

*justice can rise up, and hope and history  
rhyme* (OTA7 2020)

One of my earliest visits to Warrington was when I accompanied Bishop Gray who was attending the memorial service at St Elphin's Church in the aftermath of the Warrington bombing. This tragic event had cut short two young lives; Jonathan Ball and Tim Parry, injured more than fifty others and left a community traumatised, bereft and justifiably angry. Yet these same families and this same town pulled together and established the Warrington Peace Centre which more than a quarter of a century later continues to nurture reconciliation in many forms.

Another fine example of people of peace showing themselves bigger, bolder and better than the purveyors of division, conflict and revenge was Gordon Wilson whose last task as a father was to hold the hand of his daughter beneath the rubble of the Remembrance Day bombing in Enniskillen as her young life ebbed away.

Yet despite his grief he refused to surrender his dignity or his daughter's memory with bitterness. Justice, God's justice certainly; but vengeance no, despite being criticised and even pilloried for taking his stand.

These were ordinary people, going about their ordinary every day lives who, through the hateful crimes of others were thrust into life changing grief and trauma; but who responded with herculean character, determined to do right by their loved ones by means that the people of violence could never match. Their response to hideous violence bore eloquent testimony to the vision proclaimed by Jesus in today's Gospel, which many of us struggle to accept.

They bore witness to a better humanity, a richer soul and a greater hope. This greater spirit is captured in the words of one of the C20th's greatest poets, Seamus Heaney in these verses from *The Cure at Troy*:

Human beings suffer,  
they torture one another,  
they get hurt and get hard.  
No poem or play or song  
can fully right a wrong  
inflicted or endured.

History says, Don't hope  
on this side of the grave.  
But then, once in a lifetime  
the longed for tidal wave  
of justice can rise up,  
and hope and history rhyme.

So hope for a great sea-change  
on the far side of revenge.  
Believe that a further shore  
is reachable from here.  
Believe in miracles  
and cures and healing wells.

Call the miracle self-healing:  
The utter self-revealing  
double-take of feeling.

The towering spirits that refuse to bend to vengeance are miracle workers; who find a way to double take their feelings and create something totally dignified in the face of grief.

Heaney witnessed first-hand the conflicts that besmirched and betrayed the population of Ireland. He refused to be drawn into the language and the methods of hate. His poem identifies and celebrates the goodness of the human heart and the depth of human hope which he recognised as a universal phenomenon. He drew parallels between the words of his poem with the hope unlocked as Nelson Mandela's prison door was opened. And these verses have frequently been recited in support of peaceable paths and hopeful visions. May we always side with these same hopes.

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