

# Liturgy in a Dangerous Time



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# #10

[simonjcross.com/dangerous-liturgy](http://simonjcross.com/dangerous-liturgy)

## An opening

What began as a pain in the neck,  
turned into a real head ache.

Didn't it.

Where once we thought 'they won't...  
will they?' We soon said 'why haven't  
they... yet?'

Didn't we.

The world can turn, it seems, faster  
than we realised. It's used to it.

And that reminds us that we are  
transitory. 'Pulvis et umbra sumus'.  
We are dust and shadow.

Our time is limited, fleeting. And our  
vanities, our silly self-obsessions are  
shown up for what they are.

In the face of a foe who doesn't care  
what stories we tell ourselves, about  
ourselves, and cut off from many of  
the people and places upon whom  
and which, we would normally rely.

We find ourselves in a dangerous  
time. And then we realise, somehow,  
that in fact it always was. Dangerous.

We just didn't see it until now.



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## A prayer

From a need for order and control,  
From the need to insulate ourselves  
from doubt,  
From the need to appear invulnerable,  
From that need for security which  
closes our minds:

Good Lord, release us.

From intolerance of others' views,  
From fear of others' beliefs,  
From fear and rejection of those who  
are not like us,  
From letting our faith hinder our  
expression of humanity:

Good Lord, release us.

From scepticism of reason and  
argument,

From disregard of scientific  
exploration,  
From fear of questions and  
discoveries,  
From fear of research and  
experiment:

Good Lord, release us.

From fear of freedom,  
From fear of the responsibility of free  
will,  
From false humility which dishonours  
your creation,  
From hypocrisy and any exaggerated  
sense of self worth:

Good Lord, release us.

From fear of any challenge to our  
faith,  
From the certainty which blinds us to  
other possibilities,  
From any attempt to claim all truth,  
From fear of using all our gifts in  
worship:

Good Lord, release us.

*Dorrie Johnson*

## A meditation

[Click here for the music video of a  
beautiful Bengali spiritual song.](#)

আনন্দলোকে মঙ্গললোকে বিরাজ  
সত্যসুন্দর ॥

Anondoloke mongolaloke birajo,  
shotto-shundauro

(Blissful world, auspicious light, you  
are present always, truthfully  
beautiful.)

[Yeshe Satsang Toronto](#)

## A verse

Psalm 65 v6

Common people are as worthless as a  
puff of wind,  
and the powerful are not what they  
appear to be.

If you weigh them on the scales,  
together they are lighter than a breath  
of air.

## A poem

### Rebirth

The sun is renewed.

You had no idea

how vulnerable you were.

The months behind you

form some kind

of cohesive story,

but you have no idea

what any of it really means.

The words on your lips

have the power to affect reality.

You let out a kite into the sky

and are overcome with grief.

Resolution is complex and varied.

You cry.

You cry a lot.

It's fragmentary and vague

and lasts most of the day.

It started as a knot in your

heart and when you

thought you could never stop,

it ended.

Freedom of sorts.

Your words are, "help me."

You will be, you are not alone.

I promise you.

Close the door behind you

and step into this new

world.

[Sapphira Olson](#)



[Liz Chart](#)



[Bruce Stanley](#)

## A time

For everything there is a season.

Some trees grow for years, some  
flowers bloom for only a few days.

They are no less valuable.

They still belong.

During the time that they exist, and in  
the time after that when they continue  
to impact our lives, they are precious.

For everything there is a season.

All things have their time.

