TFTD

GOOD FRIDAY 2013

I went to see a miracle of reconciliation and healing and I found one. It was 2003 - my first visit to South Africa. I was living and working in Northern Ireland. We too needed a miracle of reconciliation.

I saw the shameful poverty which endures to this day. But I saw South Africans – black, coloured and white – together in shops and offices, on buses and trains, in the bars and restaurants. Most of all I felt a kind of grace – experienced a new space which South Africans were making for one another. Their shared past of repression and injustice was painful beyond measure. Now they were tentatively moving towards a new shared future.

Many people were part of the miracle – Mandela, Tutu, de Klerk in the headlines. Below the headlines countless heroic stories of forbearance and forgiveness. But the heart of it was Mandela – Madiba as he is known by South Africans. Everywhere was a feeling that his smiling presence – tall and authoritative – was creating a generous space in which a new future could be born.

This is of course a Good Friday story. I remember the waiting – what kind of Nelson Mandela would emerge from 27 years in prison? Suddenly he stepped onto the world stage – tall, authoritative, smiling. No anger. No recrimination. Let bygones be bygones He embodied an invitation to walk together towards a new kind of future.

The Good Friday story of Jesus’ sacrifice and death – his innocent and obedient suffering –challenges everything. It tells us that there is a new kind of power in undeserved and innocent suffering. That is not life as we live it – not the rules of the game.

Mandela took his 27 years in prison – took the long years of suffering of his people. Gracefully he turned them into that new power which broke the cycles of anger, recrimination and vengeance. Gracefully he created a space in which the first signs of justice, freedom and new dignity for all could be found.