

# **Glimpses of God in the Bible**

## **Ash Wednesday Reflection**

In the wildernesses of our lives,  
we too need to reflect, to struggle against temptations.

There is the bodily temptation  
to make the most of our opportunities for self-satisfaction.

There is the status temptation  
to be overly concerned with self-image,  
to seek manipulating power over those around us.

There is the moral and ethical temptation  
to compromise what we know to be right,  
for our own ends.

Understanding God  
you have travelled this demanding road before us,  
Help us to remember,  
that we cannot live on bread alone,  
that spectacular demonstrations of power are merely self-  
aggrandisement,  
that you alone are to be worshipped.

Help us through the power of your Spirit,  
to follow the disciplined way  
of steadfast compassion and justice  
so clearly demonstrated by the self-giving life of Jesus.

## **Banished?**

Jesus.  
Banished.  
Outside the city walls.  
Excluded from the temple.  
Prevented from influencing spirit-hungry searchers.  
Executed.  
Finished.  
Dead.

God's response?  
A resounding NO!  
Jesus,  
encountered again  
inside the city walls.  
In that Upper Room.  
Reawakening images of bread and wine.  
Sparking realisation that no human banishment can exclude God.

No walls,  
gates,  
barriers,  
tombstones  
can limit the risen Jesus  
for the Spirit goes where it will.  
Then and now.  
Thanks be to God

## **Experience**

Experienced fishermen  
out on the lake in the storm,  
waking the sleeping Jesus.  
Their expectations of a carpenter turned rabbi?  
In great danger,  
with fear and trembling,  
they seek the one  
whose experience is of life and death.  
Seamanship redundant?

So often, we too,  
turn to Jesus, to God,  
only when our earthly experiences  
cease to have relevance.  
Then we need the help  
of the one who can say,  
'Peace, be still',  
and accompany us through our storms.

We too say,  
'What manner of man is this?'  
as we sense the presence of God.

## **Fatally Mistaken???**

One of the Master's men,  
so proud when he called my name.  
I'd followed along with the crowd,  
mesmerised by his voice, his power, his personality.  
At last he had come,  
the promised Son of David.  
Vaunting Romans, despising us Jews,  
lording it over us;  
Your days are numbered.  
God's mighty power will toss you aside,  
scatter you like so much flotsam after a storm on the lake.

I didn't dare hope that he would choose me.  
First the Galilean fishermen, the tax collector.  
Others from Galilee, then, when the calling seemed over.  
One last name; Judas Iscariot!  
My heart leapt with in me.  
I would serve him loyally;  
show him, last but not least.

He trusted me, and I knew he was waiting,  
waiting for his hour to come.  
Rome's crushing power would be no more.  
Patience! I needed patience,  
waiting for the promised time spoken of by the prophets of old.  
I followed him through thick and thin.  
Triumphant moments  
when even sickness and demons submitted to his power.  
Fearful moments as in Nazareth,  
driven from the synagogue,

almost pushed over the cliff.

Three long years, waiting for the moment to come.  
Then the first secret,  
a borrowing of a donkey.  
A humble, unassuming donkey,  
yet a triumphant journey into the heart of Jerusalem.  
Waving palms, praising voices,  
hailing the new Son of David.  
Gripped with excitement, I followed.  
The hour had surely come!  
This must be the moment we were waiting for.

But no.  
Just a look, albeit a look full of a deep sadness,  
an all-seeing gaze around the temple.  
A quiet departure to the house in Bethany,  
to the hospitality of Mary and Martha.  
What was he waiting for?

Next day perhaps.  
It was late in the day to start a revolution.  
Next morning it came.  
Another of those moments as the tension rose within me to fever pitch.  
Surely this must be it.  
Rattling coins rolling into dark corners!  
Wings flapping wildly, soaring to freedom.  
Confused and frightened animal sounds.  
Harsh shouts, overpowering the usual babble,  
and angry too.  
Above all the din, a searing challenge.  
“My Father’s house, a place of prayer for all nations.  
Made a den of thieves!”

This surely is the moment,  
as I watch and wait.  
Surely he must now take his chance and seize power,  
power tantalisingly within reach.

But no.  
Just words.  
Clever, entrapping priestly questions.  
And his unassailable answers.  
But again, no action.  
Time draining by, minute by minute,  
agonisingly slow day by slow day.

