

## A Prayer/Meditation

Compassionate and Merciful God,  
Your Word reminds us time and again that we are to walk alongside the poor  
and those in any sort of need.  
Yet in every society, we choose to set up a hierarchy based on race or birth or wealth  
or any human difference which we can use to claim you as ours because we are superior.

Many years ago, in a hot and dry and humid place, new and strange to me,  
where I and others had been made extremely welcome as important visitors,  
we were laden with amazing gifts of precious materials  
and specially made expensive tokens,  
and always offered freshly made food and drinks  
at the table of the best room in the house.

And then we were asked to dress in clothing we would not mind getting dirty  
and taken on a visit our hosts were not sure was 'correct' for us.  
We walked from the bus down a dusty track, to be met by a group of women.  
They too offered food – a packet of cheap biscuits and half a tiny warm orange,  
and cloaks of unravelling thin nylon as our welcome.  
They too invited us into their homes – one dark room, made of the same mud as the road,  
with no window and only the small doorway for light  
and everything for cooking, eating, sleeping – living – crowded in that one space.

These were Dalit women, who worked clearing the bones and shit  
from where the meat we ate in other homes was slaughtered;  
who never ate meat themselves;  
who were despised and rejected because of their daily contact with dirt and death;  
who had used all their wages to buy us gifts instead of buying vegetables  
to supplement the grain of their family meals that week;  
who danced for us because we had honoured them by our visit;  
and wept when we left because they felt they had not honoured our visit enough.

I treasure my small piece of nylon,  
just as I ate the biscuits and orange to honour them,  
though their need meant I could hardly swallow.  
God dwelt in those small huts,  
and was revealed in the welcoming arms and dance of those women  
as Emmanuel once lay in a manger.

Compassionate and Merciful God, teach us again that you require us to  
“do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with your God”  
that our world may be changed, that we may be changed,  
and that all people may be free to live life in all its fullness.

Rev. Alison Tomlin

## Enough is enough: a confession

We watch India take her place  
in the growing economies of the world  
and we ignore the forgotten millions  
whose stories of struggle  
for land and livelihoods  
go unseen and untold.

**And we confess enough is enough.**

We watch as western countries jostle for position  
as the economy falters on the world stage  
and we ignore the forgotten millions  
whose stories of struggle  
for a living wage and fair pricing  
go unseen and untold.

**And we confess enough is enough.**

We watch as India's rural communities  
gather in solidarity  
empowered to raise their voices  
and demand their share in land and wealth  
and we watch from a distance  
afraid to become too involved.

**And we confess enough is enough.**

And we look at our own communities  
isolated and fragmented  
disempowered and despondent  
cuts and redundancies starting to bite  
and we watch from a distance  
inspired by the solidarity  
of India's stories of hope  
and we begin to dare to dream.

**And we confess enough is enough.**

God who created a world  
of abundance and wealth  
forgive us for wanting more and more  
and ignoring and silencing the cries of need.  
Help us to learn that enough is enough  
that in solidarity our tears fall to the ground  
to become seeds of transformation and hope  
that together we may reap in joy.

**And we profess that enough is enough.**

Christian Aid harvest 2012

## Dalit Madonna sings the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55) A Song of Transition



- The Dalit Madonna is painted by an Indian artist called Jyoti Sahi and is part of the Methodist Church Collection of Contemporary Christian Art.
- The word “Dalit” means broken and is the name given to the so-called “untouchables” in Indian society who are completely outside the caste system.
- And so as we remember those who are broken and oppressed in the world today let us hear Mary’s song of transition and transformation – the Magnificat.

### Read Luke 1:46-55 - Mary’s Song of Praise

When I was sent to train for the ministry at Queen’s, I was excited by the possibility of being able to spend a term at TTS – the Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary in South India. Queen’s had an exchange programme with TTS and each year an Indian student would come and spend a term with us in Birmingham and a British student would go and spend a term in Madurai. I had the privilege of being that student in my final year.

TTS has a special ministry with Dalits. The caste system is so ingrained into Indian society that even when people make the transition from Hinduism to Christianity their caste makes that transition with them. There are still churches where people refuse to drink from the same communion cup as a Dalit and will certainly refuse to accept a Dalit as their minister.

According to the Rig Veda, sacred texts that date back to oral traditions of more than 3,000 years ago, the different castes emerged from various parts of the body of the first man whom Brahma created from clay. Each group had a function in sustaining the life of society - the social body.

