

Sarah Parkinson's poetry

A selection on themes of worship, outreach, justice and creation care

Sarah Parkinson lives in Ilkley and is one of the many inspiring Christians in the area that the Sanctuary has been delighted to connect with in recent months. She's a mother, a wife, and a poet... and her writing brings together all this and more – it's full of humanity and the reality of faith, pain and tension – but also of the extraordinary hope and beauty of our God and what Jesus has done, and is still doing, through his Spirit working in us and through us.

When we first discovered her poetry, we were literally enthralled – unable to resist reading every post on her site in one sitting! What a beautiful and challenging way to spend an afternoon.

We'd encourage you to visit www.poiema.co.uk to read her responses to a diverse range of subjects and experiences, and to [read our blog introducing her more fully](#) but we're honoured to be able to publish this small selection on some of the themes most important to the Sanctuary. We hope they inspire you as much as they have done us, and lead you – like they lead us – to a place of prayer and praise.

A journey shared

I wasn't old when
news became old:
tired news of flood or drought,
epidemics or genocide.
Even vicious hate
becomes dreary
on that hypnotic screen.

I wasn't old when God wept
over me,
and I didn't weep.
Hearts that dull young
stay dull:
matted with tar and tarnish
that lay a dark veneer over truth.

You stripped my age,
you called the child
in me
that ached over history's years.
Recalled the sharp, metallic
taste of shock and pain
at the sight of a broken man,
crushed in hate's wheels.

No trite reflections,
but honest confessions
and a heart that shares pain:

I knew you, knew the source
from which compassion springs.
And I reflect in that source,
though ripples of strong current
distort the light that
reaches back to me.

Still I fail; still my
barren heart thirsts to take
each step on the journey
towards truth;
still that which distorts your light
I embrace. Yet in its
darkness I find truth to build
on truth; for only in
darkness can light prevail.

And still, as a child I hunger for your song;
for the strength in shared hope
and for the love that journeys on.

Broken down walls

Grinding trails into the hardened, dusty road
wheel upon wheel, the rut deepens
and the kicked-up dust smothers imagination.
It coats both transport and transported,
choking back questions.

The mind may resist, yet the tailback of travellers
extends even beyond that which went before.
Momentum once gained cannot be halted
by one mind alone.

When legs are aching and spirits sore
who would not choose the road over flat land
before the mountain pass?
Unless the questions deluge you,
frustrate and hurt you
beyond the screaming edge of pain.
Then perhaps, when sinew is stretched
beyond bearing,
your thoughts may fly free.

Yet the weight of years, of crusted centuries
holds life by lead-heavy shackles.
You may attend hallowed places,
offer worship to an unseen god;
the pew seat is worn to fit you,
whilst it remembers inhabitants of long ago.

It rests comfortable knowing that the only change
is inevitable consequence of existing within
the stream of humanity.
The mind of innumerable centuries
finds comfort in somnolence;
where one sat pondering within insulated walls
a thousand years ago
so for you today the walls remain in place.

And who or what can tear down the walls?
And where is the strength to move beyond them
when they are broken down?
You may sit shivering amidst the dust and rubble
as the world beyond your conception
beckons with eagerness and adventure.
No strength within is sufficient,
yet the Heart that tenderly shepherds
those who remain in the rubble
will sustain those who step outside.

He said

He said:
'Love the humble and the proud,
love the loveless and the loved,
love the joyful and the sad
love those below and those above.'

Love offers all to anyone
who seeks or does not seek;
love gives all of mind and body
both to the strong and to the weak.

He said:
'Love the jealous and the lame,
love the patient and the bowed:
love those who love to deal out blame,
love the quiet and the loud.'

Love does not drain the life
that flows from heart to heart:
love will not hold the knife
that severs kin and kind apart.

He said:
'Love the light and love the shade,
love the bitter and the blind:
love the one who holds the blade
for whom love is not there to find.'

Love cannot drown in judgement
else twisted hearts will not untwist,
for he from whom love pours
heals with gentleness and grace
and offers pardon with a kiss.

How to know God

I tell you this, you will not know
the God of whom I speak
without the alphabet, which guides you
through the process which I teach.
And then of course, please don't forget
in church to raise your hands,
and sing with joy and happiness
as our lyrics must demand.

No wait! Hold on, you've got it wrong
for if you know my Lord
your capitalist tendencies
must fall into accord
with our churchgoers' spending habits -
and of course you must agree
to live your life before us all
in guilt-inducing piety.

Excuse me, don't forget the most
important part of faith;
insulation from the ones
who'll turn your heart to grace.
Build your fortress high and strong,
wear armour when you meet the lost
and broken ones who hurt your planned
obedience to God.

*Reach out and touch the cross
and know the burning pain within
Walk with me through the past
of loving louts, forgiving sin.
Know the aching pain of darkness
as it threatens to conceal
my love and hope for all who turn
on death's relentless heart-hard wheel.*

Closer to you

Gathering threads of consciousness
plait and weave themselves together
in intricate textures and patterns
to create the fabric of my being.

Life leaps from hill to valley,
bounds from brook to estuary,
rushes over the boundless ocean,
gradually ascends to the mountaintop,
plummets over cliffs and
is lifted up by the heavens.

Each movement, each stunning view
fractures consciousness, allows
cracks of bright light to shine through,
but only a few –
the brightness too blinding for
more than a gently lit view.

And again, I am new.
The threads weave deeper into me,
the light shines further through me.
I see more, yet the more I see
is my own ignorance and Your brilliance;
You hold me divinely,
shed enough light to guide me,
and the weave of my threads knits me closer to You.

Who loves you now?

Down the window rolls
a crack
and through the gap
a bag is tossed –
a crinkled, baleful
advert for gluttony.

Left to the wind and
the whip of cars rushing by.
Fed to the gutter,
there to moulder for countless years.

There accrued in the
dust and the rot,
that time forgot –
that we forget.
A growing, gnawing bane
of time, of life drained
through neglect's grasping fingers.

And the grand glory of
new stars
new earth
new water

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new life
new love
in a distance beyond our hearing
fades. Eyes darken
as once-lush, once lavish creation
cavorting in the playground
of promise and aeons to come
shudders, slows, and asks
'who loves me now?'