

Canopy of Prayer

Dear Prayer Partners in Europe

Jonny Clark has been leading YWAM in Ireland since 2007 and his base in Rostrevor has a particular focus on Reconciliation. His Reconciliation documentary and podcast project can be found at www.guardiansoftheflame.org

Polarisation and a Jesus-response

**"To see your face is like seeing the face of God."
(Jacob to Esau in Genesis 33)**

In a New York Times article Tim Kreider wrote: "It sometimes seems as if most of the news consists of outrage porn". That is news that seduces us to get stirred up with righteous indignation to judge others and see them as the enemy. Social media are changing the world; they tend to pull us into an echo chamber where we are 'virtually' surrounded by like-minded people. It is easy to fall into believing what the others on 'our side' already think. This causes division everywhere, including the community of Christians, also in Europe. They believe in the same Lord but also hold very different views of the world.

My friend Davy Kidd says "When your enemy becomes 'God's enemy' you know you're worshipping an idol". When you begin to hate other Christians for their opinions, conflict gets a religious dimension. I have been familiar with this as long as I have lived in Northern Ireland. The first question I was asked at school when I moved here as a 9 year old child of YWAM missionaries was: "are you Protestant or Catholic?"

As outrage burns it can be easy to fall into the trap of stereotyping those we disagree with. These stereotypes dehumanise and ultimately demonise them. This inevitable fall is found in every place of ethnic or religious conflict. As Christians we must aim at seeing the face of God in the other person. God made them and said "it is very good".

So how do we guard the flame of self-giving love, that really sees the other person? Philippians 2 describes how Jesus emptied himself. In a time of Polarisation, emptying ourselves of selfish ambition and vain conceit is a crucial ingredient to Christlikeness. In society religion has become toxic for many; they feel that religion causes division and violence. The landscape we are faced with in Europe today is increasingly multi-cultural and post-Christian in its nature. What would it look like for an imaginative church to respond positively and actively to this? For the world is desperate to encounter a Christianity that does not pursue power, and is oriented entirely around self-giving love.

No one is safe until everyone is safe

The G7 leaders, plus their European counterparts, recently pledged to donate Covid vaccines to the rest of the world. But the level of global solidarity needs to go further than this measure alone. We can thank the Lord that effective vaccines have been developed in such a short time, but while some countries are anticipating life returning to a more normal pattern, the majority of the world's population remains unprotected with death rates high and the virus still spreading and producing new mutations. A rise in cases anywhere threatens us all.

Vaccine developers are seeking to rise to the challenge of vaccinating the whole world, for example by not-for-profit prices, building up regional supply chains and collaboration with partners and governments, but there are still obstacles - technical, logistical and even political - to be overcome. Let's pray for the willingness to share resources to increase and for the virus to decrease as many more are able to be vaccinated.

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It has been helpful for me to meditate on not so much being right in my beliefs or even behaviour, but to seek to be right in my heart attitudes, as a Kingdom response to polarisation. Jesus not only surrendered his rights but he empowered those he met with unconditional love. He did not sit passively on the sidelines of the First Century, but he also refused to support the powers of the State or of violent resistance. On the contrary he was actively engaged with bringing his peace to a society traumatised by oppression. He brought his peace ultimately by seeking not only to defeat evil but to bring good to all, including the evildoer.

In a time of Polarisation we as Christians must embody a radical empathy, seeing the face of God in those we encounter, as Jacob saw God's face when he finally met his brother Esau, who had been his enemy and whom he feared. Our stance must not be outrage or defensiveness or indeed even passivity. We can become easily tempted to seek political power so we can legislate morality from above. Yet Jesus spoke of a Kingdom that will grow from within us and cannot be imposed. We must embody radical, active, self-emptying love. This will change the world.

So let us show the power of giving up power, washing each other's feet and dying to our selfish ego. Let us pursue the way of Jesus, to be one, to love one another, as Christ has loved us.



Prayer points: Polarisation

- Let us search our hearts to see if there are any feelings of 'enmity' towards people (and especially towards Christians) who have different opinions from ours and speak about it with God
- Pray for ethnic groups within Europe; that reconciliation can take place where necessary and for God inspired wisdom for those people who are actively involved on how to achieve this.
- Pray for Northern Ireland; for protection against any tension between the different groups and that the peace will be maintained

Additional Prayer points:-

1. Pray that the tension within Europe regarding LGBT issues - often caused by feelings and lack of good information - will be dealt with, with wisdom, the right facts and respect for one another.
2. Wisdom and protection now that many countries within Europe are opening up again after a long lockdown, while Covid-19 is not yet finished.

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