

Some people were shocked. Shocked at the linking of such words from this person in such a holy place. Shocked and outraged. Some people in Liverpool, that is. For above the great West doors of their beloved Anglican Cathedral, lit in the pink neon of cheap advertising, had appeared these words: *I Felt You, and I Knew You Loved me*. Words chosen by, and sculpted in the flowing script of, artist Tracey Emin; someone who would not appear to profess anything resembling an orthodox Christian faith. A so-called 'outsider'. 'Outrageous'; 'disturbing'; 'provocative' – even 'offensive', some said.

And yet that wisdom - wisdom sited on and gleaned from a place of boundaries and edges, of artistic enchantment - that wisdom, that 'found theology', recalls us to what we are about today; recalls us to our lives of service in the Name of the outrageous One, the disturbing, provocative, marginal and yes, some say, the offensive One; recalls us to those ministries to which we will shortly renew our commitment.

*I Felt You, and I Knew You Loved me*. It is an ambiguous phrase. Does it refer to the speaker's action in reaching out to and touching another? Or to the act of being touched by the Other? Its multivalency intrigues, leading into deeper resonances, the words of *this* woman resonating with the experience of her foremothers: of hems touched, unstoppable bleeding, feet bathed, perfume poured; of touch given and withheld; of kisses and encounters in a garden.

Viewed as a triptych, the installation reveals more. '*I Felt You*' sits to the left; '*You Loved me*' to the right. This '*I*' and this '*You*' – Thou – meet in the central, focal, panel in an act of recognition, new understanding, faith. '*And I knew*'.

God communicates like that. God takes the matter of the earth – bread and wine, water and oil - oh yes, above all, today, oil, flagons upon flagons of it - to communicate God's self. In the sacraments we are touched; we touch. Christ reaches out to us; we touch Christ. We encounter Him in a moment of meeting, of recognition, of faith. Through these 'visible', 'sensible' signs, God's love is made manifest. Through matter we '*glean the unsaid off the palpable*', in Seamus Heaney's lapidary phrase.

*I Felt You and I Knew You Loved me*. We have been called and sent to share that experience of being touched and loved with the world in which we move. Ministry, lay and ordained, is about enabling the creation of touching places with and for others. People hear and receive the Gospel as liberation when it is communicated as directly as Tracey Emin's neon declaration; not through abstraction but by means of a lived and experienced proposition. *I Felt You*. The practical, down-to-earth expression of love and justice, forgiveness and mercy, that makes God's presence tangible amidst the awful messiness of life.

As part of the community of promise and covenant that is Christ's Church, we are sent so that the world may feel that love, mercy and justice. To proclaim that good news wherever poverty is experienced - poverty of resources, poverty of relationships, poverty of identity. To announce freedom wherever oppression inhibits fullness of life; to open eyes to collusive practices and to advocate for those who have been overlooked, silenced or marginalized; to work for the remission of debt and to struggle alongside all who seek to care for the healing of creation. To disclose through every action we take the justice of the righteousness of God. In credit unions and food pantries, social proscribing and non-profit enterprises, community development and political engagement.

When *Luke* tells the Jesus story, it is, from the beginning, the disclosure of the just and merciful reign of God's Anointed. Luke's entire story speaks persistently of the significance of economic realities for those who are blessed or threatened by the peculiar priorities of the reign of Jesus. And when Luke closes that story, he alone stresses that the One dying on the Cross was truly '*the righteous one*'. The proclaimer and agent of the righteous reign of God.

Today we rededicate ourselves to the justice agenda of God's righteous rule. To that ministry of creating touching places in the world that disclose a different way of being. Places where we enable others to experience palpably the justice of God - and where we in turn are touched by Christ-in-them. Not 'othering' the poor but gathering around shared tables as equals, listening to our sisters and brothers, learning from them and embracing the mysterious wisdom which God wishes to share through them. Sisters and brothers through whom God's wisdom is revealed as clearly as anything written on a scroll or sculpted in pink neon.

'*Every action in which God's justice becomes manifest is sacramental*'. So wrote Rowan Williams. May the things of the earth which we handle in this liturgy, these 'lively signs', recall us to the significance of our daily ministries as we go out - this day - to love and serve in the name of our outrageous, disturbing, provocative and righteous Lord.