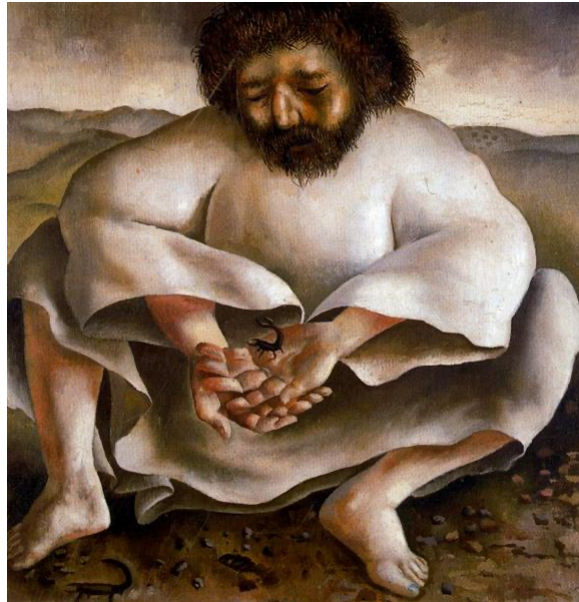


## *Bread and Scorpions*



I wonder if, like the disciples, you have ever wondered how to pray? It is something many people think they are not good at, worrying about the words to use, the things to bring before God, and sometimes worrying about being vulnerable before God in all our human brokenness, and unhealed hurts and scars.

Jesus gives us the prayer of all prayers, a prayer to carry with us through all the turns and seasons of daily life. A prayer that reminds us to trust in God, simply, as a child, held in unending love and forgiveness.

Our Father, the prayer begins. We are given permission by the Son of God to call God our Father. I don't know what your experience of human fathers are – they might be beautiful and they might be really challenging – humans are so often so broken. But this is the heavenly Father who is all things that Fatherly love should be – someone whose commitment to us is inexhaustible, whose purposes for us are unfailingly generous; someone whose life is the source of our life, and who guarantees that there is always

a home, always love and nourishment for us<sup>1</sup>. The one whom we can trust, on a very basic level to always be goodness and love for us.

There is a beautiful picture by Stanley Spencer, called Christ in the Wilderness, you may have seen it. And in this picture, Christ is seated on the ground with the most tender expression on his face, tender but sad. He is looking down at his hands, which are held carefully, one hand under the other. And in his hands, there is a scorpion. His hand is slightly swollen, suggesting the scorpion may have already stung him, but still he holds it. There is a sense that Christ's love and stillness holds all the hurts and fears and poisons of the world, no matter what. Holds it with great tenderness.

For who would give their child who asks for an egg, a scorpion? asks Jesus in today's reading. But he has already made it clear in his story about the reluctant friend who would not open the door to his friend in need, that in fact, in our human brokenness we do exactly that. We are not aware of the hurts and needs of our neighbours, often until – or even when – they nearly hammer our doors down. We do, quite often serve up stings and hurts to each other. And indeed, we bear the scars of many a fall both of our own hearts, and of those around us.

Sometimes in our fear and brokenness, like the scorpion, we may not even know what to ask for, and we may sting the love of God that holds us. But Jesus tells us – I am not like that neighbour. I will always hear you. I will always open the door to you. I will always love you. S. Teresa of Avila tells us that we cannot fall out of Jesus' hands. – we can only ever fall into them. Like those tender hands holding the scorpion they are always one under the other, ready to catch us even as we fall.

Jesus is the bread of life, and I think it is no coincidence that it is bread that the neighbour is searching for. The simple day to day nourishment that is needed, nothing unreasonable, nothing fancy; just the essentials of life. Jesus says – come to me, for I am that bread. I am the essential you need when the demands of life seem too much. You can trust in me. And it doesn't matter who we are, or what we've been through, or what we have

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, Tokens of Trust, Canterbury Press, 2007, pp. 19 - 20

done, with him we can sit down, eat... find forgiveness and mercy and new life. In him, we can find strength and hope and life even when we are tired from the journey, confidence to reach out, grace to share.

We come to God as the Lord's prayer acknowledges, human, frail and full of times we need mercy; full of times we need mercy for ourselves, or we need God to help us extend mercy to each other. *Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.*

When the world feels broken, or our lives feel broken, and as we see the rising tides of indifference, individualism, or anger and pain washing between our communities, let us rest it in the love that Jesus gives us. And let us, like him, look deeper than the surface: see the needs and pains of those around us, and be always ready, and searching, for ways to open the doors, to hold and to heal. To share the love that God pours so richly and tenderly upon us.

Our gospel – our good news – takes us from the temptations of broken humanity in the wilderness, to the resurrection and the Easter Dawn. Let us love, tenderly, insistently, that even from the wilderness of human pain, may come new life and hope and healing.

and... whether we think we are good at it or not, let us pray. Let us come with confidence of heart to sit and rest with our Father. To be confident to be who we are, to ask for what we need, to give praise and thanks. To ask for the daily bread we need, in absolute simple trust that he will give it to us, and plenty to share with those around us,

Let us pray that the doors of heart and community may be open, that those who knock may be heard, and those who are hungry, fed. And that, heart by heart, his kingdom may indeed come upon the face of the world. Seen and known, each one as sister and brother at the table of the One Father of all.