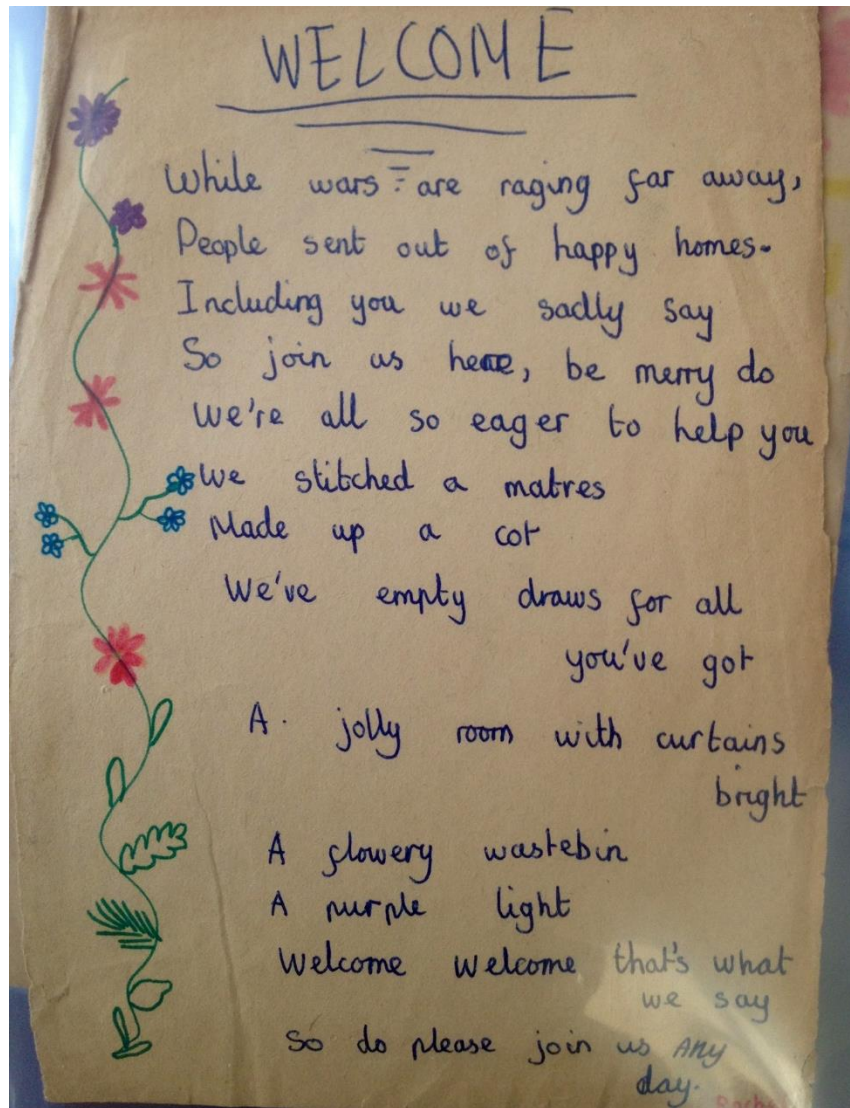
Only love remains forever.

Only love remains.

Only love.

Love.





## A treasure

This poem was handed to my Mummy and Papa (and my older brother who was 6 months old at this time) in the autumn of 1972, following their fleeing of Idi Amin's regime in Uganda, by an 8-year-old girl. They stayed with her and the family for a short time before they

settled into another home. He's held on to it all these years.

Last year my papa passed away. He handed this poem on to me to share how he felt about the little girl and her family who opened their home up so he could start his life again. To share this: "Thank you for saying Welcome".

[Ben Solanky](#)

# A song

## Bigger than that

[Click here to see & hear the song](#)

Well I've seen a lot of hatred  
And I've seen a lot of pain  
And I've seen a lot war  
They're fighting again and again and  
again  
They say that God is on their side  
And they say that that's a fact  
But I think that God's bigger than  
that

I've heard them say he'll go to hell  
The man who loves a man  
And the woman in the pulpit  
Who's she's teaching like she can  
Cos everything has been worked out  
And tradition has to stand  
But I think that God's bigger than  
that

*Some say that I'm a liberal  
Some say that I'm a saint  
But I'm just a messed up sinner  
Working out my faith  
I don't say that I know it all  
And I pick apart the facts  
And if there's a God I think He's ok with  
that*

He made friends with criminals  
And hung around with whores  
Had dinner with a con man  
And the poorest of the poor  
Had no time for the proud elite  
Or their self-righteous act  
Because God is love and love's bigger  
than that

God knows that to get things right  
Ain't no easy feat  
And I know that salvation's free  
But I know that it ain't cheap  
He said the way is narrow  
But grace will cover that  
And to tell the truth I'm Ok with that

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Promotions

[Rob Halligan](#)



(Words & art)

[Charlotte Gibson](#)

## A prayer

Ever-present God, help us to keep our faces turned to your face, our will aligned with your will and our hearts seeking your justice. As we wait, in these difficult times, to see what worshipping together physically will look like, we ask that you would keep reminding us of your presence which has never fled from us. Be known to those awaiting their ordinations, just as Mary awaited the birth of Jesus

Christ. Be known to those involved in the practicalities of keeping our buildings open, as Mary and Joseph managed the practicalities of Jesus' birth. And be known to those for whom church is their lifeline, as your Son is the lifeline of all.

We pray especially for those who will continue to be isolated when this ends. Help us to use this experience to be ever mindful of those we exclude without knowing.

In Jesus' holy name we pray, Amen.