- Brahmins, or priests, were created from the mouth. They were to provide for the intellectual and spiritual needs of the community.
- Kshatriyas, warriors and rulers, were derived from the arms. Their role was to rule and to protect others.
- Vaishyas, landowners and merchants, sprang from the thighs, and were entrusted with the care of commerce and agriculture.
- Shudras, artisans and servants, came from the feet. Their task was to perform all manual labour.
- Dalits were the lowest of the low – emerging from below the feet and have always been expected to do all the tasks which are associated with dirt and excrement.

Dalit women in India are oppressed at three levels. They are poor; they are women; and they are Dalits. I can remember being able to spot the Dalit women on the bus because they were the ones who were not allowed to wear sari blouses and were constantly struggling to maintain a sense of decency and keep their breasts covered. They are also very vulnerable to sexual exploitation and trafficking – even within their own community. For Dalit men the suppression and rape of women helps to compensate for their own lack of power in society.

For many Indians “Dalit Madonna” would be a contradiction in terms. How could God choose someone so lowly to be the mother of Christ? And yet that is exactly what God does. Mary may not have been an outcast but she was certainly not from the upper echelons of society either. Her song of praise – the Magnificat – is an anthem for Dalits and all oppressed people everywhere as it celebrates how God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; how God has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.

Britain does not have the formal caste system which India does, although there have been incidences of caste discrimination within the UK. Nevertheless there are still different layers within our society and ways of measuring status. Our gender, our postcode, our ethnicity – to give just a few examples – can either open or close doors to us. Our work, our education, our motherhood – or the lack of any of these - all affect the way in which we are viewed by others. Our marital status is precisely that - a status!

How much freedom do we really have to move on? How easy is it to make the transition from council flat to own home; from unemployed to employed; from virgin to mother?

Jyoti Sahi’s painting is a very fertile image. The Madonna is holding the fruit of her womb. She sits in a field of wheat with a sunflower growing by her side. The image has arisen out of an Indian folk symbol - the grinding stone, which is often set in the courtyard of traditional Indian homes. It consists of two stones, one fixed and stable, known as the Mother Stone. This generally has a hollow part carved out of its centre, into which fits a smaller seed or egg-shaped stone known as the Baby Stone. The Baby Stone is free to move about, and is used to grind various foodstuffs which are placed in the hollow of the Mother Stone. The baby and the mother stones together can enable wheat to make the transition into bread – but in order to make that transition the wheat has to be crushed and broken – as the word Dalit expresses.

This is an image of both life and death. And it seems to me that we often sing and read the Magnificat as a song of praise for what God has already accomplished and forget that there are many people in the world today who still long to make the transition from oppressed to blessed; from empty to filled; from virgin to mother.

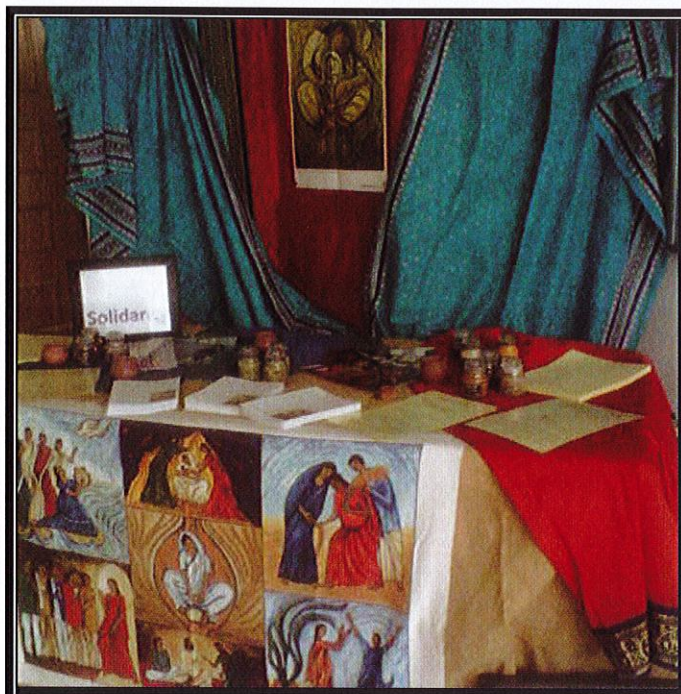
Rev. Nicola Vidamour

#### Some questions for reflection or discussion

1. What gives you status in society? What denies you status in society?
2. Who are the “Dalits” in your church/community?
3. When have you felt broken and oppressed?
4. What transitions in your life are you still longing to make?

## A Dalit Solidarity Prayer station

- A prayer station can be a simple and effective way of focussing thoughts and prayers around the issues of casteism and discrimination.
- The following ideas are only starters and can be adapted as appropriate, according to what is required and what is available.



