

“Were not our hearts burning within us when he opened up the scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32)

“How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe” the Son of Man who saw the fiery throne of the living God, the same God who may have thundered his warnings to his people, but who declared finally in his love that he could never leave his people desolate. The same God who, despite the fact that his servant, Ancient Israel, his firstborn son, had been so unfaithful and failed to practice justice, declared that because of his name he would not treat them as their behaviour deserved but would put his Spirit within them, re-settle them and build a new Temple in their midst that would be named “The LORD is there”. From that day there would be no more death, no more mourning or crying or pain - for when the Son of Man was lifted up he would say “Behold I make all things new”.

“How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe” the Son of Man, whom Daniel saw at the right hand side of the antecedent of time, the sovereign LORD of all history, to whom and upon whom all judgement was passed. To believe the one whom the Father loved, the I AM, the LORD, who is in the Father and one with the Father, who came into the world not to judge the world but to save it from itself and to seek and to save the lost.

“How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe” I AM, the LORD who appeared to Moses in the burning bush and to Daniel’s three friends in the fiery furnace. For I AM the one who delivers from slavery and death, for it is for freedom that I have set you free - not so that you could once again return to a binary way of thinking that would exclude this person and judge that one - but so that you could live in and out of the at-one-ment of all things and all peoples. So that you need no longer live in fear of the projection of the image of God that you have made for yourselves but rather live in the security of my abiding love. You may have heard “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth”, but I tell you I AM not the Angel of death but the LORD of life, abounding in steadfast love. So I tell you “love your enemies”, do not return tit for tat but treat others as you would like to be treated. Don’t think that forgiveness runs out and forgive only seven times but go on forgiving, “seventy times seven”, for this is what your Father in Heaven is like!

“How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe”, I AM, the LORD, Yeshua, I take no delight in the destruction of Jericho but I know the danger of the city and that you must be separated from its allure. Babylon must be destroyed and through its destruction and your first death - renewal, immortality and a return to paradise in the garden city that I have prepared as a bride - will be accomplished. Not through the blood of murder, conquest and war or sacrifice but in and through my own self-offering. For out of our great love, my Father and I were willing to submit to your wrath and bloodlust so that once and for all it might be revealed that I AM THE scapegoat and THE High Priest, the LORD.

For the only sign I would give you was that of Jonah, who in his sectarian small-mindedness still knew that “I AM a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love”. One day the city of Nineveh would be destroyed (that must happen) but the Ninevites are my beloved children too. Poor Jonah, he so hated that, but credit to him for recording his anger and need for a God made in his own image who would punish others.

But my Empire is not like the empires of this world that have come and gone, all built on greed, injustice, slavery and violence, even the one established by my servant David, but rather they are like the empire ruled over by his son Solomon the Prince of Peace. I could take no delight in murder and adultery but am always ready to forgive – so that when once my prophet Nathan had opened

David's eyes to his self-righteousness, his deceit, his self-reliance and readiness to judge others, he might abide in my love once again.

For do not be deceived, repentance is not a prior condition of my love and forgiveness or something that qualifies you and not others, as if one of God's children were preferentially treated over another. No, repentance is the realisation after restoration, after the homecoming, that you have always been loved, that you could never not be loved and that nothing within you or circumstantially or ultimately could ever separate you from my Father's love. For I AM the LORD your creator and your redeemer, and though you may continually choose to live enslaved to your desires and passions and imprison yourselves and others in fear and shame, I AM the deliverer who has paid your ransom. And though you may continually choose to sacrifice others and walk in the way that leads to death despite the example I have given you, I AM, the LORD, the resurrection and the life and in me shall all be made alive.

"How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe" even the evidence of your own eyes over these last few years. Have I not loved Mary Magdalene especially, have I not celebrated Mary, Lazarus my beloved disciple's sister as much as the twelve men I chose? And did I not celebrate Martha who recognised when Lazarus had died that I AM the resurrection, LORD even over death? How misused was Tamar by her father-in-law, from whom my people the Jews derive their very name, and to whom, though it will be mis-translated, my crucifixion was attributed. Or Rahab the foreigner, the prostitute, the lone survivor from the city of Jericho (another disaster wrongly attributed to me) - how could you possibly not see why I would gain the reputation I did on earth as one who sits and eats with sinners?

I AM not the angel of death, a God who desires destruction and who punishes out of wrath. And when I catch up with Peter I will let him know where I was on Easter Eve, in Hades, preaching the Gospel of God's love and grace and forgiveness to every generation including those who archetypally died in the flood. Do I have to repeat that I AM the LORD of life, the beginning, the first, the last, by whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together, the light and life of all humankind, the word made flesh who with and in the Father is eternally present? I will make that reality available to all peoples because I have not only been through the curtain but that curtain (my body) was torn from top to bottom so that all creation might be permeated by the reality that was and is and is to come: Day one, the Holy of Holies, forgiveness and renewal of life today and every today for evermore.

"How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe" that my embrace, my covenant would reach out to all peoples - the first and the last, and especially the least the last and the lost and including women and men equally. Or again - Ruth the Moabitess, who according to the law should have been excluded from the household of faith (considering all her disadvantages of nationality, status and gender) and yet who alone in all the Hebrew scriptures is presented as an example of faith and faithfulness that rivals even that of our Forefather Abraham. For Abraham believed that my Father would require the sacrifice of his beloved son Isaac - as if our Father needed to be appeased, as if our Father would ever require the taking of a life!

