

## **St James's Piccadilly**

### **Camino Companions 2023-24**

#### **Session 3: Suffering and Hope**

**Sunday 17 December - in church, 1-2.30pm**

**Monday 18 December - online, 6.30-8pm**

## **IMAGES**

Winifred Knights, *The Deluge*, 1920 (Tate)

Kehinde Wiley, *Naomi and Her Daughters*, 2013 (Harvard)

## **WORDS AND WISDOM**

### **Walter Brueggemann, 'On Theodicy, on Reading Psalm 145:15-16'**

We gladly confess:

'The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.  
You open your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.'

That we gladly and confidently confess -  
And yet, we notice your creatures not well fed  
but mired in hunger, poverty, and despair.

And yet, we notice the power of evil  
that stalks the best of us:  
the power of cancer, the dread of war, sadness of death -  
'good death' or cruel death.

And so we pray confidently towards you,  
but with footnotes that qualify.  
We pray confidently, but we will not deny in your  
presence the negatives that make us wonder.  
We pray amid our honest reservations,  
give us patience to wait, impatience to care, sadness held honestly  
surrounded by joy over your coming kingdom -

and peace while we wait -  
and peace at the last,  
that we may be peacemakers  
and so your children.

We pray in the name of your firstborn Son, our peacemaker.

"I have been in Sorrow's kitchen and licked out all the pots." —**Zora Neale Hurston**

"It was very important for me not to pretend to have surmounted the pain and terror of that time of my life, very important not to pretend that it left no mark on me. It marked me forever. In some measure I encountered the abyss of my own soul, the labyrinth of my destiny: these could never be escaped..." —**James Baldwin**

### **Cole Arthur Riley, Advent Meditation for 16 December 2023**

I've lost too much this year. Too much to process with an end of year reflection. People, yes. And also dreams and loves. And maybe myself in ways. And in the past 70 days, I've witnessed more death than I've ever had access to through the stories and tears of Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank. The expectation that we perform normalcy right now feels uniquely sinister. We've seen doctors amputating the limbs children without anesthesia. A grandfather kiss the eyeballs of his 3-year-old granddaughter. Dozens of charred feet dangling through a crack in the rubble. Mothers carrying their children in pieces. In pieces. Grief insists on their dignity. To refuse to become numb, to refuse to dismiss our sorrow, is no small act of resistance.

For awhile, Advent has been the liturgical season that's felt realest to me because it possesses a kind of solemnity. As we wait for the beauty and joy and liberation promised, we become acutely aware of how far it feels from us in the present. We are a people easily enamored with shallow platitudes and toxic positivity. We like resolution. We're urged to move on, overcome. In Advent, grief has no timeline. Christmas carries no promise of painlessness.

Jamaica Kincaid wrote, "You cry when you're born because your lungs expand. You breathe... and you come into the world crying, and it's a sign that you're alive." If the birth of Jesus is the coming of God, I hope tears are the first sound on his tongue. A mirror held up to an aching world. We are not okay. Perhaps here, we are free to name it.

Breathe -

*INHALE: I won't rush my sorrow.*

*EXHALE: Grief is an honouring.*

## TASK FOR THE WEEK

Reflect on the order of service for the Eucharist on Sunday 17 December, watch it on YouTube, talk about it with someone at St James's, and explore the theme of Suffering and Hope in relation to the Eucharist. You might want to concentrate on Communion itself and the presence of Christ in the bread and wine, or the hymns, or the readings, the intercessions or sermon, or the overall experience of being together in the building or online. If you would like to, write down or draw some of your reflections and responses, and share this in your small group gatherings.

## QUESTIONS AND IDEAS

1. St Paul talks about three things 'abiding' in us and in God - faith, hope, and love. What makes hope so important in relation to faith and love, and what can that tell us about Christ?
2. Ruth has little power, but she has agency and together with Naomi the story of their lives is a powerful expression of refusing to succumb to despair. What inspiration can you draw from these Hebrew Bible women?
3. St Gertrude of Mechtild said that 'the hammer of love nails us to the cross.' What do you think of this? How does it make you feel, and what questions does it raise?
4. St John of the Cross said that 'the suffering for the neighbour grows the more as the soul unites itself through love with God.' What do you think of this? How does it make you feel, and what questions does it raise?'
5. What does Quobna Ottobah Cugoano's story offer us about suffering and hope in his own time and in 2023 at St James's?
6. When we see suffering, or are in pain ourselves, what might our responses teach us about our faith, and how can we respond to the question 'Where is God in this?'
7. Read about or listen to Ray Minniecon's story on the Forgiveness Project website. He is an Australian Aboriginal pastor and activist, whose lived experience has brought him into the heart of suffering and the need for hope. <https://www.theforgivenessproject.com/stories-library/ray-minniecon/>