Another secret, a trysting place for Passover.  
Peter and John again, trusted with the secret.  
I couldn't stand the waiting any longer.  
I remembered the power over wind and waves.  
I remembered his warning to be alert for the hour that was to come.  
I remembered his claim that the Kingdom was near.  
He had come to bring fire on the earth; not peace.  
He had wished it was already ablaze.  
He was ready. He must be ready.  
When they challenged him.  
That would be the time.

Why wait any longer?  
I could easily set up the challenge.  
Help him, with another secret.  
Was this why he had called me out?  
Was this why he wanted me, Judas Iscariot as one of his men?  
I would not fail him.  
He could rely on me.

Those angry priests, full of cowardice;  
dared not seize him because of the crowds.  
Plenty of whispers though  
that they were out to get him.  
Just waiting for the festival to end.  
Religious men? No! Power-hungry hypocrites,  
only after prestige and influence.  
Lining their own pockets instead of the temple treasury.  
Glad enough to hear me though.

Thirty pieces of silver!  
A pittance for the life which surpassed all theirs put together.  
They thought they could wipe him off the face of the earth.  
But they would see.  
Their power would disintegrate as he faced them,  
ablaze with glory from on high.  
I could see it all happening.  
The Kingdom would come.  
The Master would be in power.  
Romans would be no more,  
and I, Judas Iscariot,  
would have put the torch to the blaze.  
Yes! I could see it all.

What a fool I was, an ignorant fool.  
And now, etched into my brain for ever an image.  
The Master, facing the horde I led,  
his face unafraid, calm and strong in the torchlight.  
My kiss, a deep-felt gesture given on the instant of deliverance ...

but there was no deliverance.  
Just a sorrowing question.  
“Judas, would you betray me with a kiss?”  
In that instant, I knew.  
I knew he wouldn’t fight.  
I watched Peter lash out with his sword.  
A gush of blood, and then, even then, a healing.  
A rebuke and then that calm statement.  
“Put away your sword.  
All those who take the sword will perish by the sword.  
My Father would at once send twelve legions of angels if I asked him,  
but then how would the scriptures be fulfilled?”

My heart sickened within me.  
The darkness opened and swallowed me.  
Panic in the darkest moment of my life.  
He had known all along what I was doing.  
Earlier, round the supper table, when he spoke of betrayal,  
I had felt that he knew and approved.  
It was our secret.  
I was to set events in motion.  
A word from him would have stopped me.  
Why didn’t he speak out?  
“What you are about to do, do quickly.”  
I went out, and it was night.  
Dark enough for me to go unseen to the priests.  
Dark enough for me to lead them to the garden.  
Dark enough for the other disciples to run away.  
  
When the full horror struck me, it was too late.  
Or was it?  
Quickly back to the chief priests.  
A mistake.

A huge mistake.  
“Here is the money.  
Let him go.  
I have betrayed an innocent man.”  
But a wall of scornful hatred.  
“What is that to us?”  
Silver pieces burning my hand.  
Rattling and rolling into dark corners.  
Where can I go?  
Where can I escape from my shameful secret?  
No dark corner is dark enough to hide me.

Lord, I offered you my life on that day,  
that day when you called me to be one of the Master’s men.  
Now, soiled and sinful, drowning in despair,  
I offer it again.  
I will die with you.  
I dare not ask you to forgive.  
All that I have left is yours.  
There is no other way,  
For truly, now at last I see,  
His Kingdom is not of this world,  
this man who is the Son of God.  
So, now, I give him all that I have left,  
my life ...

## **He Was Despised, Rejected**

He was despised, rejected,  
the one they had received in glory.  
The shouts of triumph turned to accusations,  
vengeance, dishonour, spite  
arrowing into you,  
our God of love.

Accusing hatred  
flashing from the high priest's eyes,  
barbs of malice from his tongue.  
From his tongue?  
The high priest,  
chosen as your messenger,  
your representative from the chosen race?

Betrayed by the kiss of a friend  
for a mere thirty pieces of silver.  
Denied by the one who had seemed to understand,  
brave enough to lash out,  
to follow you to the place of questions,  
yet fearful for his own skin.  
Abandoned by them all  
in that hour of darkness.  
Alone.

Alone.

Left to face the music.

But was music ever like this?

Mockery from soldiers  
only enlivening the tedium of yet another death sentence-  
no malice intended,  
just a bit of fun.

As the spittle trickled down your face  
was it harder to bear than the physical pain?

Were the barbs of their words  
sharper than the thorns of your crown?

