



Sundays with CWM

RIISING UP AND JOURNEYING TOGETHER

2023

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2023

Our Vision

Life-flourishing Communities, living out God's promise of a New Heaven and a New Earth.

Our Mission

Called in Christ to radical and prophetic discipleship, working in partnership with churches and the ecumenical community to resist life-denying systems, affirm peace, do justice, and enable life-flourishing communities.

Our Values

- Justice in relationships
- Mutuality, equality, and interdependence
- Generosity of spirit
- Unity in diversity





The Council for World Mission is a worldwide partnership of Christian churches. The 32 members are committed to sharing their resources of money, people, skills and insights globally to carry out God's mission locally. CWM was created in 1977 and incorporates the London Missionary Society (1795), the Commonwealth Missionary Society (1836) and the (English) Presbyterian Board of Missions (1847).

AFRICA

- FJKM – Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar
- UCCSA – United Congregational Church of Southern Africa
- UCZ – United Church of Zambia
- CCM – Churches of Christ in Malawi
- UPCSA – Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

CARIBBEAN

- GCU – Guyana Congregational Union
- UCJCI – United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands

EAST ASIA

- HKCCCC – Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China
- GPM – Presbyterian Church of Malaysia (Gereja Presbyterian Malaysia)
- PCT – Presbyterian Church in Taiwan
- PCS – Presbyterian Church in Singapore
- PCK – Presbyterian Church of Korea
- PCM – Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

EUROPE

- CF – Congregational Federation
- UWI – Union of Welsh Independents
- URC – United Reformed Church
- PCN – Protestant Church in the Netherlands
- PCW – Presbyterian Church of Wales

PACIFIC

- CUNZ – Congregational Union of New Zealand
- KUC – Kiribati Uniting Church
- UCPNG – United Church of Papua New Guinea
- PCANZ – Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand
- CCCS – Congregational Christ Church in Samoa
- EKT – Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu
- NCC – Nauru Congregational Church
- UCSI – United Church in Solomon Islands
- CCCAS – Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa
- EPM – Etaretia Porotetani Maohi

SOUTH ASIA

- COB – Church of Bangladesh
- CNI – Church of North India
- CSI – Church of South India
- PCI – Presbyterian Church of India

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FOREWORD

RIISING UP AND JOURNEYING TOGETHER

Greetings of love and peace in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ from the Council for World Mission!

I am glad to present the *2023 Sundays with CWM*, a weekly devotional of the CWM. This devotional aims to provide spiritual accompaniment to all the readers—individuals, families, and congregations—and serve as a pastoral recourse to all those who seek inspiration from the stories of faith. This devotional also aims to provoke missional thinking through biblical and theological reflections on various challenges the global and local communities, including the creation, face.

The theme of this booklet, “Rising up and Journeying Together,” is a prophetic call for all the readers to embark upon a missional journey in solidarity with the most vulnerable resisting the life-threatening forces and affirming life for all.

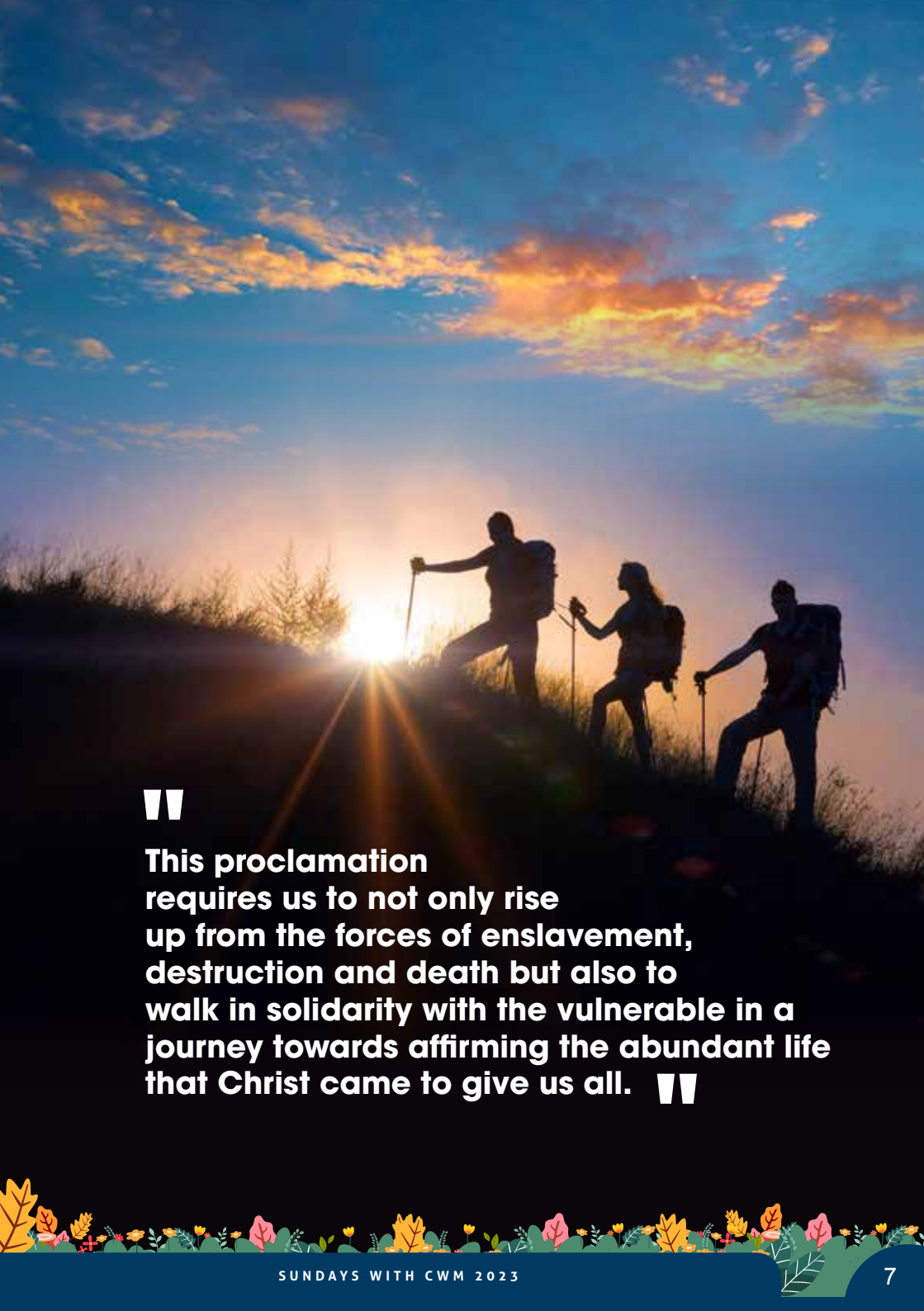
The world today is threatened by numerous forms of life-denying forces that exploit resources, oppress the poor and weak, and create divisions in societies causing wars and conflicts. In the midst of all these life-threatening forces, the scripture says that Jesus comes to give life in its abundance to all. *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly”* (John 10:10). As the disciples of Jesus, who came to give life, we need to proclaim this good news to everyone. The proclamation of such good news is that God affirms hope over despair, and life over death, transforming the lives of the poor, the oppressed, and the victimised. This proclamation requires us to not only rise up from the forces of enslavement, destruction and death but also to walk in solidarity with the vulnerable in a journey towards affirming the abundant life that Christ came to give us all. Therefore, we must commit ourselves to the mission of rising up and journeying together towards creating life-giving alternatives and fostering life-flourishing communities in solidarity with others, life-flourishing creation in solidarity with the planet earth and life-flourishing economy in solidarity with the vulnerable.

As you take upon the journey and walk with many others in commitment, I pray that these weekly reflections may provide you with constant encouragement throughout the year to not only cling on to faith in God but also to put that faith into action.

May 2023 be a year of blessings and transformation for us all.

