

The Network

As part of our exploration of the values of Urban Expression we looked at the story of Shiprah and Puah. Ordered to kill all male Hebrew babies, they refused to do so, deceiving Pharaoh by telling him that the Hebrew babies were always born before they got there. Putting themselves at some considerable risk, their humanity, their identification with the suffering of their people took precedence over their own safety.

Several of UE's Core Values point us to the humility of understanding that we are one small part of God's much larger purpose.

For the purposes of this prayer, I take as "fact" a number of historically debatable points. It is not know, for example, where the Upper Room was. I choose to locate it in Bethany to illustrate some of the networks to which Jesus belonged.

On the night when he was betrayed
by Judas from the village of Kerioth,
Jesus, the child of Nazareth,
son of Joseph and Mary,
cousin of John the Baptist
and descendent of ancient kings,
gathered around a table
with his friends and followers
in a house in Bethany.

Mary and Martha were there.
Mary, who wanted to be with Jesus.
Martha, jealous, and fussing.

Lazarus, their brother, raised from the dead.

Peter and Andrew, James and John,
Fishermen - nets and networks
families, friends and customers.
Matthew, Levi, rich bureaucrat,
connecting to the rich and powerful of
Capernium.

As they arrived, Jesus poured water
drawn from the well by an unnamed woman
into a bowl
made by an unnamed potter
and washed their feet,
drying them on a towel woven from finest
Egyptian cotton
by skilled, but forgotten fingers.

They sat at a table of wood,
grown nearby
and shaped by joiner's hands.

They prayed ancient words,
connecting them to the past,
to Moses, to Miriam,

Shiprah and Puah,
connecting them to all who suffer
in past, present or future.

Connecting them to us.

For, as we gather together,
we bring our networks,
our friends and families,
our colleagues from school,
work or play.

We bring the groups to which this church
belongs:

{replace as necessary}

Baptist Union of Great Britain, NorthWestern
Baptist Association, Northern Baptist Learning
Community, Churches of Openshaw and Abbey
Hey Together, SE Manchester Group of
Churches, Baptist Union Retreat Group,
Manchester Credit Union, East Manchester
Health and Wellbeing Forum, Manchester
Muslim Christian Forum and the Inner City
Mission Network.

All these are gathered around this table
as we break the bread of life.

Bread, made of flour, ground by unknown
hands,
as the Matzo bread which Jesus broke was
made of flour,
ground from grain
grain from the ground
of agricultural rootedness.

This, Jesus said, is my body.
Made up of many grains,
particles of human connection.
Broken by human disconnection.

This is my body.
Broken for you.
Share and eat,
eat and share.

[Break and share bread]

And after supper,
as friends began the wine-fuelled arguments,
Jesus lifted the cup
filled with wine,
fermented from grapes
crushed by human heels
and reminded them of all who are crushed
themselves.

This is my blood.
Poured out for you.
Drink it humbly.
Give thanks.
Remember.

[Lift cup and share wine]

As violence exploded into everyone for them
self,
Jesus forgot his own safety
and healed his enemy.

As darkness broke relationship
and fear locked individuals into seclusion,
Jesus sent them outwards.

So, as we separate from one another
and go our separate ways
unite us in the network beyond ourselves.

For you are the one
in whom all things come together
alpha and omega, beginning and end.
Amen