

Crimson Tears

This poem Eucharist was written for a Remembrance Sunday. I had just read Sebastian Faulk's novel Birdsong with its sensual descriptions and brutal honesty in portraying life in the trenches of the First World War. The image that really stuck with me was that of the padre or priest hiding well behind the front line and administering the sacrament of Eucharist somehow detached from the horror playing out around him. If there is one thing our Eucharistic liturgies should be able to connect with it at a profound level is the horror of human brutality and inhumanity - This is my body... This is my blood.... But the Eucharist also proclaims hope in the midst of hell, proclaims life in the midst of death and so we say, " Never again...".

Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
crushed
beneath countless
regulation boots
the heady fragrance
of opium
obliterated
by the stench
of death
trapped in never-ending
mud drenched
trenches
the crimson blood
of countless soldiers
trickling
staining
the ground
unfulfilled life flowing
back to earth
this is my body...
this is my blood...

Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
lovingly placed
on cold, marble
cenotaph steps
memories
of countless
fallen comrades
stories told
in the fear
and biting cold
of a long night watch
faded, dog-eared
photographs of children
and rationed extravagance

of hurriedly planned
wedding days
laughter dulling
the constant thud
of distant shells
this is my body...
this is my blood...

Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
crushed
into reddish-brown
floral juice
their heavy scent
dulling the pain
an analgesic
to the never-ending
nightmare
of remembering
the narcotic
opiate
that allows us
the blissful relief of the sleep
we so narrowly escaped
the opium
that allows others
to carry on living
forgetting
this is my body...
this is my blood...

Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
fragrancing
a ram-shackled garden
of olive trees
and gnarled vines
the coolness
of a tomb
carved into the rock
the balmy air
of a festival evening
blood marked doorways
an indication of
the angel of death
passing over
tears of blood
fall in anguish
the cup of suffering

overflowing
not my will but yours
this is my body...
this is my blood...

Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
fading to white
in the burning heat
of the midday sun
the moon eclipses
the sky turns dark
thunder rolls
and the curtain
demarcating sacred
from profane
hangs in tatters
ashen flesh
gives up its spirit
white shrouds
proclaim surrender
and envelop mourning
fragile white poppies
whisper
memories of peace
this is my body...
this is my blood...

Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
crushed
dust to dust
ashes to ashes
fertilising
enriching the soil
the dormancy
of winter
stirred
seed shells cracking
soft white shoots
reaching for the sun
chlorophyll greening
as the first radiance
of light kisses life
the wheat grows
defiant and swollen
the grapes hang
heavy with juice
this is my body...

this is my blood...

Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
crushed
bread broken
and passed hand to hand
by human touch
tears wiped away
with the softness
of a woman's hair
wine is poured
and sloshed joyously
a raucous celebration
of blood-tied camaraderie
once sworn enemies
differences forgotten
share the advent
of God incarnate
over barbed wire fences
a taste of heaven
in the midst of hell
this is my body...
this is my blood...

And so we pause
to remember
to re-member
and to mourn
to break bread
and share wine
this is our body
this is our blood
in death we are united
with one another
and with earth
in life we are called
to live side by side
in community
to eat together
and say never again
never again
shall poppies fall
as crimson tears
crushed beneath
countless boots
In the rising of the sun
and in its going down
we shall remember them.

[Share bread and wine]

Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
reminding us
of the blood shed
and violence
of human life
Poppies fall
like ashen tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
reminding us
of promises made
that never again
shall the world go to war
Poppies fall
like crimson tears
raining from the sky
fragile petals
beauty from brokenness
new life from death
community from disunity
the possibility of heaven from hell.

©Clare McBeath & Tim Presswood, 2006