

Easter 2020 Message from the Reverend Stephen Lindridge, Chair of the Newcastle upon Tyne Methodist District

Dear Sisters and Brothers

As we journey through the rich and deep pathways of Holy Week, toward the emotional rollercoaster Easter brings (or is that just me); I found an incredibly helpful poem for these current times. It is called *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden. Placed as the reading for Monday of Holy Week in Janet Morley's book 'the heart's time'.

Sundays too my father got up early
and put his clothes on in the blueblack cold,
then with cracked hands that ached
from labor in the weekday weather made
banked fires blaze. No one ever thanked him.

I'd wake and hear the cold splintering, breaking.
When the rooms were warm, he'd call,
and slowly I would rise and dress,
fearing the chronic angers of that house,
Speaking indifferently to him,
who had driven out the cold
and polished my good shoes as well.

What did I know, what did I know
of love's austere and lonely offices?

A son recollects his father's actions many years before, of lighting the coal fire in the 'blue-black cold' of a winter's Sunday morning, as he did every morning, so the rest of the house could get up in the warm. The last two lines sum up the theme of the poem and helped me reflect on the mystery of all this week evokes;

'What did I know, what did I know of love's austere and lonely offices?'

Hayden speaks of his own lack of appreciation at the time of what was being done for him by his adopted father in very harsh conditions, not just the physical cold...

As we think on Jesus' journey through Holy Week to the ultimate sacrifice in the austere nature of the cross; in humble recollection, praise and worship, I find myself saying "What do I know? What do I know of love's austere and lonely offices...sharing bread with a betrayer, knowing your close companions will desert and deny you, praying through the dark thoughts of what lies ahead...?"

In such days we find ourselves in, may we give thanks for all God has sacrificed that we may know ineffable love through Christ's life, death and resurrection. May this love open our eyes to the sacrifices being made in our time, those we may know and those we don't.

And if we are able, to think who are we willingly making sacrifices for... that someone in the time ahead might say 'What did I know, what did I know of love's austere and lonely offices?' and offer their own humble recognition and gratitude to God.

To this incredible reality I hope, and I invite you to pray with me for all in isolation on their own, for all in the NHS and care homes, for all those living with grief, distanced from their loved ones. May the peace of God which surpasses all understanding guard their hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.

Peace and Blessings
Stephen