

## Reflection for World Aids Day - 1st December 2004

by Rev Elder Cecilia Eggleston

### Psalm 42

When I was in the USA in the summer, I saw a video about the history of the protest group Act Up. One part of the film showed people with anti-Bush placards protesting outside the White House in Washington. They were protesting against the President's indifference towards those with HIV/AIDS and the lack of funding. In one very moving and distressing part of the protest, individuals came forward with the ashes of loved ones, and, thrusting the urns through the White House railings, sprinkled the ashes on the White House lawn.

It was a powerful and shocking thing to realise what these people were doing and how desperate they had become in face of bureaucratic hostility and societal ignorance. The fashion styles in the film told us that we were watching a time from George Bush Senior's time as President. The sadness was that so little has changed in the intervening years.

This World AIDS day, all over the world people will be taking to the streets to raise awareness about this disease, to demand full and fair access to treatment, to remember all those affected by HIV and to mourn those who have died. It is important every MCC congregation is part of this outpouring. Jesus was always on the side of the oppressed and marginalised. We must be too.

But what about after World AIDS Day? What about the other 364 days of the year? A friend of mine, who is HIV+, told me once "Lighting a candle is no longer enough".

In South Africa, many people don't want to talk about HIV and AIDS. It is called "The Great Silence". In Europe, some people speak of their shame in being diagnosed as HIV+, having known about unsafe sex or needle sharing and the risks involved. They too, don't want to talk about their situation, concerned about other people's judgement.

We need to break the silence; we need to lift people out of their shame. We need to create an atmosphere in our congregations and communities that offers hope without judgement. Central to Christian faith is the incarnation - the belief that God became human in Christ, that God revealed Godself in and through a body. Celebrating Christ's humanity and emphasising that the body is part of God's creation is part of developing a healthy attitude towards sex.

The erotic language of the Song of Songs needs to be re-captured and placed back within the church. In MCC, many of us have found our spiritual journeys interwoven with our sexuality. However, this has often been a negative experience, bound up with rejection and shame. It is very challenging to equate sexual desire with the "yearning" for God described in Psalm 42 and to describe the ecstasy of lovemaking as a spiritual experience. Bible study and group discussions on such topics will help to reclaim this aspect of spirituality.

There are those in our congregations who are not able to be open about their sexuality. For them, church might be the only place that they are able to have such conversations and ask for support. We need to have information about the different agencies that offer services in our local area. We need to understand the impacts of the medication on people's lives and the journeys of those who have lived for many years with HIV, as well as those who are newly diagnosed.

Above all, we need to work with partnership with others to challenge injustice and prejudice. We are called to bring hope. Act Up made a difference, so must we.

What is one thing that you can do to make a difference about HIV/AIDS beyond World AIDS Day?

Read through the Song of Songs, perhaps with your loved one, or try and compose one of your own. Thank God for your sexuality and your body.

God Bless Cecilia

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