

Prayers about War

Carol Penner

How big is God?

God, you've seen all that we do under the sun.
Everything done in darkness is clear to you.
When we kill each other at arm's length,
the blood is on our hands.
And so we prefer the slingshot, the arrow:
we see and hear the body fall,
but our hands are cleaner.
Our weapons get harder and faster:
catapults give way to cannonballs,
the musket morphs into the AK47,
the squinting eye becomes laser telescopes.
You know our passion for long distance killing.
We drop bombs from above the clouds
and entire cities evaporate
without us hearing a sound.
But even that's not enough for us.
Now we create missiles that explode
half a world away with the push of a button.
Not satisfied, we plan and plot
for platoons of robot soldiers, row on row.
We will set them loose and wait.
The blood of our victims
cries out from the ground,
and our killing machines
will have no ears to hear.
O Jesus, make it stop.

God of angel armies,
can you conquer our warring hearts?
Can you vanquish the human war machine?
Are you big enough to dismantle
the military industrial complex?

We need peace like a virus
that inserts itself in our very bodies;
serenity and compassion
replicating at the cellular level.
A pandemic of peacefulness falling upon us,
taking away our appetite for war,
opening our eyes and ears
to our mutual aching vulnerabilities.
Can we, like the angels, greet each other
with the message, "Fear not"?
Spirit of hope, brooding over our deep
and compulsive desires to kill each other,
cement in us visions of a world
healed beyond our wildest dreams.

God's remedy

You are the God who sees.
You see the victims of war,
and you bring them to us.
We turn on the news and they are there.
We go to the farthest reaches
of our social media feed
and they are ever before us.
You carry them to our borders as refugees,
hollow-eyed people with no tears left.
They come with almost nothing,
having left even hope behind.
What they carry is the weight
of indelible memories;
loved ones torn away,
bodies in the streets,
hungry children and no food.
They have seen and done things to survive
they could not have imagined,
and which they cannot express.
They have been transformed by terror.
They know in their bones
that community and decency
are ephemeral.

Walking survivors of hell on earth,
they are too wary to collapse in our arms.

God, you know all that needs to be healed.
You have a remedy
for the inner wounds that fester.
Give them strength to keep breathing.
Help us shoulder their sorrows
as we recall them back
to the land of the living.
Show us how to help them
with the thousand details
of making a new home in a new country.
Knit them together inside and out,
as they learn moment by moment
that there can be life after death
and peace after the fiercest season.

On the battlefield

The wars begin in our minds.
We become convinced
not only that we are right
but that our enemies are monsters.
We become convinced
that we are doing the world a service
by exterminating them.
And so, dear God, hear this prayer:
protect our minds from propaganda.
Deliver us from hatred.
Help us to discern truth and lies,
and to resist the vicious pack mentality
of every mob and army.

We give our allegiance to you.
In our time of trial keep us true to you.
And when violence surrounds us
(and it will surround us)
and when decency and love
and trust in humanity is shattered,
into your hands we give our spirits.

You are the great Safe-keeper
holding us tight when all is breaking loose,
protecting and preserving us.
You are the resurrection and the life,
picking us up, dusting us off
and sending us into the light of a new day.

Longest night prayer

There are good years and bad years,
and then there are years from hell.
Hear our prayer, O God, for all who are tortured by war.
You know the anguished cries,
and the hearts that have turned to stone.
These are people who will die unless you save them.
We need a Saviour for those who sit in the shadow of death:
for children who have lost their parents,
and have no one to take care of them;
for teenagers forced to fight,
and who can't imagine a normal life;
for all who have killed and have witnessed the killing;
for all who are fleeing the violence
and looking for a place of refuge;
for parents who have no choices
and see their children starve;
for seniors who cannot believe the losses they have seen.
God, you know the particular pain of each one,
the stories of death and sexual assault,
the stories of homes and homelands destroyed.
You gather our stories in your arms,
and in this longest night, you hold them and us.
Hope shines like an infinitely distant star,
like a star over Bethlehem,
shining over towering concrete walls
and machine gun battlements.
What we need is angels with good news of peace on earth,
lighting the sky of our lives, offering relief.
On this longest night, in the mystery of your love,
steal into our world again.
Be born again in hearts that work for peace,

who will find a way through the chaos that is war.
By the tender mercy of our God,
the dawn from on high will break upon us:
we trust that you will guide our feet
into the way of peace.
This is our prayer, may it be so.

About the author

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