[Mark Kensett](#)

## A reflection

### **Life's Purpose**

With lockdown now into its eleventh week (longer if, like some of us, you went into self-isolation the minute the alarm bells sounded) I'm beginning to wonder if this is what the 'new normal' really looks like. For those whose businesses have folded, who have no familiar routine to return to, or who find themselves prematurely

retired, getting out of bed in the morning may be the biggest challenge they will face in the 'new normal' day. Despite the long weeks of lockdown, nobody is prepared for this sense of purposelessness and for the depression that comes with it.

The shock of the new, if it is new at all, returns us to the age old problem of solitude and loneliness, of purposelessness. But perhaps we also

misunderstand the nature of purpose, when it comes to what our lives are for or about. St. Paul, in his letter to the fledgling church in Rome, writes that God works all things to the good for those who love him, who are called according to his purpose (Rom. 8:28) It seems that love, calling and purpose are very closely related. They are bound up in each other.

That, you may say, is all very well for those who have the time to ponder these things, whose thoughts and concerns are not taken up with how to pay the rent and feed their children, once the furlough money stops and their wages with it. And yet there is a connection between loving God and the harsh realities that many people will face post-lockdown. I think it has to do with our ability to somehow anchor our fears and uncertainties in a deep conviction about the transforming possibilities of love.

Every now and then we see these possibilities arising in the most

unlikely contexts, in the angry confrontations that we are witnessing on both sides of the Atlantic at the moment, and in the way they oblige us to confront our complicity in what can only be described as the historic sins of slavery, racism and all forms of prejudice. Where we confront prejudice in ourselves, we must turn and seek forgiveness from those we distrust and at the same time fear, because prejudice and fear belong together. **But the hardest thing is not the seeking of forgiveness. It is the acceptance of it.**

Accepting another's forgiveness obliges us to open our hearts to those we have wronged, and who we now fear, and then to keep them open. It obliges us to go on accepting love. We have seen small instances of this happening. Riot police taking a knee before protestors and the gentle acceptance of love and forgiveness that follows. Black people refusing to hate white people. The walls of hostility come down, momentarily perhaps, but also irreversibly. Hope

replaces despair. Somewhere in all this the loving purposes of God are at work.

The Christian Church is called to embody the loving purposes of God. But it cannot do this unless it re-connects with its own humanity, unless it thinks of itself not as an organisation, or an institution, but as a vulnerable body of human beings called to live out God's purposes for the world. The Church defines itself as the body of Christ to the extent that it knows itself to be a people whom God loves and who love God. Where there is indifference to God, there is also indifference to the suffering of other human beings. So, for Christians, the living out of God's purpose begins with self questioning, first in regard to whether we love God and, secondly, in the extent to which others feel our love for God in the way we think of them, speak of them, and act towards them.

All of this returns us to the acceptance of forgiveness which is at

the heart of the Christian faith.

Accepting that we are forgiven, keeping our hearts open to this often painful reality, disposes us to love others as Christ loves us. We still have time, before the end of lockdown, to decide whether we want to live our lives in the knowledge of this world transforming reality.

[Lorraine Cavanagh](#)

## A question

How hard do you find it to forgive yourself?

## An exercise

Think of someone you have wronged, or perhaps an attitude you have had which you know to be wrong.

Recognise how you have wronged and hurt others.

What do you need to do in order to make right your wrong?.

Choose to forgive yourself, as you determine to change, and make things right where you can.



## A lighthouse

This example of youth creativity was entered into the [National Association of Teachers of RE's 'Art in Heaven' competition](#), which attracts about 20 000 annual entries

Ayeza, aged 11, devised the window, which was created by a group of 11 year olds at a Church of England academy. Ayeza writes about the project, called "Our Guiding Light".

"To start this process, we met as a group of children who promote our school vision and values through spirituality. We discussed the question: Where is God? We looked at some pictures and thought of God

as a fatherly figure and a shepherd. This led us to the conclusion that God guides us. As a Muslim, although I don't think of God as a father, I think of him as my Creator, who guides me through my life.

We talked about Psalm 119:105 "Your word is a lamp to my feet, a light to my path". Inspired by this Bible quote, I produced a picture of a lighthouse guiding a person from the rough seas to the calm waters using oil pastels. I think of God as a lighthouse when we need help or are in difficulties we place our trust upon God to help and guide us – just as a lighthouse guides the boats."

[Lat Blaylock](#)

## An activity

This plant – a weed to some, a nuisance, yet beautiful in its own way – has grown in tough conditions. Created to grow in fertile soil, it has instead found home in a small gap in some concrete.



