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BOOK REVIEWS

Reviewed by **Mary-Anne Lumley, Perth**

The Farewelling of a Home: a liturgy

By Jane Simpson. Christchurch NZ: Poiema Liturgies, 2021. 21pp.

*'Dear friends in Christ
we gather today to farewell this home,
to remember the grace of God
in the midst of the brokenness of our world and our lives.'*¹

These words begin the gathering prayer in the liturgy for *The Farewelling of a Home* by Jane Simpson. Simpson has previously published a scholarly article in which she articulated the theological and pastoral concerns that informed the development of this liturgy.² With great compassion, she also describes the aftermath of the catastrophic 2011 Christchurch earthquake: it was in the despair, the destruction of homes, the ongoing battles for insurance settlements, the dislocation and struggles of survivors that she recognised the need for such a liturgy. In the same article, Simpson surveys the lack of existing liturgies for farewelling a home, speculates on reasons for this lack and outlines her 'starting points' in crafting this ritual of farewell.

And crafted, it is! Simpson is a poet, so understands the power and evocation of words. However, she is also a person of faith who has imbibed the Word of God. The liturgy incorporates one Scripture reading, from Ecclesiastes 3. However, allusions to Scripture are subtly suffused through the prayers and responses and even through the suggested directions for moving from place to place. Because this liturgy is bodily! Participants are invited to move from room to room, to walk, to touch, to place symbols, to bid farewell. The author is also awake to the richness of diversity, evidenced through her use of bilingual prayers and responses. Finally, Simpson is learned and generous; she brings the pain of lived experience, the fruit of much research and an openness to building on the past in creating a new work.

As in all liturgy, *The Farewelling of a Home* has a form which is four-fold. The 'Gathering' rite comprises an invitation to prayer in Māori as well as English. An opening prayer is followed by a reading from the third chapter of the Book of Ecclesiastes, with a possible suggestion for it to be proclaimed in dialogue form.

¹ Simpson, Jane, *The Farewelling of a Home*. (Christchurch: Poiema Liturgies, 2020), 5.

² Simpson, Jane. 'Farewelling a home: the difference an earthquake makes.' *Australian Journal of Liturgy* 17, no.1 (2020): 19-44.

A rite of 'Lament' follows, where time is allowed for acknowledging loss. While Simpson conceived this liturgy in the aftermath of the earthquake she has recognised, and created, specific prayers in response to other reasons for leaving a home. These include various natural disasters, separation, death, aging, change in life circumstances or global pandemic. As well as being unique and specific, each of these prayers is an opening of the heart, expressing the experience of loss and vulnerability, to a God who listens to the pain.

Simpson is sensitive to the liminality of ritual; she argues for authenticity through a respect for the expression of grief and loss, avoiding haste. She is adamant that 'lament is appropriate' and that it is important to take the time to grieve, as 'rushing towards closure trivialises loss'.³ The lament prayers invoke a God who is near:

God with us in our distress,
In the turmoil caused by the global pandemic,
When millions have lost their lives,
we come to you.
We have lost our jobs...
Be present with us as we say our goodbyes...⁴

The third part of the liturgy is 'Giving Thanks for the Past'. It begins with a lityny and continues with prayers crafted for praying in every room of the dwelling. Those gathered are invited to spend time in each of the rooms, perhaps also sharing memories and saying goodbyes. This part of the liturgy could take some time: Simpson provides prayers for a living room, bedroom, bathroom, study, garden, dining room. The prayers are rooted in Scripture, richly evocative, and engage the memories and senses. To conclude the time in each room there is a collective response, with an alternative Māori version:

'God of beginnings and endings, gather these, our prayers and memories, into your love.'⁵

Finally, there is a dialogue prayer, based on Psalm 49, reaffirming the 'continuing care' of God in the 'journey ahead'.⁶

The liturgy concludes with a 'Taking Leave' and 'Blessing & Sending Out'. It reminds those present that God is their faithful companion. There are invocations to God as rock, comfort and shelter, and the Lord's Prayer may be prayed in Māori and/or

³ Simpson, *Australian Journal of Liturgy*, 32.

⁴ Simpson, *The Farewelling of a Home*, 9.

⁵ Simpson, *The Farewelling of a Home*, 11-13.

⁶ Simpson, *The Farewelling of a Home*, 13-14.

English. The final taking leave includes the imperative: 'Go and carry God's blessing from this place to the next'⁷, followed by 'Let us go in peace, we will not come here again.'⁸

Final and heartbreaking it may be, but the ritual has unfolded to enable participants to leave with a sense of peace and hope.

It is especially commendable that Simpson has avoided pious references to 'heaven as one's true home,' (which she describes as 'gnostic, rather than Christian').⁹ Such sentiments are hardly comforting amid immeasurable loss - and do little to authenticate the very human need to mourn. On the other hand, bodily actions, symbols placed and words proclaimed, reflect the deep movements within human hearts.

The minister of this liturgy may be a family member or a minister of faith. The author provides some additional helpful directions, including suggestions for types of symbols. She also proposes variations and adaptations. A suggestion for any future reprint would be the inclusion of a supplementary selection of Scripture readings which may be used.

Simpson is to be applauded for this initiative. *The Farewelling of a Home* is a liturgy that is useful and versatile, profound and beautiful, in a world that is increasingly in need of ritual to celebrate the most essential of human experiences.

⁷ Simpson, *The Farewelling of a Home*, 17.

⁸ Simpson, *The Farewelling of a Home*, 17.

⁹ Simpson, *Australian Journal of Liturgy*, 19.