**Fabrics** can be draped over the available space/tables. Indian bedspreads could be used, sari fabric adds a beautiful touch.

**Dalit candles** are sold by a number of UK based agencies who work with Dalit people. They are in small clay pots, such as those made and used by Dalit people. Try the Life Association website: <http://www.lifeassociation.org.uk/dalit-candles.html> If candles will be a hazard, the same pots, once the candle is burned, can be used with a battery-operated tea light inside.

**Spices** add fragrance, texture and interest. Use small bowls of coloured spices such as turmeric, chilli powder, cardamom pods, star anise... Life Association also produce Dalit spice sets in small jars, which look very attractive.

**The Dalit Madonna** belongs to the Methodist Church Collection of Contemporary Christian Art. Posters may be available from Methodist Publishing, 17, Tresham Road, Orton, Southgate, Peterborough, PE2 6SG [www.methodistpublishing.org.uk](http://www.methodistpublishing.org.uk) or simple greeting cards can be purchased from Methodist Women in Britain.

**Prayer pointers and other information** can be presented on cards, preferably laminated. The sheets which follow may be appropriate or other material from this pack or from various websites, including the Methodist Women in Britain website ([www.mwib.org.uk](http://www.mwib.org.uk)) could be used.

## He stretched out his hand and touched him...

*“When Jesus had come down from the mountain, great crowds followed him; and there was a leper who came to him and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, if you choose, you can make me clean.’ He stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, ‘I do choose. Be made clean!’ Immediately his leprosy was cleansed. Then Jesus said to him, ‘See that you say nothing to anyone; but go, show yourself to the priest, and offer the gift that Moses commanded, as a testimony to them.’”*

*Matthew 8:1-4*

**Jesus never shrank from touching a person who was considered unclean.**

**How can we “touch” Dalit people today?**



Officially, “untouchability” has been abolished in India  
But there is a widespread lack of political will to enforce these laws.

On average...

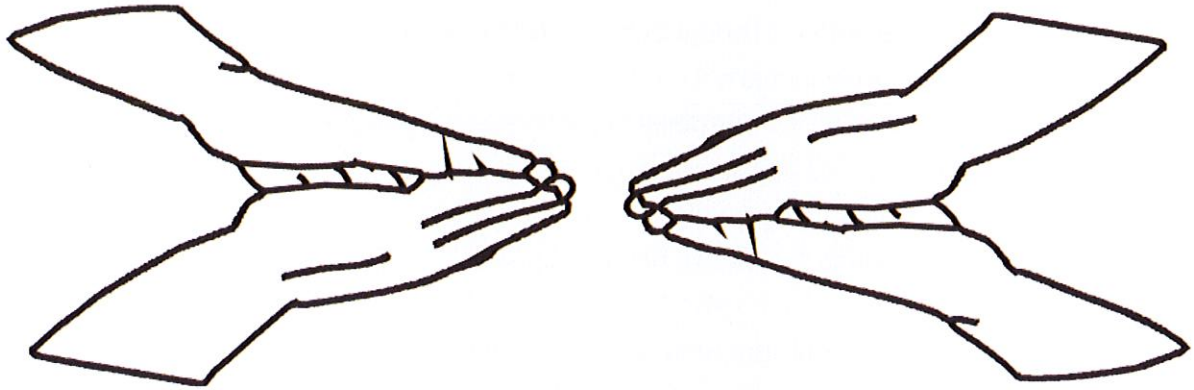
- ...every 18 minutes there is a crime committed against a Dalit
- ...every day, three Dalit women are raped, two Dalit people are murdered and 11 are assaulted

Dalit women have been described as victims of three-fold discrimination, because of their poverty, class and gender. They are often landless, lacking opportunities for education, health care, access to legal rights and food security.

Although Casteism is integral to Hinduism, it also infiltrates the Christian church in India.

Incidences of caste discrimination also take place within the UK.

# Sharing peace



If there is someone else here at this prayer station with you,

## **share the peace**

in a simple way,

devised by a Christian musician and theologian from Singapore:

- In pairs, face one another, but without making eye contact
- Place your palms together (like praying hands) and hold out your hands to the other person who places her/his hands in the same way; touching fingertips with you
- Now place your hands gently on the outside of her/his hands, and stroke them from the wrist to the fingertips, afterwards putting your hands back together so she/he can do the same to you.
- Although you do not make eye contact at all, you may like to whisper “peace” to one another.