Pushing past stone and other detritus with fragile but persistent roots and reaching up to what sun is available with determination.

If you are able, go for a walk today. Resolve to notice the determination of nature around you on your journey – not just the things that you instinctively see as beautiful, but the forgotten things too.

See too, where little things make the bigger things possible, bearable.

If you are unable to go for a walk, perhaps [watch some or all of this video](#).

If you have a garden, perhaps notice the resilience of the plants you have – appreciate how those consciously tended can thrive in ways more neglected ones are less able to. Notice too how the weeds – unloved and unwanted – nonetheless grow. [This video might also be helpful](#).

If you can spend time with others – in person or electronically – share a little about the journey of the last 10 weeks or so. Acknowledge the difficulties each of you faced, celebrate where victories have been won, share hope, insight and possibility where difficulty is still present.

[Andy Campbell](#)

## A statue

After a 40 year non-violent campaign mostly led by the black community to have Colston's statue moved to a museum, a campaign that got absolutely nowhere, frustration and anger and a global anti-racist mood finally brought about the statue's downfall.

It didn't have to be this way.

If those with the power to do so had simply listened sensitively to a hurting community and just moved the statue in the first place, this would not now be on our news feeds.

For those who don't know, Edward Colston was a Tory businessman and 'philanthropist' from the late 17th and early 18th Century who made his money shipping almost 100,000 men women and children from their homes into slavery and into an early and brutish death on the plantations of the British colonies.

During his time in control of the company, at least 19,000 Black people

were dumped into the sea if they got sick or died on the journey from Africa to the plantations. That is why the statue got symbolically dumped into the harbour.

The debate about whether the removal of a statue is a violent act or not is dwarfed by the sheer evil and violence of slavery.



[Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona](#)

I'm no fan of the failure of social distancing that a minority of the Black Lives Matter protests have shown - but I would say that most protesters in most cities have stuck to the rules and worn masks and kept their distance. But none of the complaints about protesting during a pandemic is a justification for allowing statues of mass murderers to simply be an

acceptable part of our landscape, no matter how 'philanthropic' the people they represent may appear. As has often been said, a statue of Jimmy Saville would have soon been torn down in Leeds despite all his 'Jim'll fix it' philanthropy. People should not have to see their abusers glorified. As in all abuse, the effects of that violation are still to be felt long after the event. Not just in the modern repercussions of racism in health issues, housing policy, education and employment, but in the actual memory of slavery and the idea that one group of people are inferior to another.

For those who are interested, it was only in 2015 that we finally finished paying the debt borrowed by the UK state to pay off the slave owners after the abolition of slavery act in 1833. It was the biggest payment in our history, more than the bankers bailout in 2008. **It was 40% of our entire GDP. Not a penny went to slaves who still had to work as interns for free for a further 5 years.**

I hope the statue is replaced by something that stands for hope and kindness, or at the very least, remembers the horrors of all those dumped mercilessly in the sea whilst making huge profits for our elites.

[Chris Howson](#)

