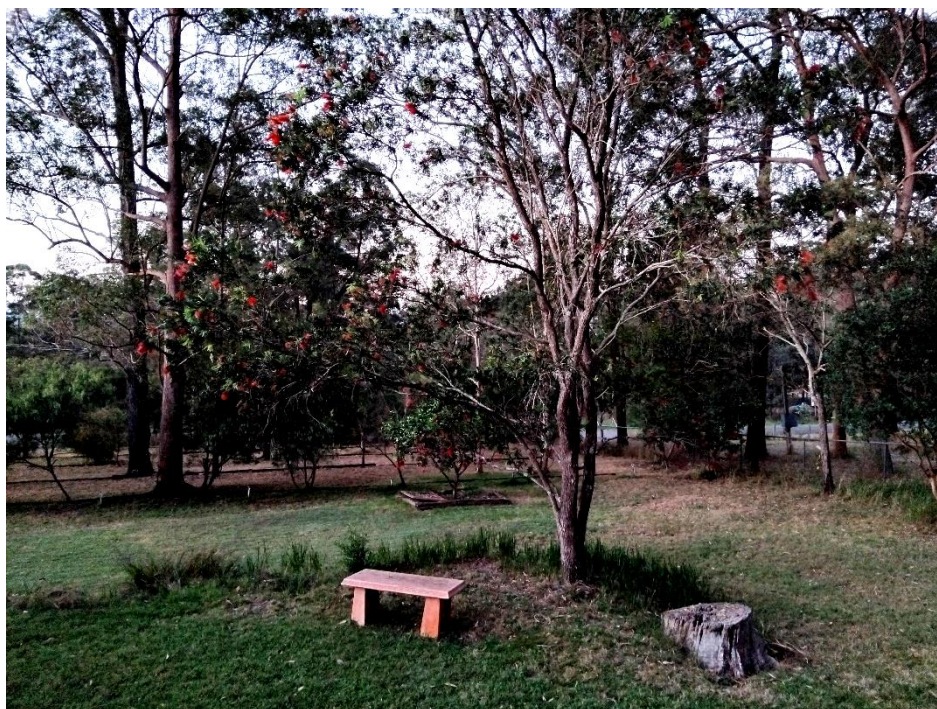


In the Silence



Silence can be a peaceful space where our troubles and joys are faced and discussed with a loving and compassionate God, or a disturbing place where our anxieties, stress, fears and pain crowd in upon us and we want to weep.

Above is a photograph of a seat, and trees. The closest tree, a bottlebrush, is displaying glimpses of its red blooms. It is the view that I have as I type this reflection. The seat speaks to me of being alone and feeling empty, but the red flowers reveal to me specks of life, present among dark leaves.

There are days in our lives that unfold in a predictable and smooth way, but there are many times when a day ends up nothing like what we expected. We find that what we have done has been quite different from what we had planned. Things changed, and we have been changed.

Lately I have felt that my life is in a constant upheaval and I do not know what to expect next. On September 7, my phone, credit card and money was stolen while I was home alone watering the garden and attending to my hens. There was no break-in because the kitchen door was unlocked. I could not phone anyone, but was able to email Sr Linda Mary in Sydney on my laptop so she

could stop my credit card. Accompanied by a neighbour I drove to the police station to inform the police what had happened.

Obtaining and validating a new credit card, cancelling and replacing my phone, took time, effort and help from others.

In all this I began to think about the mysterious way God works. If we turn to the life of Jesus, especially his dying, we can see how God uses suffering, for love to grow. The response to suffering does not need to be hate towards the perpetrator, but can be an opportunity to grow in God's love. Further, amazingly, new life can come through death.

During September we heard of the killing of 37 and injuring of more than 3,000 people in Lebanon, when pagers on one day, and walkie-talkie devices used by Hezbollah operatives the next day, were remotely detonated. Both the militant group, Hezbollah, and Israel are now fighting each other with bombs, rockets etc., escalating the conflict in the Middle East. This does not bring peace, it only increases deaths, injuries and devastation on both sides and the suffering of more people. Can peace come by transforming hate into love?

Jesus suffered a painful drawn out death on a cross. During this time he spoke a few sentences but mostly remained silent. The words he did speak were often of love and kindness for others. His first words asked God to forgive those physically crucifying him. Another time he asked his favourite disciple to take home his grieving mother, and each to comfort the other.

His physical torment was noted when he said he was thirsty. Were these words just describing his physical condition, or also relating to a thirst for the salvation of others?

When one of the men dying beside Jesus asked to be remembered when he came into his kingdom, Jesus did not hesitate to reply, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise", (Luke 23:43). Not "perhaps I shall remember you", or, "some time in the future", but, "*today* you will be with me!"

Finally Jesus asked why God had forsaken him, and then commended his Spirit into his Father's hands. Jesus' questioning of God was not, I think, an accusation, but a connection to our questions asking why God lets us suffer, and uses suffering for good. Jesus spoke no derogatory words to anyone, only

affirming words of love to his Father and others. Even the risen Jesus did not have words of hate for his enemies.

Can the way Jesus behaved on the cross, and our faith in his resurrection which witnessed to the power of God's love over evil, strengthen us in painful times?

In the silence between the words Jesus spoke on the cross, he surely was conscious of his Father's love and presence with him, and with all who suffer.

Silence can be helpful if we train ourselves to regularly use it in a positive manner. Each day we can choose to pause and look at something in nature and give thanks, or think about something beautiful or loving that has come into our minds. We are able then to experience in the silence a conscious awareness of the presence of God's love, and perhaps to deepen our love for God and for others.

By using silence in this loving way, we can turn from using it as a time of despair or emptiness, and let it become for us a time of prayer and peace.

Since the robbery, our letter box was deliberately damaged. I repaired it. A few hours later a butcherbird I knew, but had not seen for a couple of weeks, arrived at the kitchen door. I opened the door. He flew in and on to the lid of a small caddy containing food scraps on the kitchen bench. We had a quiet meeting. He went, and unexpectedly, I felt lifted up. In the silence, a sense of God's presence and the bird's visit became sources of love and new life for me. There was no place in the silence for retaliation towards anyone.

Sister Helen CSC

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