Were the lashings with their tongues  
more wounding than the scourging of your back?

And the jeers from the passers by,  
out to impress with their quickwittedness,  
were they as agonising as the nails?

No malice intended.

Not much anyway.

Jesus, how did you bear it without fighting back,  
let alone praying "Father forgive them"?

## **In The Garden**

Surely it is no accident  
that the parable of beginnings  
is set in a garden..  
There, God and humans  
in harmonious collaboration  
could create Paradise.

Just a fantasy?  
A story from long ago?  
Rather, a 'life-truth'.  
Understanding,  
resonating with deep experiences.

For, wherever we work with the 'raw ingredients',  
water, soil, sunlight and vegetation,  
we create through the breath of the Spirit,  
beauty, harmony, opportunity for growth.

Places of tranquillity;  
welcoming places;  
resting places  
along the pilgrimage of life;  
places just to be;  
places to be still  
and know that God is God.  
All bearing witness  
to the eternal truth,  
that our purpose is collaboration  
in the creating of heaven on earth.

## **Jesus the Christ**

Jesus the Christ,  
unconquerable even by death!  
Bursting out from the depths of the tomb.  
A new power, let loose in the world.  
Now unrestrictedly.

Accumulating evidence of a risen spirit body,  
demonstrating victory.  
A meeting in a garden.  
Bread in a house.  
Fish on the shore.  
A promise of more to come.

No more parting, but now an unseen presence,  
in the depths of the heart.  
God's new creation,  
fulfilment of centuries of gradual revelation,  
the way to at-one-ment for the people of God.  
A glimpse of eternity here in the world.  
Look and see you passers-by,  
Here is another way, a way of love.  
Empowered by the Spirit,  
transforming inner desires,  
enabling victory over evil.  
Here is the power to energise the Creation,  
God's strength in apparent weakness,  
not foolishness, but true wisdom.

## **Logos – The Word**

The Word became flesh and dwelt among us,  
pitching his tent in our daily life.

The Word is our light, enabling us in the darkness  
The Word helps us to perceive the straight and narrow way,  
the spiralling way that leads to that mystery beyond telling.

The Word is the door of the sheepfold,  
enabling us to move freely as we are guided to vital sustenance.

The Word is ever-present with compassionate love.

The Word ever holds for us the energy of prayer,  
that vital essence of all that is,  
enlightening, encouraging, enabling and spiritually enriching  
as we are gently transformed on our earthly journey  
from now to eternity.

## Mary

What was it like Mary, as your youthful innocence was splintered?

Was there disbelief that such a thing could happen?

How much did you understand as the mother-to-be of the Messiah?

How could you begin to comprehend

that the unseen life within your womb

could be the essence of God, creator of all that is?

Then, as incredulity evaporated when the bodily changes  
were followed by the unmistakable movement of new life,

did fear swamp your very being?

Fear of what people were saying,

Fear of the journey to Bethlehem,

Fear of the birth itself?

An inexorable journey with an inevitable conclusion;

Emmanuel as a vulnerable baby.

Did the fears continue with such awesome responsibility,

Or were you really so full of grace, pre-redeemed,

that you were able to tread this path of motherhood in tranquility?

As you pondered the words of wise old Simeon,

were you fearful of the prophesied sword in your heart?

And then, what of the fears of the hasty night journey,

followed hot foot by rumours of Herod's dreadful deed.

Did fear add an urgency to that secret journey?

Did the fear dog your footsteps down into Egypt and back to Nazareth?

Did it surge again, with heart-stopping anguish

as you realized that he had been left alone in Jerusalem,

as you searched day by day until you found him in the temple?

Was relief shattered by his far seeing words?

Words reminding you that this was no ordinary thoughtless child,

But Emmanuel about his father's business

Where was the fear during those hidden years?  
Was there fear of injury in the carpenter's shop?  
Fear of his alienation from other boys,  
this so different boy,  
full of grace and truth?.

Then as he left to be about his father's business,  
leaving home and family,  
did you fear for him as he followed the call to baptism,  
as he set off into the unknown?  
Did you feel rejected as he travelled about,  
wondering how and where he was,  
what he was doing, this beloved son?  
Did you feel anger when, in your anguish, you feared for his sanity,  
only to be dismissed in favour of his new 'family'?  
Was there relief for you when he survived the murderous attempt in  
Nazareth?  
Did the fear surge again as you heard of intent to stone him?  
Which was greater,  
your pride in his crowd pulling healings and teaching,  
or the fear of the likely response of the authorities?

