

Bystander at the gate:

“My kingdom,
my kingdom,
my kingdom for a donkey!”

And they laughed.

They were meant to.

They were a tiny band of followers:
precocious teenagers
with all the self-possession of their years
and without the wisdom to understand.

Their mock procession
was way above their heads.

They played their part.
I could see them,
feigning royal allegiance
with their palms, cloaks and hosannas,

but it was the rabbi
who quietly lit the show,
hardly moved by their encouragement,
dark eyes
living beyond the moment,
encouraging another
more dangerous drama.

These youngsters in the kingdom
were just playing;

he saw the darker things coming
and his donkey-riding antics invited it.

This city gateway
was entrance to a battle royal,
and those who cast their cloaks
knew nothing of it,
as yet.

Only the donkey rider,
the kingdom's fool,
holding a mirror
(himself),
up to the powers,
knew,
and no one would like what they would
eventually see.

“A kingdom,
a kingdom,
a kingdom for a donkey!”

and they laughed,
and danced,
but “Hosanna”
had never sounded so hollow
in the ears of the saviour.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus
may we stand here with you
at the gateway of grace
hardly knowing the cost of this week*

*May we linger here
in the wonder of heaven
who chooses love as costly as this*

*May we draw breath
deep enough to find the belief
that will carry you through*

*May we find now
a faith that holds on to this
and sees it through*

*So be it
Amen*

Bystander in the Temple:

The alter
broke,
shattered before us
in a great dust of anger,
rising in lilac plumes
as he thrashed his way through caged
doves
and righteous lambs.

Shouts echoed round the walls.
People paused
and stared
as he moved in some slow motion
that was all of heaven
scattering their intent and their profits,
flinging to the stone floor
the rules for their religion
that rolled and flashed into the shadows.

The light dipped
as he paused,
sweat down his back
and phlegm in his nostrils.
He turned his head
in an almost disparaging way,
half looking at the crowd,
half seeing the result of his tirade
to break religion.

And his words,
when they came,
were hardly heard in the porticos of the
faith,
but echoed loud in the rule books of the
temple:
“This house,
is not for robbers gain...”

and he paused,
and took breath,
then spoke louder:
“it is for the least,
and the poor,
and the honoured in heaven,
and you have laughed at them
and bound them
with your rules and profits.”

And with that

the light and dust stirred
in a holy wisp of air
that followed him
in a dervish dance
as he left.

The man had crossed the rubicon.
Only heaven knew
(or perhaps didn't)
what would happen now.

And with a incredulous mutter,
the traders and exchangers
put back their tables and money piles
as normal service was resumed.

And the alter
broke
and shattered
once more.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus
may we stand here with you
in the place of grace
religion scattered across the way*

*May we linger here
in the work of heaven
that makes love so vulnerable and costly*

*May we draw breath
deep enough to hold onto trust
that will guide us beyond here*

*And may we meet a faith
that holds on through this
and invites us as your companions*

*So be it
Amen*

A bystander at the table

What does the crackit cup mean?

And what shall we do now with this bread
and cup,
broken?

Where is heaven in this?

And those words, that came from him,
what can they mean:
broken body and cup of promise?

And the pauses between words,
the silences that went deeper,
bookending the meal:
what was unspoken about heaven in
them?

And the basin to the side,
and the towel now wet,
what kind of messiah has he transformed
into?

And what was that with Judas,
and the forcing of the kingdom
with betrayal and silver?

Yet he too was invited to share the bread.
Why?

What kind of kingdom is this to be?

And the bread,
broken and left scattered
like all our emotions
across three years of mission and
storytelling?

And the goblet,
filled with all those promises of Messiah,
and feasts,
and heavenly banquets,
and right relationships,
left
half drunk?

It is a strange place
standing between promises,
broken signs strewn across the table

with the day yet unfulfilled,
and we are left
with only a crackit cup
for hope
and a torn loaf
for comfort:
what kingdom is this to be,
what saviour will he become,
and what are we meant to do now?

Prayer

*Lord Jesus
may we stand here with you
in this broken place
where we have to reimagine the whole of
the kingdom*

*May we linger here
in the promises of heaven
that are so differently and more costly than
we thought*

*May we draw breath
deep enough to find a truth
that this is not all there will be*

*And may we meet a faith
that is shaped by love
and will yet give of itself for all*

*So be it
Amen*

A bystander in the garden

The olive trees whispered
with conspiracy and lies
through a sinister rustle of leaves
as the saviour and his cautious followers
stole into the dark
for the waiting.

It seemed to be the worry
that moved him on,
a saviour who couldn't sit down,
his cup overflowing with anxiety,
restless in his legs and mind and heart.

They were tired, the others,
and they thought it was best to let him
alone,
to wander ahead
with his prayer and concerns,
so they sat under the twisted branches of
the trees
and let him go.

And as their eyes drifted towards sleep,
they heard him,
his silences between their dreams;
his muttering as he walked in circles
rambling to his God,
so distant now,
about cups,
and whose will was to be done,
and questions,
so many questions.

And he would wander back
when he realised he was alone
to find the small band,

and asleep,
he would wake them,
not gently
but with anger:
could they not stay awake with him!
as his mind rioted with questions and love,

and then the snap of twigs
and the candle light that shifted the
darkness
as the soldiers came,
but there among them

was a deeper shadow
as Judas made his move.

Then as Jesus' wide eyes watched,
hair matted with worry's sweat,
his cheeks clammy,
his eyes red,
Judas kissed him
and this filament of the dark
disappeared into a greater darkness
as Jesus, frightened,
and now more uncertain than he had ever
been,
was bound
and pushed away
as the disciples stood,
and noticed only one thing:
there must have been still some light left in
him
for now the darkness was greater than it
had ever been.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus
may we stand here in the space you have
been
this broken place
where we can only imagine what the
kingdom will become*

*May we linger here
in the echo of heaven
that has cost us everything in our saviour*

*May we draw breath
deep enough to find a moment
that helps us believe it is not over yet*

*And may we meet a faith
shaped by a love
whose will says yes to what is yet to come*

*So be it
Amen*

A bystander from the hill

This place
holds a lot of silence

for here
love has run out.

He came to preach truth,
and here it is;

he offered healing,
but it is him who is broken;

he spoke of heaven in a generosity
colours,
and it has finished him in red and grey.

It takes a lot to silence a storyteller -
not just the nails,
or the punishment,
or the mockery,
but when love lives so fully
that life itself is willingly given,
no one knows the ending.

He came to bring new life,
yet he has none left for himself;

he spoke of being born again,
but what kind of morbid rebirth is this?;

he welcomed in the outcast and stranger,
but finds himself now on his own.

I have watched him do miracles,
but this is not one;
and I have heard him convince thousands
with his words
but here the word has been made flesh
and is silenced,
with this, his final word:
a mutter of pain and defeat,

and I doubt we'll ever hear his voice again.

It is that kind of silence
this place holds.

Prayer

*Lord Jesus
we stand here
this darkest place
where faith falters with breath*

*We linger here
in the final echo
that has cost you everything*

*We draw breath
after you have stopped
for it feels it is all over now*

*Yet may we meet a faith
reborn in love
that dares redeem the world from here*

*So be it
Amen*