



*A collection of poems
by Revd Lucy Berry*

*with starter questions
for reflection*

A Chair Like That

A lovely thing is a well-made chair.
Solid and sturdy. No splinters there.
A kitchen chair or a dining chair,
ordinary-seeming
or polished and gleaming –
either is best when you ache to rest.

You could gaze at an unavailable chair
and if it looks comfortable, I swear
you're *longing* to sit down
there.

There are poorly-made chairs
that you can't quite trust,
rickety ones with a cross-piece bust
which you'd never sit down in unless you must.

Or chairs which aren't quite chairs at all;
you see them sagging in a hall,
or they're in a skip, or against a wall,
and they look *like* a chair! But a thing's not a chair
if it can't bear the weight it's meant to bear...

And even a well-made, *lovely* chair,
with cushioned arms, put away somewhere
is no use on earth, if it's not there;
if it's disappeared into thin air.

When you're tired to death, you need a chair
built to bear what it's meant to bear;
never collapsing, never a splinter,
always sit-innable, summer or winter.
A well-made chair that won't fall flat.

Oh!
And a welcome just like that.



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If Parables Mean Nothing

If parables mean nothing
then we could go ahead,
and pass by; offering no room,
no medicine, no bed.

If Bible now means nothing,
tell Joseph to go home
and tell the pregnant Mary
she never should have come.

If all of it all means nothing
then we can close the door
on ancient ways of welcome
that we believed before,

and write to Abram and his wife
and tell them of the danger,
the foolishness, the silliness,
of welcoming the stranger;

and email Jesus right away
and, gently, tell him how
the hungry and the naked
just aren't our business now.

If what He said means nothing,
just throw away the Book,
for it has no authority
and we are off the hook.

But if the things He told us
still mean good news to you,
then open up your hearts, minds, arms -
for there is *loads* to do!



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Some Kinds of Spitting

Tell me, which kind of hostile? He said.

The kind where they pull me over
for Driving Whilst Brown,
said a young man.
The kind they still sit apart from us
in the canteen;
and the kind they dislike I support
my grandad's island's old Olympic team.

No, said a youngish mother:
Shop-man shout loudly-loudly
to make me understand
when he know I do.
Or, walk down our street
lady still ignore me
after know my face eight years –
or, pull their children
away my children in our park.

And another man said:
That place they put you in
with planes taking off so very nearby,
that they take my belt away
in case I rather hang.

And this older woman said:
The kind where they say,
there's a nice church
you'd feel a lot more comfortable in,
just down the road.

[continued over...]



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And a young girl said:
The kind where they spit.

And some unseen person said:
Fellows, these are all some kinds of spitting.

And we agreed, and He agreed,
that that was it.

A note from the author

The voice of God speaks in the first line of this poem because all the routine nastiness mentioned in the poem happens, every day, to God. Wherever you have persecution, victimisation, marginalisation, separate development, tokenism and outright hostility, it is happening to God. These are our Matthew 25 moments, the meeting and greeting - or refusing to greet - people we believe to be unlike us. It's so tricky, this business of not recognising God. The Bible is full of it.



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Jesus-Under-The-Dirt

There is a big man with no English
on the High Street
who begins to cry if you give him money.
He calls you “Mama” and wants to hug you,
and he is a horror to look at:
running nose and mucus on his sleeves
and an open sore on his lip and
the dirtiest wrists,
under his sweater where no shirt is.
Odd shoes.
And grey-grease-naked ankles like you’ve
never seen, under no socks.

I hate it when he hugs me;
and he hangs on a long time.
But if he is Jesus, under the dirt,
if he is raving, hungry Jesus, under the dirt,
then I must hug him.
Mustn’t I?

I haven’t got far with this contamination thing.
I have moved beyond
dogs and crumbs-under-the-table,
but not far.

Foxes have holes, birds have nests.
Sobbing, aching Jesus-Under-The-Dirt
has no place to lay his head.



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Waves

No-one's arriving in waves;
but on waves of terror and hope.
Who will they see if they land
who might throw them a rope?
Old waves, so oil-black, so high,
so bitterly huge in the channel
offering waterlogged death
if you can't take the tunnel.
Fathom on fathom beneath
of sickening water to harm them,
waves freezing, queasy and deep;
and no saviour to calm them.
Fast flowing water at night
few scared and despaired people brave.
And if they should get to this land,
who will give them a wave?



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Starter questions for reflection

A Chair Like That

Appearances can sometimes be deceptive. There's a difference between something which has been made fit for purpose...and something that can let you down.

1. What is the poem saying about different kinds of welcome?
2. What do you think is meant by 'poorly made' and 'splinters'?
3. How can a welcome "bear what it's meant to bear"?

If Parables Mean Nothing

Is the Bible still meaningful? If it is, do we have to act upon its meaning? If we don't act, what is that meaning?

1. What are the choices offered in this poem?
2. What is meant by "tell Joseph to go home"?
3. What are the "ancient ways of welcome" the poem refers to?
4. What are the "loads"?

Jesus-Under-The-Dirt

Jesus cared for those who His society judged "unclean": the naked, the hungry, those in prison; probably the smelly and the sick too. He didn't tell us how to handle not wanting to.

1. Why is contamination such a significant theme in the Bible?
2. In what way is it significant for us?
3. How can this filthy, raving, sobbing person be Jesus?

Some Kinds of Spitting

There has been lots of talk recently about Britain's 'hostile environment', but everyone has a different experience. Who is 'He'? And what is He asking?

1. What does the Bible have to say about welcome?
2. Do Bible-people always live up to that?
3. Is there a limit, or a time-limit, to Welcome?

Waves

Jesus calmed the storm for his frightened friends but what kind of terror prompts people to risk the English Channel in an inflatable? And what terror is ahead of them if they get here?

1. What are the first two lines of the poem making clear?
2. What do you believe is the anxiety about Asylum seekers?
3. Do you believe in the concept of sanctuary? Why?



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