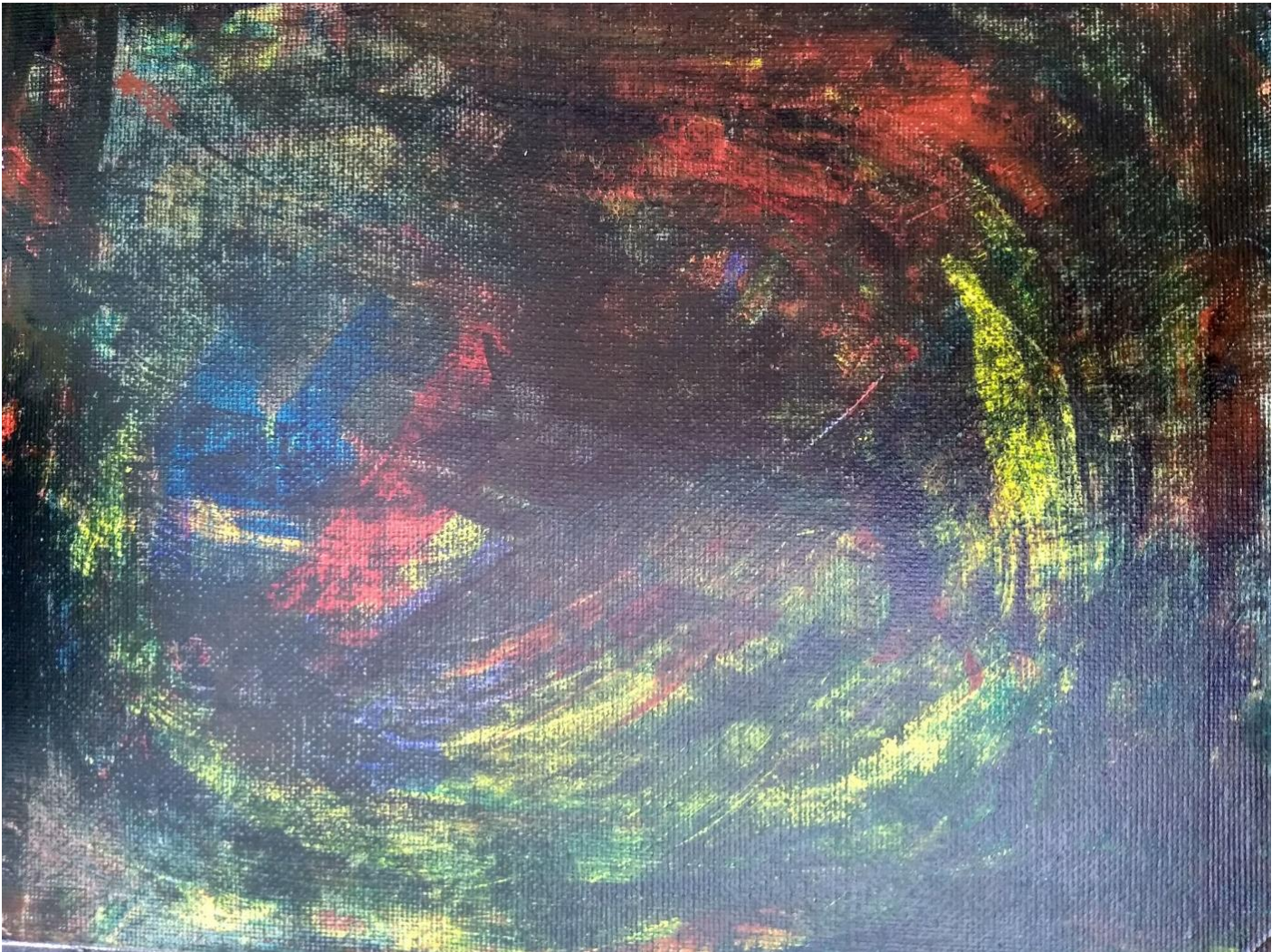


[Ehimetalor Akhere Unuabona](#)

## A song

[Go here to see](#) the amazing Ben Okafor revisit a song he wrote in the 1980s “Be my brother.”

[Ben Okafor](#)



Darkness and light dance  
Each dominant for a time  
each a teacher too

*(Words & art) [Andy Campbell](#)*

*[simonjcross.com/dangerous-liturgy](http://simonjcross.com/dangerous-liturgy)*



## A poem

Do not fear  
Do not be afraid  
Dark will be overcome  
Light will shine bright

Uncertainty will be certain  
Unknown be understood  
Proclaim loudly the whispers  
Secrets must be revealed

Stand up for the oppressed  
For the weak  
For the invisible  
No one is unforgivable

For the excluded  
For the marginalised  
For all living  
No one should be missing

Every hair on your head  
Counted and known  
God loves every part of you  
Now go make that love shown

## A closing

Enjoy beauty  
Forgive recklessly  
Accept forgiveness  
Stand up  
Tear down  
Be heard  
Don't be afraid.

Be a sister  
Be a brother  
Cry  
Pay attention  
Listen  
Be released  
Be reborn  
Welcome  
Be known  
Be loved  
Love  
Remember.

We are dust and shadow  
And God's ok with that.

[Emma Major](#)

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This series is curated by [Andy Campbell](#) and [Simon Cross](#). This edition features contributions from:

***Lat Blaylock (RE nut), Andy Campbell (poet, artist, life coach, friend ), Lorraine Cavanaugh (priest & author), Liz Chart (observer, sense-tester & way finder), Simon Cross (rabbit in the headlights), Charlotte Gibson (podcaster, artist & writer), Rob Halligan (songwriter, musician, wearer of fine hats), Chris Howson (liberation theologian, priest & chaplain), Dorrie Johnson (health scientist, theologian & poet), Mark Kensett (wonderful photographer), Emma Major (lay pioneer minister & poet), Ben Okafor (musician, author, actor & humanitarian), Sapphira Olson (trans woman, author, illustrator & poet), Ben Solanky (ambassador of empathy), Bruce Stanley (creator, entrepreneur, forestaholic), & Yeshu Satsang Toronto (gathering of the truth).***