

Sibyls service 27 Feb 2023

This is a service of reflection and prayer. It springs from things that have had an impact on me personally over the past week or so.

Alongside my own reflections, much of the ministry here comes from others - I have collected together things written by others, mostly very recently.

I hope you find that some of this can be offered in prayer.

An ecumenical worship

Sibyls is an ecumenical group, we share a faith, across denominations.

I have sometimes felt that the 'rules' for joining a particular denomination give the impression that the one you are joining is 'better' than others and underlines the doctrinal differences.

There are simply variations in worship, partly because of tradition; partly because each of us wants to be true to our own experience of God. The differences in ways of worship enrich and stimulate us all.

Words from Katharine

After the earthquake in Turkey and Syria

The devastating effects of the earthquake in Turkey and Syria are unimaginable. The numbers so large. The way that I tried to hold the people in mind and to pray, was to start from one.

A one year old died. A two year old died. A three year old died.....
a seventeen year old, an eighteen year old, a nineteen year old.....
Thirty, forty, fifty....
Someone just like me.

It was too difficult. It is too difficult to hold these people in love. Too easy to turn to other thoughts.

God in your mercy, hold all these lives: those lost, those grieving, those supporting.

War in Ukraine

Our constant prayer for the people affected by the darkness of war.

Our prayer for truth and light to turn the tide of destruction.

Our prayer for those around Europe creating safe havens for Ukrainian refugees.

Our prayer for all those fleeing conflicts in other parts of the world and those who are stuck and suffer from day to day.

Trans in the headlines

A friend, who I don't often have contact with, emailed me to say:

'How are you? Was thinking of you, with all the controversy lately re Trans issues. Hope you are well supported and welcomed in your Meeting and elsewhere.'

Many of us have felt more vulnerable since the death of Brianna Ghey, the debate around Scottish gender recognition legislation, news about prisoners, Question Time on BBC1.

May we feel the upholding of each other and value the love and blessings from friends.

Prayer for Brianna

We remember with great dismay and sadness, sixteen year old Brianna. We think of the courage she had in living her young life truthfully, and the influence for good she would have had if she lived.

We think of the challenges she had with parents and friends, challenges we all know, however old we are; challenges which are common to transgender people and which each of us has to negotiate in our own way, in our own time.

We empathise with Brianna, feel immensely proud of her and miss her, even though we did not know her.

Some of us have taken part in vigils, there have been prayers. It has brought transphobia into sharp focus. Let us pray that this sad loss brings new light.

Taking on new responsibilities

Every stage of our lives offers fresh opportunities. Responding to divine guidance, try to discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities without undue pride or guilt. Attend to what love requires of you, which may not be great busyness.

(Quaker)

Big life-changes

How can we describe what it means to make a transition in gender and way of being?

An analogy might be C18th and C19th century emigrants from the Western Isles of Scotland or Ireland leaving the only home they knew, trusting that the new World will offer a better place to live.

Hope and trust and faith.

Or an analogy inspired by Philip Pullman's parallel universes: everything is the same, but with a greater sense of belonging and a corrected perspective.

*Conflict between trans affirmation and gender critical views
within our churches*

Bring into God's light those emotions, attitudes and prejudices in yourself which lie at the root of destructive conflict, acknowledging your need for forgiveness and grace. In what ways are you involved in the work of reconciliation between individuals and groups?

(Quaker)

Inclusion in worship

When members of one worship group considered 'inclusion' these words seemed to distil the reflections of the group: that everyone should feel *Safe* when they come to Worship; that all should feel *Welcomed*, however they present. That every individual is *Valued* as a vital part of our worshipping Family; and that all are *Respected* – as people united on our spiritual journeys.

As things unfolded however I became aware that, in striving for inclusion and diversity, there was a very real risk of appearing to exclude some other Friends.

One person had been deeply hurt when called 'transphobic' by a non-binary Friend because they couldn't / wouldn't use their gender neutral pronouns. Some felt deeply uneasy about gender-neutral toilets. There were straight and gay members who felt betrayed when, after confiding sensitive personal information underlying their views - discovered this had later been shared outside of the group.

At other moments I've been exhilarated to share discussions where Friends have really opened up and immense progress in compassionate understanding has been made. It seems natural therefore that, to break down the barriers, real or perceived, in our worship groups, we need to make the opportunities to talk, share, eat, laugh, share books, watch films, read poems, make art together so that we can begin knowing each other more deeply in the 'Things which are Eternal'.

All of us need, not just to feel, but to know that we are Safe, Welcome, Valued and Respected in our worship group.

Maria

Lent and living simply

Can we make this time of Lent a time to reflect on our priorities and the ordering of our time and resources?

In the wilderness, Christ went without many things but his purpose was to think deeply about his destiny and to be in communion with God. Perhaps we can use Lent to review the way we live our lives and focus on a new insight into living more simply.

Today, many people are forced to give up and make do. Food banks, and now food shortages in food banks demonstrate hardship.

If we have the choice to give up something we are accustomed to, how can we live more simply and honestly? What does living simply actually mean, and is the simple life possible in today's technological society?

The Bishop of Shrewsbury said a few years ago, 'we want everyone else to change their lifestyles so that we can continue with ours..... at global and national levels we need to live differently.'

'Giving up' could lead us towards 'simply giving', and simply living. It is necessary for ourselves and the world.

Katharine and Anthea

Gratitude for creativity

To be creative is to make, and to mend, and to relate and resolve.
Creativity is to surprise myself, to be in awe.
It is a therapy, a problem-solver, a reconciler.

Creativity is starting with what I have and don't have, and what I
feel aggrieved by, and all the hardship and longing.
And discovering joy.

Creativity is piecing together hope from chaos.
It is a gift that springs from unexpected places, it is necessary and it
is expedient.
And it leads to thankfulness.

Creativity is in those of us who don't think we are creative.
Creativity is spirituality in action.
Creativity is God's leading.

Yvonne

Acorns and Spring

I have an acorn vase – where you place an acorn in the narrow neck and watch the roots extend into water. Then a tiny green shoot appears and reaches upwards, creating fresh green leaves. I just watch, in total amazement, then I carefully take it and plant it in soil.

Yvonne

The Lord's Prayer

