to Jesus to drink. “Now leave him alone. Let’s see if Elijah comes to take him down,” he said. 37 With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.

38 The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. 39 And when the centurion, who stood there in front of Jesus, saw how he died, he said, “Surely this man was the Son of God!” 40 Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joseph, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. Many other women who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.

The Burial of Jesus
42 It was Preparation Day (that is, the day before the Sabbath). So as evening approached, 43 Joseph of Arimathea, a prominent member of the Council, who was himself waiting for the kingdom of God, went boldly to Pilate and asked for Jesus’ body. 44 Pilate was surprised to hear that he was already dead. Summoning the centurion, he asked him if Jesus had already died. 45 When he learned from the centurion that it was so, he gave the body to Joseph. 46 So Joseph bought some linen cloth, took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock. Then he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. 47 Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joseph saw where he was laid.
If we only had this text, and not Paul’s letters, what would we make of this story?

In what ways can we consider the events here as happening “for us”?

In effect we often threaten one another with our reading of this text. “Unless you read it like this, you are not one of us.”
And he broke down and wept.
Mark 14:62
Heavenly Father,
Here I am facing you once more.
You already know the secrets of my heart
You see and hear the insecurities
Which seep out of me into a public place.
You know the doubts I harbour about myself
And the rage I sometimes feel towards others.
And so I return to your embrace.
I need to know that I am OK with you
And especially that I am treasured by you.
Thank you that you come looking for me
And that you find me each day
A m e n

But Jesus still made no reply, and Pilate was amazed.
Mark 15:5
All knowing and knowable God
Who understands all things yet is comfortable being misunderstood
Help us embrace being misunderstood too
Help us embrace silence as often as words, listening as often as speaking,
That we, like Christ, may be welcoming, hospitable & generous
To all whom we encounter
A m e n

The soldiers led Jesus away into the palace...and called together the whole company of soldiers.
Mark 15:16
Gracious God,
Vulnerable, transparent, and truly humble,
You who refused to anaesthetise your suffering,
Help me take the path of denying myself, of unveiling my truest self,
of walking through life's pain and not around it,
So that I may be like you to a world needing to know how to navigate fear,
conflict, and inner torment,
Through Jesus, the one who sees us and is mindful of us.
A m e n

Then they offered him wine mixed with myrrh, but he did not take it.
Mark 15:5
Gracious God,
In allowing torture, acts of violence
over which we have power,
allowing inequalities to persist that demean the dignity of your creation,
we have sinned against you.
We kept silent when we should have spoken;
we pleaded ignorance when we should have known.
And yet you kept silent in the face of your oppression,
torture, and the diminishment of your humanity.
Grant me strength and grace to bear my cross
during times of affliction and adversity;
and the courage to stand and speak with those who are oppressed.
Grant me the wisdom to know when to act
and when to stay silent.
So that the world may know your love and justice
that enables us to flourish with dignity
in the plans you have for us.
A m e n
With a loud cry, Jesus breathed his last.
Mark 15:37

Father,
You know us better than we know ourselves,
In the Word which was, is and always will be,
the one towards whom Jesus points us,
Be with us and help us to recognise your abandoned Son,
Jesus crying out – in His forsakenness
In all the situations of pain, conflict, division,
hurts, calamities, confusions, messes,
Mistakes, ignorance, emptiness, incapacity,
places where there is no Love,
Help us find your Son there, in that Cry.
To recognise and embrace Him,
To keep believing in your plan
of Love behind all things,
And may Your Kingdom of mutual Love,
of perfect peace,
of unity and diversity in You
grow according to Your Will,
And all to give glory and thanks
to the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

So Joseph bought some linen cloth,
took down the body, wrapped it in the linen, and placed it in a tomb cut out of rock.
Mark 15:46

The curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
Mark 15:38

Lord, Almighty and Loving Father
Forgive us for all injuries caused and received
So we can bring healing and peace
To all those we encounter through our ministry and work
Through Christ our Lord,
A m e n

