

Longings: A Collection of Poems and Prayers

Rev. Dr. Ken Henry.

A Prayer for Thanksgiving Day

(based on Ps. 126)

*Creator of All Good Days Like This One,
As autumn colors grace the trees along city streets,
As the morning chill reminds us that winter is near,
As we gather around this table of welcome,*

We lift up our voices in praise and thanksgiving.

*There were moments over this past year when. . .
We were not sure we could endure another day,
We were not sure if grief and sorrow would have the last word,
We were not sure if we could ever be thankful again,
But on this day, the day the Lord has made,
Laughter fills the room and joy has found a home.*

*We have so much to be thankful for. . .
For breathing in and out,
For food, for rest,
For church and home,
For mom and dads, sisters and brothers, grandpa and grandma
For children and grandchildren,
All waiting to share this meal one more time.*

*Lord, you have done great things for us and we are glad!
May those who sow in tears reap with shouts of joy!
May those who sow in doubt, find faith in abundance
And may those who are hungry be filled
With Thanksgiving!*

The Lord's Prayer. . . .

A Prayer to Silence

The Noise of Worldly Concern

By Ken Henry

Lord God, as we come to you this morning,
we are keenly aware of the noise of worldly concern:
An ambulance with its siren blazing,
A driver honking his horn, impatiently,
An urgent news broadcast, a cell phone ringing,
The shrill whistle of the crossing guard,
A man pounding his fist.

The noise of worldly concern creeps over the human soul
like a dense fog blocking the sunrise:
anticipating the day and borrowing trouble,
Driving to meet someone, talking out our troubles,
Our anxiety over finances, tightening its grip.

The noise of worldly concern seeks to mask clear communication.
Speaking the truth in love feels ineffective.
Listening to loved ones, an effort
The drum beat of human need and sorrow
like the ocean's surf, rhythmic and constant.

But then, in the midst of the noise of worldly concern

A word from God cuts through the static hiss:

“Therefore, I tell you, do not worry about your life,”

God whispers.

“what you will eat or what you will drink. . . .”

With every divine syllable, the noise of worldly concern lessens.

“Look at the birds of the air; they neither sow nor reap
nor gather into barns.”

Fainter, fainter, almost gone

“and can any of you by worrying

add a single hour to your span of life?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. . .

Fainter, softer. . .

distant now. . .

nothing.

O God, this morning, send us a silencing word,
Send us your quieting presence.

That we might hear, and be still

And be saved. Amen.

A prayer for urban places
by Rev. Dr. Ken Henry, Pastor at Stone Church of Willow Glen

Concrete, sand, steel, and glass
A sloping Victorian mansion, a chain-link fence;
Obtaining permits, pursuing dreams,
City planning conundrums –

O God of urban places, meet us here.
Meet us in this place of great responsibility and possibility.
For a short while and on borrowed time,
You have given those in this chamber
A sacred commission: the care and intention of making our lives better.
They are here to keep a watchful eye on justice.
They are here to piece together decisions on our behalf
Without doing harm. Be with them.

God of railways, freeways, airways, and sidewalks;
God of museums, restaurants, civic centers, and shark tanks;
God of green and gray landscapes,
We call upon you to assist your public servants
Whom you have so aptly called.

Open channels of communication and conversation.
Remind all present that you created human beings with two ears--
So that we might listen twice as hard and speak much less.
O God of urban places, bless and keep your leaders strong,
Strong in wisdom, strong in compassion,
Strong in forging purposeful agreements.

God who is here now, never forsaking your over-programmed people,
Help us to see down the road whether it be 680, 880, or Almaden Expressway.
And in our seeing,
Mend and bridge our human relationships,
And in mending and bridging,
Guide us to honor one another.
Amen.

Stained Glass Jesus in an Old Southern Church

By Ken Henry

O Stained-Glass, with all your symbols of
Peace, Angelic Children, and Holy Scripture,
Why is your Jesus so white?

Your inscriptions evoke the sweetest consolations:

“Suffer the little children;”

“The Way, the Truth, and The Life;”

“Be not afraid;”

“I am the Good Shepherd;” but

Why is your Jesus so white?

Are we to feel forgiveness
As he raises his fingers toward heaven?
Are we to be welcomed into the kingdom
By his pure outstretched arms?
Or does his opaque frame convict and chide,
His closed mouth speechless,
A sign that if he were to speak
The foundations of the church would crack?

I watch a black man polishing the handrails.
My pew hardens, my knees buckle against wire hymn racks,
All too close for human comfort
He shines the brass for white handholds
As if I'm not even there.

On Sunday morning, all eyes are fixed forward;
A tenor angel sings flat;
Basses return to Coda too soon;
Cherubs and sinners' prayers collide in mid-flight;
The communion cup spills;
Glassy saints bend and ache

But now. . . .
Wiping, dusting, spraying, and buffing,
A black man earns his keep,
My fingerprints remain.