Jooseop Keum
General Secretary
Council for World Mission





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requires us to not only rise
up from the forces of enslavement,
destruction and death but also to
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journey towards affirming the abundant life
that Christ came to give us all.** ❧❧



1 January 2023

New Year Day

UNLIMITED ACCESS

Then Peter began to speak: "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favouritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right." ~ Acts 10:34-35

There is a lot of newness planning that tends to happen at the beginning of the year. Each person is setting their own goals for the new year, individual new year resolutions are being formulated, some are fasting for their needs and desires, and others are hoping that the new year will bring them better and improved situations.

It is easy to each one to forget that God is receiving new year requests from millions of people all at the same time, and that the requests are as diverse as the people themselves. What is even worse is that one person's resolution may actually clash with another's. How is God supposed to deal with each differing request?

Cornelius requested for such an opposing thing – for Peter to come to his house in response to an instruction that God gave him. But it was against Jewish laws for Jews to enter into the homes of Gentiles and eat with them. Furthermore, Cornelius was not an apostle like Peter; he had never walked with Jesus, let alone met him. In addition, Cornelius as a soldier worked for Romans, the oppressors of Jews. Cornelius and Peter had nothing in common!

Yet God not only chose for Peter to do the unthinkable and be hosted in Gentile Cornelius's house, but God went further to send the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and the whole Gentile crowd. No wonder Peter declares the revelation that "God does not show favouritism." Favouritism is a word which when literally translated from the Greek means "acceptor of a face." In other words, God does not accept someone based on 'face' value things such as colour, nationality, background, gender, ethnicity, or even ideology. Peter explains that the qualifying factors for being accepted by God are "fear of God" and "righteousness." This means all have full and unlimited access to being accepted by God.

Now measure your new year resolutions, plans and strategies by these two factors – do you respect God and God's plans and call above your own? And do you hunger



and thirst for righteousness or rather for self-serving and sinful interests? You can be assured of acceptance by God and success in this new year if you fear God and remain righteous because even if you face seasons of failure, God is on your side because we all have equal and unlimited access to God all year round! This means there is no need for any to feel and act superior over others, and no need to feel inferior either, because God shows no favouritism.

PRAYER

Lord, help us to be wise enough to prioritize fear of God and righteousness in our 2023 plans and resolutions. Thank you that you are a safe place for us because you show no favouritism and therefore, we are assured of your life-flourishing plans over us. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

In what areas do we mistakenly feel and act as if we have limited or special access to God over others?

Lydia C. Neshangwe

Moderator, Council for World Mission



8 January 2023

WITNESSING CHRIST AMONG THE NATIONS



On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure-chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. ~ (Matthew 2:11)

Feast of Epiphany (meaning, manifestation or revelation or showing forth) is observed and celebrated in many church traditions commemorating the Magi's visit of baby Jesus recorded in Matthew 2:1-12. Also called wise men, the Magi were probably kings or priests from the East. We assume there were three Magi because of the three gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh they presented to Jesus. They followed an unusual star, the star of Bethlehem, to reach the Star of Universe—Jesus Christ.

The Magi were the first non-Jewish (Gentiles, as some call them) people who visited Jesus Christ in the manger and worshipped him. We commonly think that the gospel was presented to non-Jewish people much later, but in fact, it happened at the very



birth of Jesus. God's manifestation through Christ to Magi is important because of two reasons. One, it proves that Jesus Christ is indeed God's manifestation who is worthy to be worshipped. And two, it proves that God cares for all the people of the world, not just the Jews. This way, at a time when Jews thought that they were chosen people and salvation belonged only to them, God made sure that salvation belongs not only to Jews, the chosen people but to all people of the Earth.

In today's world, God's salvation is presented only to the privileged by religious institutions. Faith became so commercialized as if only the rich could afford it. Religion is being used as a tool of oppression and segregation instead of liberation and unity. The event of epiphany proves that Jesus Christ's birth brought both the Jews and non-Jews together. It provides us with an assurance that all things on the planet are part of God's salvific plan. Salvation belongs to all people of the Earth, not just Jews or privileged but people of all colours, races, genders, faiths, and nations. "God did not send the Son for the salvation of humanity alone or give us a partial salvation. Rather the gospel is the good news for every part of creation and every aspect of our life and society. It is therefore vital to recognize God's mission in a cosmic sense and to affirm all life, the whole oikoumene, as being interconnected in God's web of life" (TTL). Therefore, our mission of evangelism—proclaiming or witnessing to God's salvation—should not be limited to some people only but to all. The gospel is the good news for the whole creation and everything in it. That's why Paul says the whole creation is groaning for liberation (Romans 8:21-23).

May our mission of manifesting God not be limited to some people only but all the people of Earth and the creation itself. As God revealed Godself to all the creation, it is our responsibility to proclaim God's revelation as a holistic salvation of all the planet.

PRAYER

God of life, who intends to give life to the whole of creation, give us the wisdom and commitment to proclaim your salvific grace to all people of the Earth. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What are we doing to manifest God's salvific grace to all the planet?

Dileep Kumar Kandula

Council for World Mission



15 January 2023

WITNESSING CHRIST AMONG STATELESS

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. ~ (Hebrews 13:2)

Dee came and lived with us for about 15 months. She arrived not long after Mohammed left us. He stayed for six weeks after having attended his mother's funeral and then, arriving back in the UK, was not permitted to work for six weeks. Dee wasn't quite perhaps what you would think of when you think of someone with no legal status to stay in her country of residence.



Dee came to the UK from Zimbabwe and had trained with the NHS to become a nurse. She had a career but then experienced mental health issues which meant that she forgot to file the right paperwork at the right time to enable her to stay, lost her job and her flat, and ended up sleeping on the streets one night in London.

A charity there picked her up, which is when we came to know her, and she moved in with us. We were not expecting her to stay that long, but she did, and we journeyed with her a little in the ups and downs of dealing with the paperwork and the paper trail she was forced to go through.

Eventually, she got her residency status restored and moved on. But the stress took its toll on her, as it does on many who have to go through 'the system' of immigration. Two years later, we heard that her body had been found in the place she was staying. Her journey was over.

We hope that we did the right thing by providing a home, a warm and comfortable environment, but we know from our experience of working with refugees that sometimes, perhaps, we are unable to give them all that they need or require.

Our questions may never be answered, but that should not stop us from keeping on entertaining others, showing hospitality, giving the offer of life, and hope to those who need it. We think it is what Jesus would do and what God asks us to do.

PRAYER

God, who travels with those who walk many miles, journey with us throughout 2023. Open our eyes to the people around us, whoever they are and wherever they come from. Help us to share the resources you have given us with all our neighbours. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Find out about the charities and other organisations in your area that work with the homeless, with refugees and begin to pray for their work.

Mark Meatcher

United Reformed Church



22 January 2023

WITNESSING CHRIST AMONG INTERFAITH COMMUNITIES



For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, "To an unknown god." What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ~ (Acts 17:23)

We live today in a more complex world that is religiously pluralistic, secularized, globalized and open to all forms of knowledge. The world is very critical of the actions and inactions of contemporary Christians. Irrespective of the change in dynamics of how the modern world appears, it does not defeat or render null the Great Commission. Thus, a critical question that one ought to ask is how the Gospel can be propagated in such a religiously pluralistic world without offending the people of other faiths and not disrupting the peace we all yearn to attain. How does one witness Christ among interfaith communities? We must make a conscious effort to answer this question.

In Acts 17:23, there is a mission model, which I call "Paul's model to interfaith missions", that shows how Paul proclaimed Gospel in a religiously pluralistic context



without engaging in unnecessary arguments or conflicts. This verse demonstrates some fundamental approaches to mission among people of a different faith.

First, the study or assessment of the people. Before addressing the Athenians, Paul observed and assessed their object of worship and had a fair idea about what they worshipped. I was a member of the University Christian Fellowship at the University of Ghana from 2013-2017. During those years, before we embarked on any mission journey, we would first send a delegation to do what we call “spiritual mapping.” This mapping would help us assess the people we encounter and how we should deal with them before we embark on missions. This knowledge gained from the mapping is the key to making our missions successful.