Throughout this narrative Jesus is being asked who he was. Only the women who attended at a distance (15:40) and maybe the young man (14:51) were not bewildered. Then, at his final breath, the word of abandonment was persuasive for the Centurion and gave him a moment of recognition.
God
We overstep, we miss each other, we say it wrong, we stay deliberately silent. We rarely hit the sweet spot of compassionately speaking up or prophetically sitting down beside. Forgive us God. Show us tender mercy when we speak too loudly or break eye contact and say nothing. For you are with us in our noisy bluster, our awkwardness, in our guilt, silent complicity. Give us wisdom. Give us wisdom. Give us wisdom. For you are both humble and wise. Aamen

Someone with a social conscience gave him sour wine. Human rights are otherwise abused and social justice ignored throughout the narrative. How would we re-write this story in our day of human rights and social justice?

9 Jesus Heals a Man Born Blind

1 As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. 2 His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” 3 “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him. 4 As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work. 5 While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.” 6 After saying this, he spit on the ground, made some mud with the saliva, and put it on the man’s eyes. 7 “Go,” he told him, “wash in the Pool of Siloam” (this word means “Sent”). So the man went and washed, and came home seeing. 8 His neighbors and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?” 9 Some claimed that he was. Others said, “No, he only looks like him.” But he himself insisted, “I am the man.” 10 “How then were your eyes opened?” they asked. 11 He replied, “The man they call Jesus made some mud and put it on my eyes. He told me to go to Siloam and wash. So I went and washed, and then I could see.” 12 “Where is this man?” they asked him. “I don’t know,” he said.

The Pharisees Investigate the Healing

13 They brought to the Pharisees the man who had been blind. 14 Now the day on which Jesus had made the mud and opened the man’s eyes was a Sabbath. 15 Therefore the Pharisees also asked him how he had received his sight. “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.” 16 Some of the Pharisees said, “This man is not from God, for he does not keep the Sabbath.” But others asked, “How can a sinner perform such signs?” So they were divided. 17 Then they turned again to the blind man, “What have you to say about him? It was your eyes he opened.” The man replied, “He is a prophet.” 18 They still did not believe that he had been blind and had received his sight until they sent for the man’s parents. 19 “Is this your son?” they asked. “Is this the one you say was born blind? How is it that now he can see?” 20 “We know he is our son,” the parents answered, “and we know he was born blind. 21 But how he can see now, or who opened his eyes, we don’t know. Ask him. He is of age; he will speak for himself.” 22 His parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders, who already had decided that anyone who acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah would be put out of the synagogue. 23 That was why his parents said, “He is of age; ask him.” 24 A second time they summoned the man who had been blind. “Give glory to God by telling the truth,” they said. “We know this man is a sinner.” 25 He replied, “Whether he is a sinner or not, I don’t know. One thing I do know, I was blind but now I see!” 26 Then they asked him, “What did he do to you? How did he open your eyes?” 27 He answered, “I have told you already and you did not listen.
Why do you want to hear it again? Do you want to become his disciples too?"

28 Then they hurled insults at him and said, “You are this fellow’s disciple! We are disciples of Moses! 29 We know that God spoke to Moses, but as for this fellow, we don’t even know where he comes from.”

30 The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes. 31 We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will. 32 Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind. 33 If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

34 To this they replied, “You were steeped in sin at birth; how dare you lecture us!” And they threw him out.

Spiritual Blindness

35 Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”

36 “Who is he, sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”

37 Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”

38 Then the man said, “Lord, I believe,” and he worshiped him.

39 Jesus said,[a] “For judgment I have come into this world, so that the blind will see and those who see will become blind.”

40 Some Pharisees who were with him heard him say this and asked, “What? Are we blind too?”

41 Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains.

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John 9:5

O Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God

confounder, pursuer, healer

Open the blindness of my eyes

and the deafness of my ears

that I may detect your whispers

and perceive your traces

and so praise your disturbing generosity.