## Meditate and Pray

A Dalit meditation on John 4; from material prepared by the Student Christian Movement, India, for the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity January 2013. Available on [www.ctbi.org.uk](http://www.ctbi.org.uk)

Alone with his thoughts he sat by the well  
 He looked wearied by the heat and dust  
 Of our desert land  
 I approached quietly  
 Not wanting to disturb this man Jew  
 I was so used to being despised  
 I despised myself  
 A Samaritan woman – a nobody  
 Who had grown not to care for herself  
 Or for what others thought ...  
 Grown comfortable just ...  
 Looking down...  
 Freedom came to me by degrees  
 With each word carried  
 On that day's gentle breeze  
 And when he finally said,  
 "I who speak to you am He ..."  
 I knew it was the truth  
 It was the Messiah who had asked me for water ...  
 God's daughter returned  
 To her crushed people that day with a message  
 Come and see  
 Walk with me, head held high  
 Towards freedom

Loving God of all our imaginings and strivings, we pray that we may be willing for you to dispel the complacencies in our lives, the comfort zones with which we are so familiar and that you would move us ever forward to sharpen our perspectives and inform our minds, so that we may truly understand the situation of the Dalit people.

Enlighten the minds of all those in positions of power and influence, so that they may work with a careful conscience and a reverent respect to bring about changes and chances for those for whom choice is a rare luxury.

Show us all the way forward to encourage, to empower and above all to continue without losing heart the prayers for Dalit families and communities.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who so often placed Himself alongside the poor and undervalued.

Amen

Joy Chapman



## Vazhipaduvom - Dalit Liturgies

### Introduction

This work has been taken from material produced by a group at the Dalit Resource Centre, Tamil Nadu Theological Seminary, Arasardi-Madurai, India.

The rationale underlying the material is important because of its radical approach. It opens up avenues of thought which may be unfamiliar to us but which will also challenge our preconceived ideas.

It maintains that within Christianity there have been two strands of thought which have been welded into one whereas they should have been maintained as two.

- Firstly the approach to God made by those people who have been dominated by society.
- Secondly those persons who actually form the dominating group. Dalits and Tribal communities are part of that first group.

These two aspects together with God's approach to humanity form the three strands which are included in these worship dialogues.

God's story to humanity

The human story of the dominant

The human story of the dominated

### **Lord's Prayer for use by Dalits and non Dalits together**

Lord, who art with us always.

Let your name be praised in the liberation of the oppressed.

Let the kingdom of the meek be established on earth.

Let your justice be established with the removal of all unjust forces.

We thank thee for the power of pardon you have given to the poor, women and Dalit.

Bless us so that the oppressors repent and seek in pardon.

Relieve the sufferings of the meek from those oppressive forces.

Praise the Lord, let his kingdom come.

Amen.

Material on these two pages adapted from VAZHIPADUVOM (Dalit Liturgies)  
Published by Dalit Resource Centre, Tamilnadu Theological Seminary. August 2000

## Confessions

These confessions are part of a worship service where non Dalits recognise their own failures and the part they have played in maintaining the system of discrimination.

We too can recognise in ourselves the ways in which we are responsible for injustice perpetuated by our own apathy and acceptance of situations together with our lack of will to act in order to change things.

As we say these prayers let us be aware of the implications both for society in India and within our own lives.

*In order to bring home the idea that we are all responsible for injustice at some level, it is suggested that the entire worship group is divided into two groups, A and B; one group will represent the voice of the powerless or the Dalit, the other group will represent the voice of the powerful or non-Dalit. Both groups will read all prayers in turn, so that everyone stands in the shoes of both oppressor and oppressed.*

### Non Dalits confessing to Dalits (group A to group B)

Our dear brothers and sisters, we used you as slaves in our houses, fields and in other jobs. We were party to the socio-economic political and cultural oppression. We used marriage to prop up the oppressive structure of the unjust social setups and delayed our repentance. We humbly seek forgiveness for this.

### The Dalits give pardon (group B to group A)

Brother and sisters, your repentance makes us happy. Our forefathers, for years together, have continued to forgive you. We give that pardon to you now. Now let us all join together to fight for the rights and liberation of Dalits.

### Rich confessing to poor (group A to group B)

All along, we have lived under the assumption that economic disparity is natural and the benefits we have derived are justifiable, and they are God's blessings only. We have refused to accept that your life has been affected because of this. We realise that we are also indirectly responsible for your miserable condition. We acknowledge the fact that our lives are comfortable and luxurious only because you were not given proper wages.

### Poor pardoning the rich (group B to group A)

Brothers and sisters, your repentance brings us happiness. Give the fruits of repentance by experiencing the Lord Jesus Christ's stand that it is difficult for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God. Lead a simple life and learn to share. Join in our struggle to fight all oppressive economic regimes.

*Prayers are then repeated, in each case read by the other group*