Second, Paul’s knowledge gained from his observation enabled him to start preaching his message. Paul began from the known to the unknown. He began by citing an inscription on an altar which read, “to the unknown God”, and preached to the people about his faith. Observation and assessment of people of other religions will enable us to begin our conversation about Christ with them. We must observe that Paul did not attempt to condemn their faith or speak ill of the knowledge and philosophies that they possessed. What he did was a reflection on such ideas in the light of the Gospel.

In this record, as we conclude this brief reflection, even though, as Christians, we observe and assess the people of other faiths to introduce them to our Lord and Savior, the act of conviction lies with the Holy Spirit (John 16:8).

PRAYER

Dear Lord, grant us wisdom and grace to proclaim Jesus Christ as the Savior. Enable us with the Holy Spirit that our proclamation may be harmonious and courteous to people of other faiths. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What things do you observe in other faith traditions in your community that help generate conversation about Gospel?

Samuel K.B. Nkrumah-Pobi

Azusa Revival Outreach Ministry, Ghana



29 January 2023

WITNESSING CHRIST AMIDST SUFFERINGS



I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel. ~ (Philippians 1:12, Recommend reading the full text, Phil. 1:12-18)

I have been through a variety of physical illnesses and accidents on several occasions in my life, getting admitted to the hospital and, at times, having near-death experiences. As I reflect on my life, I realise that many times I haven't had enough faith to overturn my moments of darkness for God's mission. I think it is an utterly normal response to bemoan our situations when we are amidst suffering and contemplating that this event is to keep us from doing God's ministry. But Paul's reaction to his situations of suffering helps us to widen our understanding of what God is doing in and through our sufferings, even to the point of rejoicing about how God is working.

In Philippians 1:12–18, Paul rejoices amidst suffering. He rejoices to see that God has, in fact, used his suffering to build up the advancement of the Gospel. Regardless of his grief, Paul asserted that he will rejoice in the new ways that he



sees Christ proclaimed. In prison, he was in chains. Even though this circumstance seemed to be hindering his work, in verse 13, he says, 'For everyone here, including the whole palace guard, knows that I am in chains because of Christ. He converted this moment of darkness to share the good news with the guards who were chained to him. The suffering hasn't prevented Paul from preaching the gospel. Instead, it was transformed into an opportunity he would never have had without the chains.

When suffering hit me, I ask, why me? Why again? Why is God afflicting me again and again? What mistake did I commit? But Paul, unlike me, took his suffering as an opportunity. Paul understood that God was bringing him a new context with an entirely rare opportunity in this new place where he could fulfil His commission. He performed what God intended him to do. By his response, as we read, most of the believers gained confidence and boldly spoke God's message without fear.

One act of faith transformed the faith of many. Paul, through this, has generated a band of witnesses who were bold and were without fear. As we have the great commission entrusted before us, let us strive to make disciples of all the nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching these new disciples to obey all the commands Jesus gives us. Just like the apostle Paul, let us try to convert our moments of suffering into opportunities of witnessing and equipping many more to witness.

PRAYER

Dear God, increase our faith. We have often missed opportunities to witness to your gospel because of our own anxious thoughts, fears, and worries. Help us to seek your face, looking up to the mountain from where our help comes from. Irrespective of what is happening in our lives, help us to witness the Gospel and see it advancing as Christ is proclaimed. Empower us, equip us. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Am I able to witness Christ even amid suffering and pain? How can I consciously respond to challenging situations so that God's great commission will always thrive?

Ebin Thankachan

Council for World Mission

5 February 2023

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND MISSION AS COMMUNICATION



All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability. (Acts 2:4, Recommend reading the full text, Acts 2:1-13)

Today we are living in an era of miscommunication. Miscommunication causes a lot of problems. For example, our bodies can be healthy only when blood flows well. If there is no blood flow in any one place, our bodies will have problems. Also, if there is miscommunication between husband and wife, parents and children, or in the church community, problems arise, and the communities become sick. Likewise, miscommunication with God makes our spirit sick.

Miscommunication is the result of human sin. In the Tower of Babel context, we can see that miscommunication results from our sin and arrogance. After the great flood, Noah's descendants settled on a plain in Shinar. Their construction techniques developed day by day. Genesis 11:4 says, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves." To build a tower to the sky means to challenge God. God saw humans unite and become



arrogant by speaking the same language (Genesis 11:6). Thus, God confused human language so humans could not understand each other (Genesis 11:7).

There is a way to overcome miscommunication and move on to the era of communication. Just before Jesus ascended to heaven, he told his disciples not to leave Jerusalem but wait for the promised Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4). When the day of Pentecost came, 120 disciples and followers gathered in Mark's upper room and prayed earnestly with one heart. Then suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house. The full grace of the Holy Spirit came upon everyone who was there. When the Holy Spirit descended upon them, an amazing miracle occurred. "They began to speak in languages they had not known before. The Spirit gave them the ability to do this." (Acts 2:4)

The Holy Spirit, our helper, helps us overcome miscommunication and communicate meaningfully. Where the Holy Spirit comes, everyone communicates and connects with each other. The Holy Spirit, who enables communication, wants us to cut off our miscommunication and move on to a life of communication. The Holy Spirit as communicating power indwells in all created beings, not just humans but all nonhuman creatures, to enable us to communicate. Moreover, nonhuman creatures communicate not only with each other but also with human beings and with God.

Mission as communication is a witness to the life-changing power of the Spirit of God. Therefore, the mission is always interlinked with communication. With the guidance of the Holy Spirit, who makes us communicate and witness to life-flourishing communities, we should take the lead in restoring a communicating society and proclaiming and living out God's justice where creation groans.

PRAYER

God of Life, we pray that the Holy Spirit may enable us with a great power of mission and communication. In Jesus' name, Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What aspects of communication could strengthen our mission today?

Young-Cheol Cheon

Council for World Mission



12 February 2023

MISSION IN A DIGITAL WORLD

If the whole body were an eye, where would the hearing be? If the whole body were hearing, where would the sense of smell be? (1 Corinthians 12:17)

What are the 'eye, ear, nose, tongue and skin' of which Paul speaks here? Are these the essentials of sense organs to do God's mission? Does digitalisation enter the body through which we can do missions in the digital world? Perhaps, yes. Yet the meaning goes deeper in it based upon today's context.

The world that we live in today is an advancement of civilisation that has been built from science (technology) and religion (ideology) developed and are currently integral parts of the human creation of the digital world. Global crises such as wars



and pandemics have pushed our lifestyle, faith, and mission further into a digital world and brought changes in behaviour that are likely to have lasting effects by the time spirituality starts to pick up. While attending Church has become a choice for some, as they can watch any sermon online, others are not ready to embrace a more digitised world due to their choices and access to digital tools. This thought must be taken up, prayerfully and thoughtfully, and must be put into how the contemporary resources of God's people can remain proactive in Mission.

In 1 Corinthians 12:17, Paul demonstrates to the Church in Corinth how the body and its various sense organs function. Each organ has a specific purpose that would be missed if it were gone. The life of the Corinthian Church was an open one, like today's digital world. Paul uses a formula envisaging that God is the creator of all things, and creation is not simply an originating fact but an ongoing intention. Like, "If the whole body were an eye, where would the sense of hearing be? If the whole body were an ear, where would the sense of smell be?" So our senses should all be in control – we might call it the soul or the conscience – through which we perceive the right way to live and act in the changing world. If our sense organs are healthy, then our whole being will be ready for the Mission.

God's mission in the digital world takes various shapes in various contexts based on rapidly changing digital trends. Therefore, sharing our faith and making disciples needs proactive adoption and creative integration of the digital trends available while preserving the integrity of the gospel values to answer the spiritual needs of the digital community.

