

A Service of Word and Table

Crafted by *Michael Jagessar*

Words of Invitation

The Baker of the Bread of Life, the Vinedresser whose new wine bubbles and ferments welcomes us. The voice is Love that calls us: friend or stranger, saint or sinner. This table is the meeting place. Let Love call to you. Hear God call your name. For Jesus, the Host knows you and loves you. The Spirit wants you to share and live and dream – the dream of bread and wine. All are invited. Come, the table is set. Listen – Love, who has become part of our pain whispers to each of us.

Verse of **HYMN**

Liturgy of Thanksgiving

God be with you:

And also with you

Let us lift our hearts – and be lifted up:

We lift them up to God

Give thanks to God:

Joyfully we do so. God has been good to us!

We are blessed, God of Life and Lover of all. In the beginning You wind swept the waters. You created the world and all that is in it. Upon the emptiness you cast the brilliance of your thought, and all of time and space leapt forth; a universe afire, all-dancing. Your burning holy love created all. You formed us from clay, breathed life into us with thought, culture, speech, silence, music...

Interrupting the narrative [Read by a Voice from Congregation]

How about listening to my story before you continue? You know me. I do not have to give you a name. I am every refugee and stranger in your midst. I had to run for my life from a place where God dies (my homeland). It used to be a place of love, compassion and hospitality until that day when soldiers marched into my village and rounded all our families out of their homes at gunpoint. There was fire and gunshots and shouting, screams and cries coming from every corner of the ground. We ran and ran until it was all left behind. I lost my husband, mother and two children on that day – forever etched in my memory. I held onto my 19 month old daughter as we ran for our life. With other survivors I walked for 8 hours until I reached a spot where a bus took us to a refugee

camp. It was the first of many long bus rides. On that ride I wept till the tears refused to flow.

At the camp I was told that my daughter had a dislocated hip – as a result of the long journey and hours spent with her legs at unnatural angles while on my hip and will need to be operated on or she will never walk properly. I was advised to apply to be taken to one of four countries. One eventually granted me and my daughter temporary protection. Even a shattered heart and permanent tears could not hide my joy – as I imagined a safe, welcoming and friendly land and people.

My daughter underwent 3 operations in the space of 10 months – all unsuccessful. She was booked for a fourth when I was told that the government had decided that we were to be deported back to our country. It was now safe there. The UN were there. There were no UN in our village and if we went back it would be a huge tent and there would be nothing. I was scared. The government had already decided and told us that if we did not leave we would be detained. I thought: 'People are kind here. There is nothing back home – except sad memories. Nothing could be as bad as my country. Besides, I now only want to live for my daughter and this country is her only chance to walk again.'

We stayed and were placed in detention. It was horrible. Only miles of barren landscape around us. No trees. No flowers. Children kept asking: 'Where are we?' 'Where are the flowers?' They kept saying, 'We want to go. Please let us go away from here.' My daughter cried every day. It was a very, very bad place. We lived in a building with 200 adults and 400 children. The facilities were poor and the space was cramped. The Centre was run by a private company and everything was done at minimum cost. Meagre meals – most times partially cooked. 'How could they lock up innocent people? How could they lock up children?' The children were not like children I saw before. Many of them had no hope.

One constant battle I had to fight was for my daughter to be re-operated on – as she was still unable to walk properly and suffered frequent pain. A doctor was eventually allowed to see her. However, he was not allowed to discuss anything with me. He was only allowed to speak to the guards. When he did eventually manage to speak to me, it was to tell me that he was not qualified to diagnose my daughter's problem and that he could not help me. I was denied any further access to a doctor.

After seven months in detention, ML, a well known human rights lawyer came to me and my daughter's aid and secured permanent residence status for us. I am so grateful and will always be indebted to her. It took some time for me to get over my nightmares and to adjust back to 'normal' life. I had to do it for the sake of my daughter. I still wake

up at nights from dreams of the screaming guards with their torch-lights by my bedside asking to see my identification tag.

I am thankful for the kindness of people like ML, but I still struggle to forgive the government of this land. It is difficult to forgive for the nightmares, the trauma, the suffering, the lies, the threats. I thought God had died only in my land.

...Weaver of stories that form the tapestry of faith, thank you for re-calling us – when we tear each other apart in our arrogance and hatred, seeking the shadows and the way of non-life – to rest in your strength and purity of love.

And so into our wintered life – from which the sun had fled – You placed a child, Jesus in Mary's womb and a star in the eastern sky. Through Jesus you offer to all of creation the gift of abundant life.

Second verse of **HYMN**

As we claim the faith of your child Jesus, we remember how
in Egypt his parents sought refuge to save him from death
in Galilee of the Gentiles he grew in wisdom and stature.
he healed a Roman centurion's servant
spoke peace and forgiveness to the Samaritan woman
marvelled at the faith of a Syrian mother
welcomed the Greeks who sought him
embraced children as models for adults
created a welcome space for people and served them with joy.

Reading

Philippians 4: 4-13

Yet, he was rejected, betrayed, abandoned by all
Because he showed us a different way of living and loving
We turned on him for daring to be hospitable and welcoming

We nailed him for going against the flow of the tide
Buried him in our fresh hewn tomb
But you did not abandon him to the grave
We praise you for his life, which is bolder than death
that rises undefeated in us yet
pregnant with the promise

that bio-degradability is not your final word
that it does not have to stay like this
We thank you for the hope and resurrection – embodied in Jesus your dancing incarnation –
the dance of hope for people everywhere.

Reflections/Sermon

Third verse of **HYMN**

So, we recall that night when he was betrayed and led outside the city's gate to be sacrificed
for love

That night, before his death, our brother Jesus shared a meal with his friends. During the
meal he took bread, broke it and shared it out among his friends saying: 'This is my body' –
for us his word and his life which was broken so that we may find our mission as we make
him real in our lives.

And after the meal, he took a cup filled with wine, thanked you gracious God, for wine and
gave it to his friends saying: 'This is the cup of blessing' – the blessing and promise that held
his joy and tears – that contains our joys and tears so that we may find our mission as we
make him real in our lives.

HYMN

O Compassionate and Embracing God

We offer up our work, our lives and our journeys in the symbol of bread.

We offer up our laughter, tears, humiliation and suffering in the cup of life.

Come, Spirit of God

Through the power of love, communicate through bread and wine and transform elements
in us into your way of love, justice, peace and life.

Empower us with passion, energy and love to transform our world into your roundtable of
love and hospitality.

We pray, loving God, all this through the Holy One, in the Power of the Spirit. Amen.

Bread and Wine are shared

O God, Giver and Renewer of Life, Creator of Love, Bearer of Pain, Sustainer of Journeys

We give you thanks that at this table, we have been reminded once again of your love for us
(here and everywhere)

And so, we remember the needs and pray for....

Intercessions

The Lord's Prayer

Continue to feed our hunger with life itself. Send us on our way, with your rhythm and benediction of life pulsating in us – as we rejoice in your offer of abundant life for the whole of creation. **Amen!**

HYMN