And beyond all that,  
the fear as the unspeakable  
came to pass  
and the end came.  
The end that was actually a paradoxical beginning,  
liberating  
beyond time  
yur son,  
an ever-living presence  
to strengthen humanity  
in their fear.

## Moses

Moses: keeper of the flock in Midian.  
Wanderer in the barren wilderness,  
traversing vast tracks of aridity  
of stone and more stone,  
of rocks and minerals.  
Haphazard yet beautiful heapings,  
ancient beyond imagining,  
scorched under the relentless noontide sun.  
Vast.  
Awesomely silent.  
All encompassing.

Moses, keeper of the flock beyond Midian.  
Observant Moses.  
Moses of Horeb, of Sinai.  
Magnetised by the bush which was burned but not consumed.  
Drawn by the voice which ordered feet unshod.  
Moses, keeper of the flock of Israel.  
Ear tuned to hear God's voice.  
Obedient despite the questions, the excuses.  
Faithful to the demands of God's call.

Moses, shepherd of God's flock of Israel.  
Leading them through the valleys of temptation.  
Temptation to linger and not press on in the heat.  
Temptation to turn back when the water bags were empty,  
the food all consumed.  
Temptation to worship other gods in the vast emptiness.  
Moses, guardian and guide of God's flock of Israel.  
Mindful of their needs.  
Patient with their grumblings.  
Leading on and on.

Moses, inspirer of God's flock of Israel.  
Leading them from Egypt to Sinai/Horeb.  
Back to the birthplace of the vision.  
Back through vast tracts of aridity.  
Still obedient to God's call.  
Unafraid to climb the mountain,  
With the people waiting below.  
Unafraid to spell out God's laws  
to a disobedient people.

Moses, faithful shepherd of God's flock.  
Lifetime spent following God's call.  
Bringing them at last to Mount Nebo,  
Glimpsing the land of promise.  
The land of milk and honey,  
of green grass and plentiful flowers.  
Content to die on the mountain.  
Moses, your task is done.  
It is finished,  
But the journey of faith continues,  
On and on into the future, known only by God.

## **Pentecost Reflection**

“Stay here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high”.

And that is how it needs to be so often.

Hard on the heels of momentous,  
often unwelcome events,  
those which absorb all our attention,  
there is a need for a time of waiting,  
waiting for the next stage of life to unfold,  
to become clear,  
waiting for the strength and courage to take the next steps.

Did the disciples wait patiently, confidently as they obeyed,  
staying in the city?

Or, like us so often, did they chafe and question,  
fretting and wondering,  
anxious to be getting on?

Or, did they hide away,  
not daring even to contemplate the future?

Help us God of kept promises  
to be patient in the waiting times  
until we too are clothed with your life-giving power  
as we step out again on the road to the Kingdom.

## Peter

Lurking in the shadows,  
flickering shadows of firelight.  
Myriad images swirling in the dark corners of my mind.  
Busyness in the market place, the lamb;  
the blood, the stench of death.  
Black smoke billowing above the marble and gold;  
sharpness in the taste of bitter herbs.  
Brittleness of bread in the upstairs room.  
An old, old ritual with memories of oppression and suffering,  
yet sweet with the fragrance of freedom.

Then a surge of fear, a sudden atmosphere swing;  
mention of betrayal, denial,  
mingled with the gentle caress of cooling water on dusty feet.  
Memories surfacing from childhood of loving hands gently drying feet.  
An ominous symbolism of bread and wine.  
Swirling memories, here in the flickering shadows,  
as I wait and watch and wait.

More memories, acid-etched into my brain now.  
A prayer in the silent garden,  
his voice revealing a wrenching, ripping apart of dreams;  
the reluctance, the tears, the sweat, glistening in the moonlight.  
Then an unpredictable calmness.  
Or did I dream it,  
just before the shame of hearing that all-seeing all-knowing voice?  
“Could you not watch with me one hour?”  
Not once, not twice, but three times,  
penetrating the overcoming veil of sleep which dragged me down.  
No time then for the shame to sear deeply into my soul,  
as lights and noise - rough voices, clanking steel splinter the stillness.

Then an image, unforgettable.  
Another transfiguration.  
A transformation,  
from indecision and horror to undefeatable courage and even authority.

“Who are you looking for?  
I am he.”

