

Violet's Birthday Prayer

Every month or so, we worship with the local URC at St PJs (technically, St Paul's with St John's, but no one would know where you meant if you called it that!). Every month for at least the last couple of years, Violet has been telling us about her 90th birthday party.

So, today is the day.

And it is a day when the rest of the church seems to be feeling pretty low. Three members of the tiny congregation have died recently, including one who died only last week. The church is facing up to the fact that with dwindling numbers, it is very unlikely that they will be sent a new minister when the present incumbent retires. Several of the mission projects that they have undertaken over the years have "failed." And they are finding the task of keeping the church going increasingly burdensome.

Were you there, God,
in 1923?
Were you there, God
as the country fell apart?
Were you there, God
as a divided nation
elected a weak
hung
parliament
that couldn't deal
with the nation's crisis?

Were you there, God
in 1923?
Were you there, God
as the streets of Gorton
vibrated
to the rhythm
of steam hammers
belching out
engines and railways?

Were you there, God
in 1923?
Were you there, God
as a new-born baby
carried the hopes
and the dreams
of her family
that this generation
would be happier
better, richer
more
than the last?

Were you there, God
amidst the sweat
and the grime
in the tears
and the blood?
Were you there, God

in the fears and the screams
in the pain
so great that it couldn't be borne?
Were you there
in the great human story?

Were you there, God
in the dirt of a stable
amidst cattle and oxen,
animals fouling,
sheltering, stinking?
Were you there, God
as a teenager
screamed out
in childbirth,
fearful, alone
no mother for comfort
no midwife for skill,
Were you there, God
were you there?

Were you there, God
as that mother's dreams
were crucified
on a hill of injustice
and cruelty?
Were you there, God
in the loneliness,
isolation
abandonment?

[Silence]

Are you there, God?
Are you there?

Are you there, God?
Are you there?

Are you here, God?
Are you here?

Are you here
in our singing
in our praying?
Are you here
in our loving
in our sharing?
Are you here
in our caring
in our raging?
Are you here
in our playing

in our celebrating?

Are you here, God?
Are you here?

[Silence]

God our past
God our present
God our future

God our journey
God our story
God our history

God our everything
in all places
at all times

Be with us today
as we celebrate Violet's story
and our own.

Be with us
as we celebrate the story
of your everlasting love
and life

Be with us
here
and now

as we join with your people down the ages
and in ages to come
in praying...

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