

## **Picking the locks**

In the last couple of weeks both Stephen and Vincent invited us to reflect on Jesus' greeting to his disciples in that first Easter season: 'Peace be with you.' (John 20:19&26). Words of blessing to fearful and traumatised people 2000+ years ago, that still resonate strongly in our conflicted and traumatised world.

I am increasingly aware of how much we fearful, anxious, insecure human beings need blessing. How crucial it is for humanity to reclaim the importance of blessing and being blessed for there to be peace in the world. Blessing is to speak well of or say good things of someone. We all need blessing and affirmation. To give someone a blessing is the most significant affirmation we can offer. It is more than praise or appreciation; more than pointing out someone's talents or good deeds; more than putting someone in the light. To give a blessing is to say a heartfelt "Yes" to a person's belovedness, to the unique expression of the image of God in which each of us was created and formed. You are the beloved of God. It is not easy to hear this in a world filled with voices that shout that we are not good enough, worthless, unimportant. And if the world isn't shouting, then there is often a little worm of self-rejection in our heads and hearts that whispers it.

Blessing draws from that same infinite well of loving desire, energy and intent that said, "Let there be light," and there was light, light that was good. Blessing touches the original goodness of the other and calls forth their belovedness. It calls to and draws out into being, the reality of which we speak, bringing healing. The blessings that we give each other are expressions of the blessing that rests on us from all eternity and from Easter morning. They are the deepest affirmation of our true selves and a most precious gift.

The poet Malcolm Guite says, 'The peace Christ gives us, and will always give us, is not the world's peace, not the so-called peace imposed by the world's winners on the 'losers' they exploit, not the phony peace that papers over injustice and exploitation, of which the Roman historian Tacitus said "They make a desolation and call it peace". The peace of Christ is something different: living, active, creatively seeking reconciliation, proclaiming love even to enemies. How does that peace become prayer, and prayer become that peace?'

The image that came to him was of prayer patiently picking the locks on the chains of unforgiveness that bind us, and then we, once freed, seeking and assisting in prayer and in life, people with whom we have not had peace before.

Praying means to be accepting of God, who is always new, always different. Acceptance may lead us where we do not want to go – it led Jesus to the cross. To be led without knowing where we are going is part of the lifelong project, as Vincent put it, to keep ourselves open for Him to work his Peace within us.

As we come now to silent prayer, in stillness let us open our hands and hearts and receive anew the gift and blessing that is spoken over us through the Holy Spirit: Peace be with you.

## **To lead us into silence**

John 14:27 'Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.'

Shalom – May it be so!

**To lead us from silence:**

**Peace**

Not as the world gives, not the victor's peace,  
Not to be fought for, hard-won, or achieved,  
Just grace and mercy, gratefully received:  
An undeserved and unforeseen release,  
As the cold chains of memory and wrath  
Fall from our hearts before we are aware,  
Their rusty locks all picked by patient prayer,  
Till closed doors open, and we see a path  
Descending from a source we cannot see;  
A path that must be taken, hand in hand,  
Only by those, forgiving and forgiven,  
Who see their saviour in their enemy.  
So reach for me. We'll cross our broken land,  
And make each other bridges back to Heaven.

Malcolm Guite