So what joy was Abraham's when our Father provided a temporary, alternative, animal sacrifice and Isaac his beloved son was spared. What wonder was Abraham's when he saw my day and saw how that same joy would not be shared by our Father, as I was given up to the wrath in men and sacrificed for the sake of the nation in the misguided notion that by my death there might be peace with Rome. How Abraham marvelled at my willingness to take the worst in men and the powers that be as well as the failure of my friends and the silence and complicity of the crowds and be that

sacrifice made in love. A sacrifice to bring the foolishness of the notion that the sacrifice of others could ever make peace into the light, and reveal once and for all that self-sacrifice is the way of love and is the truth that brings life to all.

“How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe” that this foreign destitute widow Ruth, Rahab the prostitute and Tamar (who also had to prostitute herself with her Father-in-law to obtain justice) were icons of inclusion, forgiveness, redemption and grace and that that, and that alone is the will of our Father? And to believe that is why these women will be included in my genealogy, when Matthew gets around to recording it? Or consider Esther, who was willing to submit to becoming one of the women in the Lord of all the Earth’s harem, who so courageously entered into the Holy of Holies and before the throne of grace mediated and pleaded for her people at risk to her own life - her people’s peril resulting from a quarrel between two proud men, the one stubborn and the other jealous. Have you not read that it was on the third day that she accomplished the salvation of her people? Was there ever a clearer picture or forerunner in all the Hebrew scriptures, and she a woman, of me your great High Priest? Can you not see that the crib, the cross, the empty tomb and the garden are the Holy of Holies, Paradise, the place where I AM, High Priest and sacrificial scapegoat THE At-one-ment made once and for all?

“How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe” that Joseph, despite (or perhaps because of) his failings was given up for dead, despised and rejected by his brothers, denied his birthright, sold into slavery in a far country, reduced to feeding the pigs, beaten, falsely accused and yet was raised up and given a name second only to the Lord of all the earth. Who then declared forgiveness and the riches of his grace, giving an everlasting home to those same brothers with whom he was reconciled before ever they repented of their actions. When, at the last, he was received into that embrace, what joy he shared with his beloved Father so overwhelmed to see his beloved son whom he had thought lost!

“How foolish you are and slow of heart to believe” that Jacob, the cheat, the coward, the one who ran away out of fear and shame, whose name was changed to Is-Ra-El, which means the one who sees God, not because of any goodness and deserving in him - surely nothing could be clearer than that? For Israel to the last continued to believe that his older brother Esau in his wrath still meant him harm even when, as he was brought back to the land of promise, the garden of Eden (that same garden where once too Adam and Eve had become lost in fear and covered in shame), he received nothing but loving kindness, generosity and forgiveness from this brother. Esau received him back into fellowship despite all his younger brother had done to him, and the name of their father Isaac and his father Abraham and the name of their God.

Or consider Cain, that first murderer, that first city builder and who set this whole sorry story in motion – for he was given the mark of the cross on his forehead as the sign of God’s protection of him, even him, despite all his jealousy, anger, violence and murder. My prophet could see it: “The LORD demands mercy not sacrifice.” The sacrifice of self out of love for the other, not the sacrifice of the other for the sake of self or the tribe or the nation or so-called peace. Violence will only ever beget violence. I have broken that cycle once and for all and revealed the scapegoat mechanism for what it is - the darkness in man. I have revealed the alternative and the self-sacrificial love that alone makes for peace.

How could my people have been so blind as to think that they were chosen over and against other peoples rather than for and on behalf of them? That they were chosen to be a light set on a hill to show the nations the way that leads to life and peace? How could they have ever been so misled by those same nations to believe that the way to peace could ever be attained through the sacrificial

blood of others, or that their God was like the gods of the nations and demanded such blood in sacrifice?

Have they not read their own account of the origins of the world that are in such stark contrast to those of the other nations in which the world is birthed in violence and bloodshed between the gods and mirrored on earth?

Now surely they will see that my blood is the last blood to be shed in sacrifice, my accommodation, and that of my Father, to the misunderstanding and darkness in men that demands such murder and bloodshed in the name of a God cast in their own image. Now the character and will and purpose and heart of their God is once and for all made known. For now my blood, the blood of the suffering servant, the great High Priest, is sprinkled over all the nations. And now it has been revealed that God is not a God of wrath, God is not set over and against the peoples of the earth, or that he has a favourite nation or that he elevates men over women or that the first are preferred to the last. No - in his Kingdom all that is reversed, now the last shall be first, the lost shall be found, women shall be my witnesses and Apostles, all are welcome at my Heavenly feast and that the table is now laid and ready.

How could they not see that my only and abiding resistance is to their resistance of me and my grace and love and forgiveness? How could they not follow my example of inclusion, acceptance, forgiveness and welcome, as I sat and ate with sinners? For surely if they do this, break bread and pour out wine, whenever they are at table together they will see themselves as they truly are, both sheep and goats, both susceptible to the darkness as well as indwelt by the light. Surely as wine is outpoured and bread broken they will recognise me in that moment, in those elements, in one another and in all the world?

Michael Beckett, May 2019