

## The Network

*As part of our exploration of the values of Urban Expression we looked at the story of Shiprah and Puah. Ordered to kill all male Hebrew babies, they refused to do so, deceiving Pharaoh by telling him that the Hebrew babies were always born before they got there. Putting themselves at some considerable risk, their humanity, their identification with the suffering of their people took precedence over their own safety.*

*Several of UE's Core Values point us to the humility of understanding that we are one small part of God's much larger purpose.*

*For the purposes of this prayer, I take as "fact" a number of historically debatable points. It is not know, for example, where the Upper Room was. I choose to locate it in Bethany to illustrate some of the networks to which Jesus belonged.*

On the night when he was betrayed  
by Judas from the village of Kerioth,  
Jesus, the child of Nazareth,  
son of Joseph and Mary,  
cousin of John the Baptist  
and descendent of ancient kings,  
gathered around a table  
with his friends and followers  
in a house in Bethany.

Mary and Martha were there.  
Mary, who wanted to be with Jesus.  
Martha, jealous, and fussing.

Lazarus, their brother, raised from the dead.

Peter and Andrew, James and John,  
Fishermen - nets and networks  
families, friends and customers.  
Matthew, Levi, rich bureaucrat,  
connecting to the rich and powerful of  
Capernium.

As they arrived, Jesus poured water  
drawn from the well by an unnamed woman  
into a bowl  
made by an unnamed potter  
and washed their feet,  
drying them on a towel woven from finest  
Egyptian cotton  
by skilled, but forgotten fingers.

They sat at a table of wood,  
grown nearby  
and shaped by joiner's hands.

They prayed ancient words,  
connecting them to the past,  
to Moses, to Miriam,

Shiprah and Puah,  
connecting them to all who suffer  
in past, present or future.

Connecting them to us.

For, as we gather together,  
we bring our networks,  
our friends and families,  
our colleagues from school,  
work or play.

We bring the groups to which this church  
belongs:

*{replace as necessary}*

Baptist Union of Great Britain, NorthWestern  
Baptist Association, Northern Baptist Learning  
Community, Churches of Openshaw and Abbey  
Hey Together, SE Manchester Group of  
Churches, Baptist Union Retreat Group,  
Manchester Credit Union, East Manchester  
Health and Wellbeing Forum, Manchester  
Muslim Christian Forum and the Inner City  
Mission Network.

All these are gathered around this table  
as we break the bread of life.

Bread, made of flour, ground by unknown  
hands,  
as the Matzo bread which Jesus broke was  
made of flour,  
ground from grain  
grain from the ground  
of agricultural rootedness.

This, Jesus said, is my body.  
Made up of many grains,  
particles of human connection.  
Broken by human disconnection.

This is my body.  
Broken for you.  
Share and eat,  
eat and share.

*[Break and share bread]*

And after supper,  
as friends began the wine-fuelled arguments,  
Jesus lifted the cup  
filled with wine,  
fermented from grapes  
crushed by human heels  
and reminded them of all who are crushed  
themselves.

This is my blood.  
Poured out for you.  
Drink it humbly.  
Give thanks.  
Remember.

*[Lift cup and share wine]*

As violence exploded into everyone for them  
self,  
Jesus forgot his own safety  
and healed his enemy.

As darkness broke relationship  
and fear locked individuals into seclusion,  
Jesus sent them outwards.

So, as we separate from one another  
and go our separate ways  
unite us in the network beyond ourselves.

For you are the one  
in whom all things come together  
alpha and omega, beginning and end.  
Amen