PRAYER

God the Trinity, help us live in harmony with the digital world. Give us the wisdom and skills to utilise digital technologies to fulfil your mission in this changing world. Also, bless the leftover, and neglected by this digital world. In Jesus' name – Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How can you best use digital technologies in the Church and everyday life to spread the good news?

Gnanak Gerhardson Munnangi

Andhra Christian Theological College



19 February 2023

WITNESSING CHRIST AMONG THE SUFFERING YOUNG



*“A voice was heard in Ramah, wailing and loud lamentation,
Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be consoled, because they are no
more.” (Matthew 2:18, Recommend reading the full text, Mathew 2:13-18)*

King Herod heard from wise men from the East that the king of the Jews would be born in Bethlehem. Because Herod always thought he was the only king of the Jews, he could not tolerate other kings in his place. He somehow had to kill the baby, the king-to-be, because the baby would eventually threaten his throne. But the angel of the Lord fled the baby and his family to Egypt. Not knowing that the baby had already left and not hearing any report from the wise men, Herod became furious and ordered to kill all the boys under two years in Bethlehem and its vicinity. A great force of death engulfed Bethlehem and the surrounding area. Innocent newborn boys all lost their lives. “A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more” (v.18). The cries of parents who lost their children seem to penetrate through time and space and reach us.



On 29 October 2022, an unfathomable tragic disaster occurred in Itaewon, Seoul, Korea. Young people who could not go out freely during the Covid-19 pandemic for more than two years have gathered in Itaewon to enjoy the Halloween festival. It was obviously predictable that a lot of people would come to Itaewon than usual, but local and national governments did not come up with sufficient measures to keep citizens safe. Itaewon is an area where many foreigners gather. Itaewon is also where the newly elected president has recently installed his office. Many young people who came to have a good time with their loved ones could never return home alive because of the stampede. Death has swept through the heart of South Korea, a country boasting huge skyscrapers and advanced technology, taking the lives of about 157 young people.

Herod, the minion of the Roman Empire, took the lives of many children with his power. Even today, empires such as capitalism, neoliberalism, political hegemony, and militarism use the most vulnerable people as collateral to build up their powers. In the midst of wars, climate crises, and conflicts all over the world today, powerless, innocent, vulnerable people, especially young people, are risking their lives and future.

Where was God when the babies in Bethlehem were killed? Did God ignore Rachel's cry from Ramah to save his child Jesus? Not at all. God grieved and endured the death of Jesus, who had survived the whirlwind of infanticide and eventually was crucified. God is still with us in every context of death and suffering. However, in God's life, we see a glimpse of light that can enlighten all through the gospel. Let us resist the powers of life-threatening forces with the hope of life to protect young people around us.

PRAYER

God of life, do not turn your face away from the young people who are suffering helplessly. We pray that churches around the world can cherish young people and speak up against unjust structures and systems. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What are the places where young people suffer around us?

Songhee Chai

The Presbyterian Church of Korea



22 February 2023

Ash Wednesday

BEAUTY FOR ASHES

When he saw the crowds, he had compassion for them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. (Matthew 9:35)

The world has been wounded for ages. However, the recent Covid-19 pandemic has exposed and exacerbated various forms of social injustice and violence, especially against women and children. The pandemic did not only threaten lives but also the livelihood of people. It spurred the pre-existing toxic and oppressive social norms, gender inequality, and violence against women. The measures put in to curb the virus, such as lockdowns and social distancing, led to an exponential increase in Gender Based Violence (GBV). These measures rendered many women helpless as they were locked at home with their abusive husbands, thereby limiting their chances of freeing themselves or getting socio-psycho-support. The impacts of the pandemic are felt to date. GBV is one of the vices that we are grappling with in the modern-day world. It inflates physical and psychological pain in women to the extent that some opt to take their lives away. Its impacts are also extended to children who witness their mothers being abused.

Amid all these forms of suffering that affect us either directly or indirectly, what lessons can we learn from the scripture? In Matthew 9:35-38, Jesus associated himself with the marginalised. He felt compassion for them (36). Before this scripture portion, Jesus had been busy healing the sick, casting out demons, raising the dead, and performing other miracles for the betterment of humanity. He came into contact with the dirty, the destitute, the prostitutes, the marginalised, and those who were considered unclean by His day's religious leaders. In this scripture, Jesus is going through all towns preaching the good news of the kingdom, healing the sick from all forms of diseases, accompanying the poor, and re-memembering those at the periphery. The actions of Jesus gave beauty for the ashes of those that were suffering. God is ready to beautify the ashes (Isaiah 61:3) of people who are struggling, especially women who are suffering from GBV and are considered inferior in society. These ashes represent the physical, psychological, financial, and mental suffering and all your pains. For God to give you beauty for these ashes, an exchange must occur. Christ gave us that beauty by turning himself into ashes.





Therefore, we cannot hold unto our ashes. We need to let our ashes go to receive something good and beautiful. God wants us to be victors and not victims. Jesus is still calling for more workers in God's harvest field who are ready to continue with His mission of being on the side of the oppressed and marginalised. God is calling for those who are willing to suffer with the oppressed to support them and stand for justice. Martin Luther King says, "doing right for it is right to do right." Let us do what is right. May the Lord turn our ashes into beauty as we begin the journey of struggling for justice and righteousness in this season of lent.

PRAYER

Almighty God, may you heal and beautify the ashes of the people who are suffering in one way or the other. May you help us accompany those suffering by showing love and standing for justice. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What can I do to turn the pain and sorrow of the GBV victims into joy?

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Methodist Church in Kenya



26 February 2023

DENYING SELF, CARRYING CROSS, AND WALKING TO THE MARGINS



⁶ *Is not this the fast that I choose:*

*to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke,
to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke?*

⁷ *Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,*

*and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them,
and not to hide yourself from your own kin? (Isaiah 58:6 - 7)*

Today is the beginning of Lent in the church calendar. We remember the temptation of Jesus, his suffering on the Cross and his death. Lent is a time to retrospect into ourselves along with the Church to see if we are walking the way that Jesus showed us or if we have missed the mark. Lent is a time to repent and rely on God for the abundance of mercy and grace. In the midst of a constantly moving and busy world, God calls us to meditate on the way of the Cross. In some church traditions, the way of the Cross is very important during the season of Lent. To follow Jesus is to deny oneself and take up one's Cross.



While we meditate on the suffering and death of Jesus, we ought to know that God is also suffering with the suffering communities around us today. We come across different people who are dehumanized by oppressive systems that deny life, like migrants, refugees, Dalits, and religious minorities.

Lent can be a spiritual journey where we take up our Cross, i.e., to leave our narcissistic comfort zones and walk towards marginalized communities around us to pray for them and pray with them, asking God what God wants us to do. In Isaiah, we read what fasting is during lent and what God expects from us.

When we act for the suffering communities sacrificing our time, comfort, and wealth, we are standing in solidarity not only with the people but also with God, who is with them. This spiritual journey saves us from narcissism and self-centeredness, thus helping oneself to move towards the other who lives outside the gate in the margins. Jesus was crucified outside the gate and to witness this Jesus today is through witnessing, together with God along with the suffering humanity. While we stand in solidarity with oppressed communities, the body of Christ is also called to stand up against oppressive systems in prayers and action, though the system might be powerful like Mammon. May God grant us the courage to walk to the margins and meet the crucified Christ outside the margins and witness the sacrificing love of Christ.

Let us remain silent for a few minutes remembering the way of the Cross.

PRAYER

Dear God, as we begin this time of Lent, we ask for your forgiveness as, at times, we went far from you. God, as we remember your suffering, give us the will to fast in the way you want and share our food and wealth with those who need more than us. Help us to repent from our sinful ways and depend on your grace completely. Journey with us and lead us during the lent to get closer to you. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How can I deny myself and carry my Cross during this Lent?

