

## The Sound of Prayer

Pray Now is a collection of prayers, meditations and blessings produced by The Church of Scotland every year. Here, as part of the 2018 Together We Pray initiative we offer you a special sneak preview of Pray Now's soon-to-be published volume, also called *Together We Pray*.

Together We Pray is a national initiative calling the Church of Scotland to join together in prayer. The following excerpt can be used to join in Together We Pray whether you are praying individually, with family or in a small group, with a friend, in a pastoral care situation, a meeting or worship gathering.

This excerpt is specifically taken from the section *The Sound of Prayer*.

### Vibrations

*How shall I pray?  
Are tears prayers, Lord?  
Are screams prayers,  
or groans,  
or sighs  
or curses?*

Ted Lodder, from 'How Shall I Pray' in *Guerrillas of Grace*

A torrent of noise.

Wave after wave pouring in, battering against all in its path.

The life of a sound wave can be a violent one. Crashing, reverberating, permeating and engulfing. It may even meet itself coming back, pouring scorn upon itself, until stuck in a loop, it screams for escape.

At other times it is a gentler affair. As intimate as a whisper or mezzo piano music dancing gracefully, caressing the ear of the listener until finally settling and resting within.

The listener? Who is that? The one who hears? The one who waits to be told? The truth seeker? The audience? The one with no choice but to bear witness to the noise?

Sometimes we may imagine a kind of blue, or we try to paint it black, but regardless of how much colour we associate with it, we never get to see sound. It is made visible in the reaction of its recipient, bending and bowing to its every whim. The vibrations are felt, whether you are directly in their path or watching others dance in tempo.

As I recall news reports of the Manchester bombing and of the Grenfell Tower disaster flooding our screens, reports of school shootings flashing up on social media feeds and bleeding across broadsheets, I am reluctant to imagine the noise.

It feels indelicate for me to acquaint myself intimately with something that did not affect me directly.

Yet I hear it. I feel it.

Even at great distance, it has not only left its mark, but I recognise its sound. We can be overly familiar with cries of grief, of frustration and hurt, forgetting each has its own voice and character, a melody line of truth and pain that weaves together with other twisting lines to create a dissonant antiphony that is both terrible and inspiring.

The sounds of these recent disasters still echo within the walls of homes, schools and hospitals. They do not lie dormant in cemeteries, mortuaries and ruined buildings. Instead, they ring like tinnitus in the ears of those caught in the first wave. They resonate with those outside the blast radius, who were far from the lick of flame and pillar of smoke, but still recognised the call for help, the need for action and the urgent need for solidarity.

In times of disaster, we invariably hear stories of the generosity and courage of others, whether first responders or communities gathering around those who need support. We hear stories of doors thrown open wide to harbour those needing shelter, of collections of money and supplies. In the midst of this beautiful display of humanity, we hear the blend of new voices, of creative responses, we hear soaring solos, well-rehearsed choirs, we hear improvisation and repetition, sound and fury, and yet still there is the same old rhetoric.

The same empty offering of 'thoughts and prayers'.

And in that space, when something could have been said to temper the litany of denial, political posturing and blaming the other, the opportunity for someone to say something thoughtful and prayerful is missed.

But, the sound of prayer is there.

Beyond the clichéd rumblings of those who need to say something.

It is there.

Perhaps as a whisper in the ear of someone grieving.

Perhaps as grace said for a meal thrown together at an impromptu gathering in a makeshift shelter.

Perhaps as a concert, a celebration of shared humanity with stories and songs and smiles and cries and cheers and howls and every noise that is appropriate at a gathering that is brave and raw and honest yet unsure in some ways about its own identity.

A concert? Yes. A liturgy? Perhaps. A prayer? A rite of passage?

In the midst of disaster and pain and grief and loss and anger, what does prayer sound like?

Like the sound wave that cannot be seen, we witness these prayers in the movement of others.

We see the prayerful preparation of emergency accommodation, of impromptu meals.

We see the prayers of pain and hope in rituals and rites.

We see the prayers of comfort in bouquets and candles.

We may not always recognise it through the noise and disquiet, but it is there, playing out across our television screens, amongst us in stadiums and in kirks, whispering in homes and echoing through hallways.

Prayer does not always start when we choose.

It may not always crescendo to shouts of hallelujah and songs of praise, but when the invisible is made visible, the vibrations are felt far and wide.