Even Caiaphas’s henchmen startled.

“Let these others go.”

The shame burns deep within my soul.

My legs independently, unthinkingly, were running,  
hurtling me into the darkness.

Then he was gone.

My Lord, my dear Lord, where have you gone?

Where are you going?

Where is that place you spoke of - the place where we cannot follow?

It is not here in the firelight.

You are in there with them now, but that cannot be the end.

My heart has made my unwilling legs bring me here,  
to watch and wait.

In the shadows with my swirling images,  
untameable,

fighting one another for viewing time in my mind.

Watching and waiting,

fear and expectation intermingled,  
numbing my thinking.

I **am** ready to die for you Lord.

And yet .....

And yet, here in the flickering shadows,  
a voice bursting in among the images in my mind.

“You are one of them.”

“One of them.”

“One of them.”

The words reverberate in my head.

Sheer instinct rejects them.

“No I am not!”

Instinct moves me away, out of the revealing firelight,  
into the shadowed corner,  
alone with my images,  
still swirling and fighting in my mind  
as I wait and watch and wait.

“What are they doing to you in there my Lord?  
Is your indefatigable courage still holding you firm  
as they question and probe and question?  
Why didn't you stop Judas?  
Why didn't you flee into the safety of darkness?  
Why did you stop my defence with the sword?  
Why didn't you summon that legion of angels  
to put such proud arrogance to flight?”

“Surely you are one of them!”

That voice again.

“One of them.”

“One of them.”

The sounds burning into my brain.

Instinct again, mingled with fear.

“Indeed I am not!”

Dark fear, overpowering my soul,  
swirling among the flickering shadows,  
among the shifting images.

“He must be. He is a Galilean.”

The voice won't be silenced,  
intruding, forcing its insidious way into my life.

A curse.

A strong curse, to silence it once and for all.

And then, O Lord, forgive me, and then ....

Crystal clear, ringing in the dawn, a cockcrow,  
shattering the darkness,  
splintering the images.

Only one image now, reproaching me sadly.

“Peter, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times.”  
His grieved but loving face, eyes penetrating deep into my soul,  
knowing what I had not known myself.

Hot tears and shame spurting uncontrolled;  
uncontrolled like the dark denying words I had uttered,  
not once, not twice, but three times.

My legs were running again, out into the darkness,  
where I can be alone with my shame.

Alone, and yet .....

I can't forget, the swirling images, the firelight,  
the shame.

Now mingled with new images.

A whip lashing,  
its loathsome sound punctuated by sharp intakes of breath.

A splintery cross, great nails  
and the chilling sound of hammering,  
loud jeering,

the raucous screech of an angry crowd.

And the darkness, the all encompassing darkness,  
not just in my head, but all around,  
blotting the light of the sun.

Then a voice in the darkness.  
His voice.  
“Father forgive them.”  
“It is finished.”  
New words, burned deep into my brain.  
And again the waiting, though I know not what I am waiting for.

The waiting.  
An interminable Sabbath.  
Hopeless waiting.  
Hysterical women.  
An empty tomb?  
Folded grave clothes?  
What did it all mean?

Then a presence.  
A fearsome presence.  
Was it a ghost?  
Then a dawning realisation.  
A remembering of words as we had tramped towards Jerusalem.  
“And after three days, rise again.”  
Could it be true?  
And if it was, how could I ever face him?  
Still those shameful memories struck at the pit of my stomach.

Then a breakfast on the shore after an unexpected catch.  
A walk along the shore and a penetrating three-fold question.

“Do you love me?”

“Do you love me?”

“Do you love me more than these?”

How can I tell him as the sunshine of his presence,  
mingles and swirls among the dark memories.,  
among the shameful words?

Not just love, but an overwhelming devotion,  
more powerful than anything before.

Dissolving the shadows and the darkness,  
transforming the shame and the memories.

A deep, all-embracing love, like a rock within me.

An acceptance which doesn't demand perfection,

And a task for the rest of my life.

“Feed my lambs.”

“Feed my sheep.”

“Tend my sheep.”

No need for words now.

Just peace, an all-enfolding peace.

I won't forget my memories, my swirling images.

But now they have no power to harm,  
to take over my actions, my words, my thoughts.

Instead, they will fuel my devotion,  
transformed by his risen power.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

His is the victory.

My Lord, and my God.