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Yonsei University



CROSS, BROKENNESS, AND LIBERATION



Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any wish to come after me, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. (Matthew 16:24, Recommend reading the full text 16:24-26)

Why does the Gospel message bring salvation exclusively through the cross? Why does the brokenness become crucial towards liberation? Do we tend to think that the cross is something we only see at the end of Jesus’ life journey? These are some of the questions with which I would like to begin this reflection.

To deliberate these questions, we may try to recollect what discipleship is according to Jesus. Following Jesus is very crucial in the Christian life. However, Jesus demands something more to be done before we begin to follow him. All four gospels teach about the discipleship of Jesus, and in all four gospels, we found the verse: “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross, and follow me.”

Cross and discipleship are the intertwined theological and spiritual realities in the gospels. According to Jesus, only those who deny their own self are eligible to be his disciple. The Greek word used for ‘denying’ means “to hate.” Renouncing



one's identity given by the socio-cultural and religious norms of the time is crucial to becoming a follower of Jesus. Hence, on the one hand, the brokenness experience of a person as being part of the marginalized/victimized/impoverished communities leads his/her journey towards liberation. And on the other hand, everyone who wants to become a disciple of Jesus must experience the brokenness in terms of their self/identity by adopting the broken identity, which is not of the person's social, economic or cultural status.

Jesus himself had gone through the experience of giving away his own God-self-identity, embracing the identity of brokenness—as a human, poor, and neglected. Not only his identity/self, but he also embraced the brokenness physically to become the ransom for all.

If there is no brokenness, then there is no (need for) liberation. Any history of liberation begins with the stories of broken experiences of the particular community. On the one hand, for the oppressed societies, the experience of being broken becomes the emancipating tool to rise towards their liberation. And, on the other hand, for the subjugating community, renouncing the society-given privileges/identities becomes the discipleship demand by Jesus.

One more aspect that Jesus demanded of his followers was to carry the cross and follow him. Discipleship is a journey of carrying one's own cross. Thus, the salvation experience itself begins with the experience of breaking oneself from her/his existing way of life and begin to journey with Jesus. And therefore, discipleship itself is a journey towards and for the liberation of the one who follows and of others with whom s/he is sharing the Gospel.

PRAYER

God of love who was pleased to be broken through his own Son, we thank you for teaching us the importance of embracing brokenness when we are part of the privileged and when we attempt to journey towards the liberation of ourselves and our communities. Strengthen us to carry our cross and be on the journey of following you in all our circumstances. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Where is our discipleship journey in embracing the brokenness and following Christ?

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12 March 2023

CROSS, A SIGN OF RESTORATION FOR THE BROKEN COMMUNITIES

The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners (Isaiah 61:1)

Brokenness and woundedness are conditions commonly seen in certain communities and manifest in many forms. Physical brokenness occurs in war-torn zones and areas ravished by violence, while emotional and psychological brokenness occurs in areas under intense persecution. In Laos' indigenous tribal Christian communities, Christians are weighed down by history. Being colonised by the French for 60 years and then becoming a puppet state of the Japanese, Laos was a battlefield during the Vietnam war and became the most bombed country in history. Today, millions of unexploded American ordnances still pose a risk to inhabitants of rural areas. In addition to a difficult history, the indigenous tribal Christian communities in Laos find themselves struggling with a massive identity crisis and face quadruple persecution by the communist state, by the ethnic majority, by tribal non-Christians and finally by other tribal Christians themselves (communism-induced self-censorship). Representing the lowest stratum of Lao society, basic rights are non-existent, and dignity, education and freedom are luxuries only enjoyed by a privileged few.

In the face of all these, the indigenous communities find not just salvation but also hope and strong deliverance in the power of the cross. When the word of God was translated contextually into their indigenous languages, the radical love of God gave an identity to identity-less people as they saw themselves in the narratives of the bible. Previously living in bondage to physical rulers and spiritual powers, they experienced liberation. Some physically tormented by spirits were completely healed the moment they believed. In the relative absence of external support, the word of God became like yeast in a pack of dough, with the Holy Spirit slowly transforming the community. The power of the cross also drove out fear, as the people's confidence shifted from something previously unknown to something known.

However, the process of transformation is an ongoing and painful one. In a community where the mark of a great leader is the amount of persecution and time spent in prison





endured, the indigenous Christian congregations still struggle with communism, the only leadership structure they have ever known. As in other communities, women are particularly vulnerable and typically require years of support to soften their inferiority complex and trust issues built up over time in resistance to years of marginalisation. Beginning as a foreign, colonial tradition a generation and a half ago, Christianity now has a local flavour and sings to the tunes of traditional tribal melodies while resting on the spiritual fortress built by the early western missionaries. In the words of the female hymn writer Civilla Martin, “*I sing because I’m happy; I sing because I’m free...*” Today, the voices of the indigenous groups of Laos can be heard the singing of their spiritual freedom even in the midst of abject poverty and continued physical persecution.

PRAYER

Dear God of the least and the last, the first are last and the last are first in your economy. You use the weak to shame the strong. Be with the indigenous Christians of Laos as they struggle to rise from the shadows of colonial powers, marginalisation, and persecution. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How has the power of the cross brought change, deliverance, healing, or restoration to you personally?

Stephen Chia

Council for World Mission



19 March 2023

CROSS, VULNERABILITY AND COURAGE

Jesus said to him, "Truly I tell you, this very night, before the cock crows, you will deny me three times." (Matthew 26:34)

Every person has social, political, religious, and cultural identities by birth. Because of the identity of the vulnerable people, they are always distanced and discriminated against by society, treating them with inequity.

Peter, Simon bar Jonah, one of the disciples of Jesus, was a Galilean fisherman. That was his identity. Fishing was an essential part of the Galilean economy controlled by Roman Aristocrats. Hence the peasants felt the burden of rigid hierarchical taxation as they were robbed in the name of various types of tax. This burden on the fisherman was even more intense, which made them rebel against the Empire. Jesus resided in Capernaum during most of his ministry and greatly impacted the fishermen's lives. While they were seeking a kingly Messiah to liberate them from the stronghold of the Roman Empire, they found Jesus, who was meek yet mighty. Matthew 26:31-35 and 69-75 consist of prophecies of Jesus concerning the disciples and Peter. Jesus foresaw the weak, yet so courageous, Peter, that he would deny



and desert him before the third cock crows. Though Peter emphatically said that we would not forsake, not even under the threat of death. Jesus told Peter, “Truly I tell you, before the night is over, you will deny me, not once but thrice”. The cock crowing in Matthew is to be understood as referring to a roman division of the night watch. This thought of the threefold denial of Jesus seemed unimaginable to Peter. His bold promise was based on his ego and not on the supreme power of God. Hence, a maid’s suspicion was enough to undo his faith. His charge was a simple association with Jesus as an accomplice of a Galilean. Peter was present in the core events of Jesus’s ministry but now denies his association with Jesus.

Here Peter’s denial was also self-denial. In denying Jesus, Peter was shattered. He was afraid of the Roman empire as he was a victim of resisting the manipulating abilities of the empire. So he couldn’t face them. The empire today also does the same. It exploits vulnerable and weaker minorities socially, politically, and economically. It makes the rich more prosperous and the poor even poorer. It victimises the vulnerable by denying them their rights. The multiple attempts to achieve their rights not only left the communities broken and also powerless to stand against the empire.

The Church, once a denied community but now stronger in Christ, should extend its solidarity to the denied and broken communities. As the power of resurrected Christ transformed peter, a coward turned courageous and became the leader of the apostles. As communities of Christ, we need to come under this transformative experience to stand firm against the empire. As a walking Church, every individual with the in-dwelling spirit reflects Christ in showing solidarity, extending love to the vulnerable, and helping them stand firm.

PRAYER

Parent God, the author of salvation, help us to be in solidarity with the broken and vulnerable. Empower us with Christ’s love to identify ourselves with the church and reflect your love for the vulnerable. Though we are broken, help us to look at the cross, which fills us with the courage to stand against the Empire. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How do we transform our vulnerability into courage?