Tell me O Southern Church on Richmond soil:
Why is your Jesus so white?

An Love Poem

Don't mess with my honey

She is the bee on the flower

She is the buzz in my ear

She is the comb that is home

She is the queen that hums 'round my head

Sweet to my lips, sticky and golden

I have been stung by her love

And I will never recover

An Ode to Fatherhood

There was once a father who loved his children.

He poured out his grace and mercy for them.

He tried to be patient, but didn't always succeed.

He gave his time generously.

He allowed them to find themselves and not hover too much. And when he disagreed with their decisions, he tried not to show it.

This father watched his children grow and change;

he watched them run and play on the playground;

he pushed them on the swings and caught them at the bottom of the slide; he attempted to say the right thing for every situation; he was only trying to offer the advice his father gave him, and sometimes this worked out and sometimes it didn't.

There was once a father who divided his property among his children. It was his way of letting go;

it was his way of saying, now it's your turn; do the best you can and don't forget to love along the way.

The father informed his children that everything he had was theirs to do with as they desired; it was his parting gift to them, but it was not goodbye.

There was once a father who said to his children, "I'm so glad you came. Let's go out to dinner; it's on me.

What do you need?

Tires for your car? Money for a movie?

Strong coffee to face the day?

Do you need me to ask you a question or to

keep silent while you think it through?

What do you need?

Remember, there is no need to ask...what I have is already yours.

There was once a father who loved his children.

And one stayed home and one went out to explore the world;

And one came back to occupy his or her old room.

Some of his children became poets, actors and software engineers

While others became teachers, physical therapists and cabinet makers.

Some became mothers and some became fathers.

And still today, whenever he sees them at a distance,

He runs out to meet them with open arms.

And, I imagine, he will drive you to a public park if you let him.

And once there, he will ask you how you are doing and listen to your stories and push you on the swings and catch you at the bottom of until the sun goes down.

Big Sur

God lives here:

where streams of water flow

where Redwood trees have grown for hundreds of years

where ocean waves are painted emerald green

God lives here. . .I know it.

God lives here:

where the mind can relax

where tense muscles give way to stillness

where deep longing becomes acceptance

God resides.

In balance

In quiet

In spirit

In song

in gentle breezes blowing...

God has made a home

O God who lives in the here-and-now and not-yet

Come!

And by your living...help us to live.

How Lovely

(A Prayer for The Raising of the Rainbow Flag in downtown San Jose, CA)

How lovely is this day, O God of the Heavenly Hosts

How lovely to be in Your presence,
a presence that both welcomes and embraces all people.

How lovely to see a tangible sign of your inclusive love.

We only ask that you would forgive us for not raising this symbol sooner.

Still, here we are! And, today, our cup overflows with the joy that this event holds!

How lovely to see a banner raised for the sake of personal freedom and equal participation under the laws of the state of California

-- whose colors, day by day, will only become deeper and more brilliant as we your people find the courage—no-- find our resolve. . . to put prejudice and hatred behind us. Yes, God, resolve is what we need. It's what we pray for.

So that by your mercy, we might further commit ourselves to acts which respect and dignify all of your children.

O, how lovely is this day, God of the heavenly hosts.

For we are listening

And You are speaking--

--- words of grace,

--words of peace, words to soften hard hearts,

--indeed words spoken from one who knows how to build rainbows.

Yes God, you are speaking loud and clear

...and you are saying to all of us gathered here in front of city hall--

“How lovely.”

Amen.

Don't Get Stuck

"Thus says the Lord, who makes a way in the sea, a path in the mighty waters. . . "Do not remember the former things or consider the things of old. I am about to do a new thing. Now it springs forth. Do you not perceive it?" (Psalm 43:16 ff.)

Thus says Lord, The Creator of all things

and the God of each of us:

Don't get stuck.

Plain and simple.

Don't catch yourself ruminating over how things used to be

Or wishing you could stop the earth on its axis and reverse its rotation.

Don't hold onto old grudges, or something said yesterday or last week or 20 Years ago, or keep wishing you could go back and undo what's done.

Don't get stuck, says the Lord.

Don't hold onto what a person told you in the past.

He or she has probably forgotten all about it by now.

Thus says the Lord, "Loosen your grip.

Let go. There is a better way.

For I, The Lord your God, am about to do a new thing.

And here it is:

I, the One who made a path through the mighty waters, declare:

You are now unstuck.

You are free to live again.

Don't you see it? It is the gentle hand of God on your shoulder.

Don't you perceive it? It is the whisper of the Holy Spirit in the wind.

Don't you sense it? This is the moment.

Now, it springs forth.