A m e n

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As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

John 9:1

Ever attentive Lord

Who walked this earth and noticed

I’m frequently blind to others

and inattentive to their need

Heal my eyes that I may walk like you and notice

Create in me the capacity for change

and the generosity to recognise it in others

That the on-going work of God may be clearly seen in me

To the glory and praise of the

One who brings light to clay

A m e n
3 So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.
John 9:7

Author of Light
Who divided waters from earth
And brought life to crawl, swim, walk and fly
Unite us in dust, breath and water
from the word of your sending
That we may wash, be cleansed
To see each other clearly in your image
Creator, Redeemer, Sustainer of All
A m e n

4 His neighbours and those who had formerly seen him begging asked, “Isn’t this the same man who used to sit and beg?”
John 9:8

To my neighbours who share the same streets
And among whom I grew, poor and blind
May every confusion which clouds our vision be clarified
That we may speak for ourselves
of what we know and have seen
Of the Light who brings light
to those who cannot see
A m e n

5 “He put mud on my eyes,” the man replied, “and I washed, and now I see.”
John 9:15

Unfathomable God
Who defies our expectations and breaks apart our categories of thought
Teach us anew the wonder of your redemption
That we might be signposts to your living hope
Through Jesus Christ our Lord
A m e n

6 “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!”
John 9:25

Creator God
Who gives sight to the blind
Grant us light in times of darkness
So that we might follow you into new and unexpected places
For the glory of your name
A m e n
Jesus heard that they had thrown him out, and when he found him, he said, “Do you believe in the Son of Man?”
John 9:35

“Who is he sir?” the man asked. “Tell me so that I may believe in him.”
John 9:36

Jesus said, “You have now seen him; in fact, he is the one speaking with you.”
John 9:37

O God of seeing
The One who sees our hearts and all within
May we see others as we are seen by You
And recognise our own blindness
So that we, and they, may be loved with Your love.
Amen

God who brought life and light and knowing
through spit and dust
And caused questions to tumble and run
from the sceptical and the searching
from the blind and the seeing
from the angry and the scared
Like Who? and What? and Where?
and how? and Why?
Enter my own questioning heart
That I may clearly see and hear the Voice
Who brought illumination from the beginning
So that the work of God may be visible in me
To the glory of the One who is the Shining Light of the World.
Amen

“Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.”
John 9:32

God who spoke and speaks
People seek your voice
in corners that they trust.
Help us all hear where you speak
to frighten
Because you are the one, hear;
I whose words are life for all,
Amen

Creator of light
In whom no darkness can be found
When I am blind open my eyes to your light;
when I think I am enlightened may I become blind
So that I may always know that I only see in part
Thanks be to God

People seek your voice
in corners that they trust.
Help us all hear where you speak
to frighten
Because you are the one, hear;
I whose words are life for all,
Amen

God who spoke and speaks
People seek your voice
in corners that they trust.
Help us all hear where you speak
to frighten
Because you are the one, hear;
I whose words are life for all,
Amen

God who brought life and light and knowing
through spit and dust
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Like Who? and What? and Where?
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Enter my own questioning heart
That I may clearly see and hear the Voice
Who brought illumination from the beginning
So that the work of God may be visible in me
To the glory of the One who is the Shining Light of the World.
Amen

God who spoke and speaks
People seek your voice
in corners that they trust.
Help us all hear where you speak
to frighten
Because you are the one, hear;
I whose words are life for all,
Amen
John 9:41

Almighty and Merciful God
Who continually surprises us with
your gifts of healing and release
Free us from the shackles of shame,
hopelessness and frustration
So that we might grow into the people
you have always intended us to be
Through Jesus Christ our Lord
Amen

John 9:39

God who breathes life through dirt and clay.
You used simple things to open eyes
and give life to those on the margins.
Bring sight when we are blind
And challenge us when we think we can see.
For you see through our blinkers
And lenses.
You are the Light of the World
Amen