Moses Dayan Kodali

Church of South India



CROSS, A RESPONSE TO RACE AND CLASS



⁶ *To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace.*

¹⁰ *But if Christ is in you, then the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

¹¹ *If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you. (Romans 8:6-11)*

I grew up on the outskirts of a city in Guyana. It is a small village of many ethnic races, people of different religious upbringings and even a distinct sense of social classes and identities. During my early school years, I would play with all my classmates, sharing food and other elements of good school life. Well, of course, there's always the exception of that 'one smart kid' whose fundamentals are too rubric for play or engagement, but other than that, I had fun. Regardless of skin colour, money in my pocket, or awkward stuttering, I engaged well with others and thought less of any of these barriers.



Later in the years to follow, the brightly burning candle of engagement gradually became dim as the differences of race, class, and religion became glaring to my conscience due to the growing awareness. I found myself being in trouble most of the time. As to my village upbringing, I would have to structurally disassociate with groups and classes of people when I would be in uniform and neatly presented to the educational forums. It was the requirement to fit in. Absurdly hypocritical, it is that the ones I was forced to hate were the ones who became my partners out in the fields when the afternoon came. When the shirt was no longer tucked into the pants, or when I had to be neat and organised to hate.

Well, isn't it what we fight for? High offices, suits, and ties? And firm structures?

A valid response from the Rastafarian community would be to say, "Fire pon that!" as the question of transformation comes into play. The idea of a transformation seeks to transcend beyond the norms of world disorders. Transformation is not being afraid to take the other step in the act of solidarity with minorities across the borders of separation.

On this day, we are reminded of God's justice through the death on the cross and resurrection. As an example of transgression, the challenge comes to go beyond the common ground regardless of the outcome of the courageous vocation with which we are called.

PRAYER

God of life, we give praises and thanks for the call to reform. We earnestly seek the courageous spirit of Christ for a just and free society. One in which we all can live in love and unity. We ask for mercies when we ignore the cries of the oppressed. Together, we pray for the desire to engage with the kingdom of God here on earth as it is in Heaven. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How can we go beyond the boundaries of class and race to accept one another just as Christ accepted us all on the cross?

Christopher Latchman
Guyana Presbyterian Church



2 April 2023

Palm Sunday

JOURNEY WITH JESUS FOR A PEACEMAKING MISSION

*"...Blessed is the king
who comes in the name of the Lord!
Peace in heaven,
and glory in the highest heaven!"
(Luke 19:38, Recommend reading full text, Luke 19:29 - 40)*

As recorded in the four Gospels, Jesus entered Jerusalem before his cross and resurrection. His entry into Jerusalem was a fulfilment of the prophecy of Zechariah (9:6). Zechariah depicted a king who was righteous, victorious, and humble, riding on a little donkey. Jesus rode on a donkey toward Jerusalem, and people celebrated the coming king, laying down branches of palm trees on the path and singing praises.

Before entering Jerusalem, when Jesus approached the Mount of Olives, he sent two of his disciples to a village to bring a donkey tied there. It was too young and weak, so no one was interested in riding it. However, Jesus chose it and rode on it to Jerusalem. At that time, when a king had a victory in a war, it was customary to ride a well-trained, sturdy horse to show off the victory. However, unlike a war-waging king, Jesus rode on a feeble donkey as a prince of peace (Isaiah 9:6) against power and empire. His destination was not a royal palace but a cross.

Jesus invites us to his journey of peace just like he invited a powerless donkey to Jerusalem. Imagine how the donkey felt when it saw all the singing and praising. The donkey became a part of the historic scene and was glorified together with Jesus. Imagine our lives without Jesus. We are who we are because of the prince of peace. Today we see and hear the news of violence, conflicts, wars, and deaths everywhere. Jesus came to this world as the prince of peace and invited us to be part of the pilgrimage of peace. When we walk the path, carrying Jesus on us, we become part of Jesus' peacemaking mission. Waging war, fomenting division, and instigating conflicts are not the ways how Jesus works. Sometimes, it might be easy to close our eyes and live our lives in our comfort zones. Carrying Jesus' cross, proclaiming peace and walking in solidarity with the poor and oppressed is the peacemaking





mission of God. Here and now, on Palm Sunday, is the invitation from the peace of prince. Despite being weak and feeble, we are called to walk the path of Jesus, proclaiming peace in this world of wars and conflicts. Peacemaking is the message that we need to draw from Palm Sunday.

PRAYER

God of peace, may we never miss in our prayers the people who have lost their homes, families, and countries due to war and conflict. Even today, there are so many people around us who desperately want peace. May we, like the donkey that carried Jesus, start taking steps for peace this Palm Sunday. We praise Jesus with all our hearts, who embraces our weaknesses and expands the kingdom of God through us. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What conflicts in our society call for a peacemaking intervention, and how do we find peace amid those conflicts?

Songhee Chai

The Presbyterian Church of Korea



7 April 2023

Good Friday

BROKEN BY AND FOR EMPIRE



¹⁴ Now it was the day of Preparation for the Passover; and it was about noon. He said to the Jews, "Here is your King!"

¹⁵ They cried out, "Away with him! Away with him! Crucify him!" Pilate asked them, "Shall I crucify your King?" The chief priests answered, "We have no king but the emperor." (John 19:14-15, Recommend reading the full text, 19: 12 – 16)

There is no way one can take a romantic approach to the distressing events leading up to Jesus' death. The awareness that in human history to this day, some things remain as they were in Palestine when Jesus was condemned and crucified underscores this fact. Still with us, even sharper, is a world of inequities, racism, sexism, xeno/homo/trans-phobia, Islam-o-phobia, antisemitism, religious people, institutions conspiring with political and economic powers, slavery, and much more. Empire, at the heart of these ills, has not disappeared. It has morphed.

The reading from John (19:12-16) reminds us of the injustice of a system of values and hegemonic relationships the Roman Empire devised in order to maintain its total reach. Empire and its agents so framed the minds of the people that they became



part of the irrationality of the system. Empire controlled the information and presented it to the people so they could no longer discern the injustice, their complicity, and oppression. Empire's aim and behaviour never change.

When the story of Jesus' trial and crucifixion is viewed from this angle, you may ask yourself: what was wrong with the people? Why didn't they realize they were condemning an innocent man and losing the chance to transform things according to the revolutionary ideas Jesus presented in echoing the prophetic inheritance in the gospel of Luke (4:18). They were trapped within the (il)logic of the empire. They became part of it the very same moment they affirmed Caesar as their master and Lord.

Thus, Jesus became a victim of the empire. In their God-talk, Church Fathers, theologians, and preachers have made the cross part of God's plan of redemption. Can it be that nearer to the truth, that the empire and its agents slaughtered Jesus because he was a threat to their exploitative system, which was denying full and flourishing life for all? His body was broken by empire and its agents because he was shaking-up and wanted to change things. He was a threat to empire's extractive and exploitative ideals. Think again about our traditional liturgical mantra that 'he died for our sins'. Pause and consider this: Jesus was killed because of the evil and insidious reach of empire.

Some things may never change. At the same time, what the 'rising to life' way of Jesus demonstrates is that things can change, should change, and they will change! That is the main content of our faith. Otherwise, why bring these memories back to us every year? Beyond that Friday, remember the rising-up Sunday.

PRAYER

God-who-disrupts-our-neat-boundaries, you whose truth is larger than we are: by your presence and through your Spirit enlarge our minds and hearts so that we may seek truth, catch a glimpse of truth, hear the truth, learn the truth, tell the truth, live truth – your truth of the way of full life for all. In the name of the rising-up One whom no tomb could contain. Amen

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Who are the victims of today's empire(s) and what does Jesus' death and rising up mean for our faith and practice?

