

## Betwixt Darkness and Light

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Photo: Peter Wilson

Yesterday I visited Port Arthur on the Tasman Peninsula on Tasmania's East Coast. Nature has graced that peninsula with awesome beauty – awesome in the real meaning of the word. Rugged coastal cliffs rise hundreds of feet above the deep blue sea. Breakers crash against them, sending up torrents of white foam and drawing them back into the deep. Some distance from those cliffs, white sandy beaches bring a surprising gentleness, contrasting those fearsome rocky heights.

Beautiful as it is, the area holds a tragic history going back to the earliest times of the colony. The Peninsula was a prison for convicts. The ruins of the prison cells and yards are a grim reminder of the cruelty of the system that went to extraordinary lengths to strip the prisoners of their identity and dignity. It is not the first time I have been there and heard the stories. I never get

used to it: the cruelty with which we humans can treat one another! *And* in a natural environment of such powerful beauty.

That beauty itself was created in the clash of harsh forces: the push of Earth's tectonic plates against each other giving rise to mountains and hills. Earthquakes, floods and fires, ice ages and global warmings, the relentless crashing of waves on rock, all played their part in carving those breath-taking cliffs: creation is a process of gigantic forces...



Photo: Margaret Heath, Wikimedia Commons

It is four o'clock. I join my CEN companions wherever they may be and open my heart to whatever needs our contemplative presence today. Yesterday's experience floods back into my awareness: its beauty and its terror. I know the suffering embedded in the Tasman Peninsula is not only a past event. It continues in the depths of suffering of Earth as our lifestyle put enormous pressure on its life and life systems, and on all the beings, human and other-than-human, that depend on those life systems. Southern Somalia and eastern Kenya are experiencing the longest-lasting crippling drought in living memory. Life drains away, leaving a dry, weary desert:

As the deer yearns for running streams  
So my soul is yearning for you, my God.

My heart's attention is drawn to the cry of peoples, animals, reptiles and insects in war-torn countries: their homes and habitats are bombed and burning, their young shot and killed, their forests destroyed and the land poisoned:

How long, O God,  
How long do we need to wait?  
O God, my soul is thirsting for you.  
Will I ever again enter and see  
your face, O God?



Photo: Jacqui Barker, Storm brewing, Port Lincoln SA, Wikimedia

Our world and its innate relationships are unravelling. Cyclones and tornadoes devastate swathes of country and habitat, now here, now there – in almost every continent. Floods, fires, earthquakes and mudslides disrupt and devastate everything in their wake, leaving behind lost and starving populations. Trust in leaders, public institutions and even in Churches, has worn thin. Where, Lord, are we heading in this mess?

O send forth your light and your truth;  
let these be my guide.  
Let them bring me to your holy mountain,  
to the place where you dwell.

Do you weep, Lord, like you wept over Jerusalem? Our world today too does not recognise the time of your visitation. It does not know the things that make for peace!

Your words reach across the darkness: *Come to me, all you who labour and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.*

Lord, I long to come and find rest in you. But I cannot come to you without bringing along all my suffering sisters and brothers, human and other-than-human. They all thirst for you like a dry weary land without water. But most don't even know that it is you for whom they thirst. And we, in whom you continually pour out Living Water, have lost the art of quenching their thirst with that Living Water.



An image arises in me: I know that image. It comes to me whenever I open my heart to experience the depths of suffering in our world: it is you, the Crucified One, your body rent in two, and in the fissure all the suffering beings of the world. You

embrace their suffering as your own, and invite me to bear it with you, in you; to bear it with *your* love, *your* compassion and *your* powerlessness; and, yes, to bear it with serenity and joy, *your* serenity and joy. In *you*, suffering is never the whole story. There can be no resurrection without death. But in *you*, our daily dyings are the pangs of labour birthing us into the fullness of life.

And might it not be that the destructive forces that cause the world so much suffering, are actually the labour pains birthing a new epoch, a new global consciousness which calls forth a new phase of being of our world, our Universe?



Dark Sky - Lac Léman, Wikimedia Commons

While I ponder the possibility – no, more than a possibility, an inner conviction – that God’s Spirit is hovering over our chaos, bringing forth a new creation, I receive a distressing text message from a dear friend. She is facing a serious health crisis. She has always managed to control the circumstances of her life; and when she couldn’t, she cut her losses and ran without turning back. But now? She can’t control this crisis, and

there is no running from its reality. Yet might this crisis not be a grace that enables her to discover inner resources, spiritual strengths she never suspected? The macro world and the micro world mirror each other. When none of our remedies work any longer, the only thing left for us to do is surrender to the Mystery...

I look up and see the darkening sky: evening is coming on; the day is now far spent. Stay with us Lord, break Bread with us yet again, that we may recognise you, the Risen One, in the simple daily things of life, and there find sustenance for the journey through the dark chaos of today’s world, confident that this night, too, will pass, and our world will rise to new life with the dawning of the New Day.