## **Reservoir of Living Water**

Holy God,  
open our inward eyes.  
that we may become aware  
of the great reservoir of spiritual love  
available for all humanity.  
Encourage us to draw near,  
to drink deeply,  
satisfying that deep thirst  
which exists,  
often unnoticed,  
unidentified,  
ignored,  
deep within us all.  
We do not need to ask,  
'Give us the living water',  
for it is there,  
the most precious gift of all,  
freely available at all times,  
for each one who comes  
in need.

## So Like Peter

At first the fear,  
then the questioning.  
“If it is really you,  
tell me to come to you”,  
asking the impossible.  
Humans don’t walk on water!  
Rather we submerge rapidly,  
struggling as we descend to the depths.  
But, with his eyes on Jesus’ face,  
perhaps an encouraging hand stretched out,  
Peter did walk,  
maybe tentatively, but he did walk  
across the heaving surface.

Maybe a cold splash of water on his legs  
shocked him into awareness  
of the improbability of his action,  
like the disbelief of the baby  
tottering the first few steps.  
Maybe he looked down,  
down into unfathomable depths,  
or did he look up,  
aghast at towering waves above  
threatening instantaneous oblivion,  
losing sight of encouraging eyes.

His firm footing faltered.  
Water lashed his ankles.  
Sheer panic prevailed.  
Humans don't walk on water!  
In such dire straits  
only one source of help.  
'Save me Lord'!  
An immediate response.  
Firm grip banishing danger,  
but then a challenging rebuke  
for a short-lived faith.

Did you remember that event Peter,  
as you wept in the courtyard,  
when the harsh reality of denial seared your soul?  
Did you remember that other failure,  
that sinking into the depths?  
Did you remember your challenge to Jesus,  
to prove that he really was the Lord  
by allowing you to walk across the waves?

Did you recall those other bold words,  
words of willingness to die with him,  
regardless of what the others might do?  
As hot tears spurted,  
did the memory of icy water splashing your ankles  
rekindle the shame of that other failure?

During those long hours of waiting  
were you comforted by the memory of his outstretched hand,  
or was the pain of this second failure all-consuming,  
too dreadful to be contemplated,  
a symbol of the end?

Then, on the water,  
came that gentle rebuke with the outstretched hand.

Now you are on your own.  
No saving hand for it had been nailed to a cross,  
laid in a tomb.

No hope of help now.  
Humans don't walk on water!

And yet – and yet ....  
the impossible.

The risen Lord on the beach!  
Another drenching as you waded ashore.  
Another impetuous action,  
walking through, not on the water,  
dragging the net full of fish.

After breakfast, another gentle questioning  
and then a commission.

'Be a shepherd for my sheep.  
Tend and feed them,  
Sheep and lambs'.

Not in your own feeble, wavering strength,  
but sustained by the Spirit he would send.

Amazing, humbling trust in you,  
despite your failures.

An example for those who come after.

There is a sadness reverberating through the centuries.  
So many of us step out on a seemingly impossible venture,  
only to fail as our initial confidence deserts us.  
Yet within such failure a strength,  
a reminder that we are not asked to do the impossible alone,  
but to rely on the ongoing power of the Spirit,  
enabling, strengthening,  
achieving the unbelievable.

Lord, help us to trust in your strength,  
not in our own.  
Help us to remember that failures are not the end,  
but with you can be new beginnings.

## **Temptation**

Jesus, fellow traveller, hold my hand in your firm grasp  
as we tramp upwards into the land of rocks and loneliness,  
aside from the calls and duties of the world.

Pause for me to catch my breath as I try to keep up.

Walk slowly into the place of the unknown,  
the place of temptation.

Be with me through the lonely days of wandering and wondering.

Be with me as the clamour of the world retreats,  
revealing the still silence.

Sit with me in a hollow, out of the wind,  
the sun warm on our backs.

Loaf-shaped pebbles scattered around.

Is it right to change something permanent and safe,  
a pebble which has seen aeons come and go,

to a transient loaf,  
eaten today,

more needed for tomorrow?

Am I tempted to discard the reliable  
in favour of the short-term?

Jesus, fellow traveller, help me to know your will.

We stand side by side on the parapet,  
a long drop below us,  
so little between us and the plunge earthwards.  
Should I jump,  
leaving the firm grasp of security,  
risking the unknown?  
Your hand is in mine.  
Shall I let go and trust in you when I can no longer be sure,  
fearing the repercussions?  
Your temptation to jump.  
mine to stay in the safety of the already known.  
Jesus, fellow traveller, help me to know your will.  
Give me the courage to follow God's call.