Michael Jagessar

Council for World Mission



9 April 2023

Easter Sunday

MOB VIOLENCE AND THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH AS THE CROSS BEARER

³⁰ *They spat on him, and took the reed and struck him on the head.*

³¹ *After mocking him, they stripped him of the robe and put his own clothes on him. Then they led him away to crucify him.*

³² *As they went out, they came upon a man from Cyrene named Simon; they compelled this man to carry his cross. (Mathew 27:30-32)*

The text above is one of the commonly used readings among Christian communities during Easter session. Although the story provides us with the narrative of the road to Golgotha (the place of the skull) and the suffering of Jesus leading to his death, there are aspects of this story that are similar to our contemporary society that needs to be highlight. First is the issue of mob psychology violence which is very common in most of our communities. Looking closely at the text we see a situation where Jesus was surrounded by a mob that was psychologically motivated into something they may not even have been conversant with. One would assume that not everyone who was shouting crucify him! crucify him! had a clear picture of the events around Jesus' arrest and yet the Bible tells us that the mob and of course with ring leaders who were the insinulators of violence led Jesus to the cross to die.

At the time of writing this devotion our part of the world is observing 16 days of activism, an activity that focuses on addressing, gender-based violence. As we may all be aware, there are many forms of violence such as, mob violence which may be in form of gang rape or xenophobic attacks of people of other foreign nationals. Just like the mob that attacked Jesus mob violence is one of the most dangerous form of violence that has led to the death of many innocent people. For example, migrant most of whom run away from the pollical and war workers who are attached daily by different mobs including the social-political mob of the host country has left poor and innocent people homeless and vulnerable and many of them dead. The second



point that I wish to highlight is the call for the church to arise and carry the crosses of these suffering souls who are innocent and yet die at the hands of the wicked mobs. Just like Simon became the salvation to the pain that Jesus encountered we need a church that is going to bring salvation to these souls.

PRAYER

Dear Lord we want to thank you for your death and resurrection that bring us unto to salvation. Just like in the of Jesus, we live in era where injustice towards humanity and nature is engrossed in people's minds. Help your church to be the barrier of the crosses that many innocent yet condemned people carry in Jesus' name Amen

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How can the church be a Simo and help carry the crosses of many, women, men and children who are vulnerable?

Lilian Siwila

University of KwaZulu Natal



16 April 2023

ENCOUNTERING THE RISEN LORD FOR A MISSION TO LOVE



When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” (John 21:15, Recommend reading the full text, 21:1-19)

We often say that we love God. What do we really mean by saying that we love God? Is it just limited to the words we utter, or is it much beyond that? We will derive some lessons from Peter’s life on how to love God truly.

We see that in the preceding passage, where Jesus appeared again, after his resurrection, to the disciples for the third time by the Sea of Galilee, which is also called the sea of Tiberias. Simon Peter, Thomas, Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, James and John, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter told them, “I am going out to fish,” and they said, “we will also go with you.” They went out to the sea for fishing. They forgot what their master, Jesus Christ, had said to them so far. They were so discouraged because of the death of their master.

They thought that they were left alone as the sheep without the shepherd. They went back to their past business, i.e., fishing.

They tried their very best all night, but they caught nothing. All their efforts went in vain. Early in the morning, Jesus appeared, helped them catch a lot of fish, and shared breakfast with them. After that, Jesus confronts Peter and confirms him in his pastoral calling with the three questions of love.

Jesus' questions of "Do you love me" are intended to confront Peter and restore him back into the relationship with him. The test is simply Peter's relation to the Lord. This is the basis of genuine Christianity—love towards God and God's people. The test is not moral perfection, nor academic excellence, nor brilliance in ministry, nor a display of spiritual gifts, nor any agenda of our own but simply a relationship with the risen Lord and love for him.

Jesus communicates his will for Peter. He commissions Peter for service. The three commissions corresponding to Peter's three answers are different- "feed my lamb, take care of my sheep, feed my sheep". Jesus tells Peter, "You are to be a shepherd to my people, teaching and caring for them all—young and old." It is a calling to serve all the people of God—lambs as well as grown-up sheep, the strong and the weak, the crippled and diseased, the rich and the poor, the privileged and the vulnerable.

Real love towards God begins with the denial of self-interest (Luke 9:23) and acceptance of God's mission of service to others. Selflessness comes from an experience of life with the risen Jesus Christ – (Phi. 1:21-24; 3:7-11).

PRAYER

Risen Lord, enable us to boldly say that we love you when you confront us and ask, "Do you love me," Loving you is loving your people despite the differences. Help us to carry on such love till the end. In Jesus' name, Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What does it mean by loving God is loving people?

Devadas Galla

Yonsei University Global Institute of Theology



23 April 2023

ENCOUNTER OF YOUNG PEOPLE WITH THE RISEN LORD

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." (John 20:19, Recommend reading the full text, 20:19-23)

In today's Gospel, we find ourselves in the locked upper room with the first disciples. Only Mary Magdalene had experienced the Risen Christ at that time. Others knew that the tomb was empty, but no one apart from Mary had any real experience of Jesus' resurrection. The doors of the room that the disciples were gathered in were not only locked to keep the Jews away but locked to keep the whole world away – whilst a small group of men and women were trying to make sense of all that they had hoped for, which seemed to have been lost. Suddenly, Jesus walks through the door – literally through it, without opening it – and stands amongst them, and greets them with the words, "Peace be with you"!



Imagine being there! What an extraordinary experience face-to-face with the resurrected Jesus! No wonder the disciples who were locked in that room in fear became, at once, the fearless missionary leaders of the Early Church. It is this encounter with the risen Christ that made the disciples to be very bold in preaching Christ, and they did not hesitate to be martyrs. They had locked themselves into a prison of fear and lived as though Jesus was still in the tomb. The risen Lord broke into their prison to free them from fear. After giving them His peace, he gave them the commission "...As the Father has sent me, so I send you" (v21). The disciples hid behind closed doors to protect themselves from becoming victims. The risen Lord freed them to witness boldly concerning what they had seen and experienced. They transformed being fear-filled followers into fearless missionaries. When they met the risen Christ, they received peace in their lives.

We live in a world where young people are faced with so many challenges, such as drug abuse, gender identity, unemployment, displacement, climate change, addictions, negative peer pressure, mental health challenges, and so on. Some of these challenges were aggravated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and that resulted in a great number of young people who have committed suicide. It is in the midst of such challenges that the risen Lord is coming into the lives of young people and speaking, "Peace be with you"! Real peace, real comfort, and real solutions can only be found in the risen Christ. Christ came and lived among us. He is Emmanuel, who knows what it means to be discriminated against, put to shame, misunderstood, and marginalised. The passage teaches us that any encounter with the risen Christ should result in a change of lives. Such as the Lord changed the waters of Marah from being bitter to being drinkable. Therefore, the risen Christ comes to the situation of young people who are grappling with various challenges to make their lives worth living. A real encounter of the risen Christ with the young people should promote the fullness of life.

PRAYER

Almighty God, we beseech you to help the young people experience your unending love and peace as they journey in life. May they encounter the risen Christ in their daily life endeavours. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Reflect on your own encounter with the Lord and how it transformed your life.

Jackline Makena Mutuma

Methodist Church in Kenya



30 April 2023

ENCOUNTERING THE RISEN LORD AMIDST UNCERTAINTIES



That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem (St. Luke 24:33).

The resurrection of our Savior, Jesus Christ moulds, strengthens, and stabilizes our faith in God. Resurrection enables us to understand the universal mission of God, i.e., salvation for the whole planet, including humans and other living beings.

Our living context and circumstances sometimes destabilize our faith and make us blind to understanding the power of resurrection. The power of resurrection stimulates us to measure our lowly situation only by our faith established in Christ. Risen Lord leads us to know about the role of our response to God's action. Risen Lord helps us grasp our limitations and provide the capacity to overcome barriers.