High on the mountain, standing beside you.  
Your gaze pierces the distant horizon.  
The wind of change wraps its insinuating tentacles around us.  
Do we seek fame, recognition, power  
in the busy places of your world  
or stay in the insignificance on the quieter walks of life?  
Do we hasten after the values of the world,  
or stay true to the call of God  
in humility and obscurity?  
Is it the call of the world, or the call of the Father?  
As the wind swirls round the nooks and crannies of my mind,  
send your Spirit to blow away the cobwebs,  
clear the mistiness,  
and help me to see the way I should go.  
Jesus, fellow traveller, help me to know your will.  
Stay with me in the time of temptation.  
Deliver me from evil,  
that your will may be done.

## **The Harvest of Prayer?**

Is the energy of our concern  
as we pray for the needs of others  
something like  
the seed planted in good soil?  
Through the power of the Spirit  
enabled to yield a bigger harvest  
than we could ever envision,  
unknown to us  
but feeding the spiritual needs of many?

Is our neglect, our half-hearted,  
sometimes selfish praying  
something like  
the seed that fell elsewhere,  
wasted potential?  
Ever-mindful God,  
help us to pray fruitfully  
yielding benefit for your whole creation.

## **The True Light**

From the beginning,  
a promise.  
God revealing himself  
to searching hearts and minds.  
A promise of love and faithfulness  
for those with ears to hear.  
A promise fulfilled in an obedient life  
acted out on a cross.  
The light of the world  
revealed in all its richness  
in the risen Lord.

Spreading far and wide  
through twelve touched by the Spirit,  
flaming from one to another,  
rippling across the world,  
on and on,  
down through the centuries,  
lightening our darkness.

How can we tell if it really is you Lord?  
Could it be just the self-importance of humanity?  
Help us to distinguish the true light from the darkness.  
Let us see the fruit of the light in others,  
bear fruit ourselves, in love  
as the promise takes root within us.  
Strengthen and guide us  
that the light may shine on in the darkness,  
that light which the darkness can never extinguish.

## The Way of the Cross

What are we doing to you Jesus  
when we imagine God as a stern, judgemental God,  
constantly emphasising our 'sins and wickedness'?  
What are we doing to ourselves, cringing and wallowing,  
our thoughts focussed on our degradation and unworthiness?  
What are we doing to the wonderful potential within each one of us  
when we so often focus on our just deserts?  
Can't we see in the Jesus of the gospels  
your gentle touch, encouraging,  
leading to wholeness of ordinary people,  
people like most of us?

Can't we distinguish that your words of condemnation  
were reserved for deliberate hypocrisy and self-righteousness,  
that even then, it was the deeds rather than the person being challenged?  
Haven't we yet learned that encouragement and praise  
work far more miracles of transformation  
than constant fear of punishment?

Jesus, who spoke of a loving Father,  
help us to see the crucifixion  
not as the placating and pacifying of an angry God  
but as a journey through death,  
giving us a sign that your goodness will always overcome evil,  
stronger than even death itself.  
Help us to differentiate between wholesome awe and paralysing fear.  
Trusting that insight, encourage us to become,  
not fear stricken cowards,  
but the people of our potential,  
growing, becoming more Christ-like day by day.  
Give us the vision to recognise the way, the truth and the life,  
rejecting selfishness,  
worshipping God and loving our neighbours.

## **Undesirables?**

Send her away,  
the quick-witted Canaanite woman,  
relentlessly pestering ,  
seeking help for her daughter,  
content even with the crumbs under the table.

Send her away,  
the fortune-telling slave girl,  
exasperating Paul  
with her ceaseless shouting.

Send them away,  
the tax collectors and ladies of the streets,  
common people,  
lowering the moral tone, unclean,  
unfit to be included.

Send them away,  
those who rarely or never darken the door of a church,  
deterred by a perceived sense of personal unworthiness,  
deterred by our attitude of condemnation.

Send them away,  
those who challenge our neat and tidy,  
clearly defined concept of your Kingdom.  
Send them - and so many others - away?

Rather, let us remember the words of Jesus.  
Outcasts and the wounded casualties of life  
are honoured guests,  
first in the queue for the Kingdom.

Transforming, compassionate God,  
welcome us all into your presence,  
just as we are,  
but help us to grow into your image,  
into the likeness of your love.