After the death of Jesus Christ, the disciples were so confused and in distress for fear of life. They were so worried and shut themselves up in the upper room, not knowing the consequences. Two of Jesus' disciples, Cleopas and the other one who followed Jesus till His death, even turned to go away to their home place, Emmaus, and started their journey in despair and distress, discussing the events that happened in Jerusalem.

When they were encountered by the risen Lord, they could not recognize him. But Jesus walked with them and spoke to them to analyze their faith by interpreting the scriptures beginning with Moses and all the prophets concerning himself (v.27). A process of re-reading the scriptures took place during the journey. Jesus helped them to understand the mission of God with an open mind. The risen Lord created a new understanding and direction for their faith. They turned their journey from Emmaus to Jerusalem, which is also a significant sign of their understanding. This is indeed a great experience of evolving from hopelessness to celebration.

We often fail to recognize Jesus, even though He walks with us, due to our distress. This experience of journeying back to Emmaus happens in our lives too. We fail to believe in God's assurance and push ourselves into a state of confusion, distress, and hopelessness. As a result, we start journeying backwards and become weak in faith with all the uncertainties.

Encountering the risen Lord, who walks with us, talks to us, and answers all our questions that arise from our life situations, is an empowering experience amidst life's uncertainties. Confidence in the risen Lord forms the basis of our success in our lives. The power of resurrection working and operating in us strengthens us in times of challenges. The resurrection of Jesus Christ helps us to perceive spiritual growth and is considered as a model for a believer's own faith journey to a deeper faith and as an instrument to help others in the same journey. Let us proclaim, "Christ, the Lord is risen today, Halleluiah!"

PRAYER

Gracious God, through encountering the risen Lord Jesus Christ, you have given us an opportunity to re-examine our faith journey by acknowledging his presence within us and in all walks of our lives. Help us to understand that the journey with Christ clears our paths and empowers us with his divine love to carry on the mission entrusted to us. Help us to encounter you for hope and guidance in times of uncertainties. Bless us with the power of resurrection. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What is it like to walk with Jesus as he explains all life's challenges and clears the uncertainties?

Joseph Dawson

St. John's Parish, Visakhapatnam



7 May 2023

MANAGEMENT CAPACITY

when no plant of the field was yet in the earth and no herb of the field had yet sprung up—for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth, and there was no one to till the ground. (Genesis 2:5, Recommend reading the full text 2:5-15)

The story of Genesis and God's creation is a very familiar one, giving us an insight into how the world came to be, it is presented like the genealogy of creation history, but our special attention should be drawn to v5. in light of vs 8-12

In the wisdom of God and the mystery of creation, there are seeds with the potential to grow in the ground but await the availability of rain or water to water the ground. It is natural for something to grow out of the ground even if nothing was planted. However, humanity's participatory role and cooperation was lacking, hence the call for his creation. When humanity was created with his mandate and management role and capacity, certain growth was attracted. God had to halt the growth and expansion of creation because of lacking the participatory role of humanity in managing what was given, i.e., to work the ground, nurture it, exercise prudent stewardship and oversight over it through the safe keep, care, usage, healing, and restoration, all for humanity's sustainable survival and development.

When humans' management role is well exercised, the creation responds in return and gives humanity food, medicine, renewal and sustenance but only in the context of his management capacity and capabilities. We are called to use God's natural resources for our benefit and that of posterity in a responsible and sustainable manner as a proof of our stewardship (management). Economic justice will not be achieved by people praying and waiting on God but by acting in the economic affairs of their people and setting examples of Christian stewardship while they conduct business and investments. Humanity's insatiable greed and selfishness continue to perpetuate hunger, poverty, and deprivation of human needs like shelter, food, clean drinking water and affordable financing.

Within the church, one can argue that bad theologies and wrong interpretations of scripture have also added to the equation, among many others. The systems and structures so far developed in economic systems, especially through policy formulations, do not allow the majority to come to the dinner table.



However, whether invited or not, there are still some ways through which all can participate at the dinner table and enjoy the provision of God and the fruit of their labour. Our management shrewdness, transformation and re-learning of global economics from a Biblical perspective will empower us to start from somewhere.

In order to change our current economic situation, we must Change What We Do, and what we do can only change when we Change What We Believe. In order to change what we believe, we must change what we know. We must learn to re-learn what we have learnt, introduce new information and take action that could transform our lives. Interactions, Bible Studies Reflections, and Entrepreneurial and Life Survival skills should continue to be promoted both at the family and Congregation levels.

PRAYER

God of all creation and all in it, enlarge our capacity to manage what we already have. Help us to protect mother earth for all her good and provisions. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What really causes Inequality in wealth redistribution in your country, and who truly owns and controls the natural resources you have?

Does the church have the capacity to engage in global economic dispensation?

Andrew Chulu

The United Church of Zambia



THE VISION OF THE ECONOMY OF LIFE AS CREATION

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day. (Genesis 1:31, Recommend reading the full text, 1: 26-30)

Reading Genesis 1:26-30 is fascinating because here God created an economy of life as creation and installed two people, Adam and Eve, to manage it as stewards. God said it was very good. The fall of Adam and Eve destroyed the economy of life, and now humanity is faced with challenges in creation, including climate change, hunger and diseases. It is high time humanity recollects the lost paradise through the teachings of Jesus Christ that God created the earth for all to live sustainably in love. Humanity continued to destroy God's creation by inventing an unsustainable economic system based on the neo-economic paradigm and using the market as a distributive mechanism of goods and growth without limits enhanced by greed. Where contemporary economic theory and practice start from the fundamental assumption of scarcity, the vision of the economy of life as creation is based on the affirmation of the abundance of life as a blessing from God, who provides enough for the needs of all and still sustaining the health of the Oikos. This aspect challenges humanity.

The vision of an economy of life spells out the rules of love, which are giving and receiving, sharing and just exchanging life in God's household of life (the Oikos). This vision is an expression of spiritual discernment concerning the powers that dominate the economic realities of peoples' lives. It challenges the laws of the market and redirects economic activities towards serving the common good. It trusts the transformative energies of the Holy Spirit to realize the promise of "life in all its fullness" (John 10:10b).

An economy of life responds primarily to people's needs for life in the community rather than serving private interests and desires. However, life is more than survival and people are entitled to more than the satisfaction of material needs. Therefore, an economy of life is concerned with justice. It values cooperation rather than competitive individual achievement and seeks to provide opportunities for productive work for all. It emphasizes the participation of the people in decisions about production and distribution and assesses the value of products based on their use and sustainability rather than monetary gain in exchange. It seeks to build an economic order that

respects human dignity, encourages solidarity and mutual accountability, and serves the common good.

The vision of an economy of life does not present a blueprint for an ideal state of ordering economic activities: Rather, it provides guidelines for transformative praxis that will continuously have to struggle with the temptations of abusing economic and financial power of exploiting the resources of nature and giving in to sinful drives of greed and egotism.

It was the fall of Adam that reversed the economy of life as creation by God to the economy of death that we are facing today. Repentance and adhering to the teachings of Christ underlying Love as a commandment and the above-stated values will help to revert to God's economy of life as creation that affirms life in abundance for all on the one hand and protects God's oikos on the other.

PRAYER

God of life, help us embrace the economy of life, turning away from greed and destruction of the creation you have given to us. May we commit ourselves to the mission of affirming life in its fullness to all, including the creation. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How do I be part of the vision of the economy of life as creation to affirm life in abundance for all?

Rogate R. Mshana

True Wealth Enterprises for Economic and Social Change (TWESC)



21 May 2023

ZACCHAEUS' EXPERIENCE

But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if the many died through the one man's trespass, much more surely have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of the one man, Jesus Christ, abounded for the many. (Romans 5: 15)

In 2022, I had the privilege of attending the WCC Assembly. Among the deeply enriching worship experiences was one led by members of the Roman Catholic Church. The worship centred on Zacchaeus. The speaker used an effective, interactive approach, inviting worshippers to imagine themselves as actors in the drama of the day Zacchaeus met Jesus.

I share today what I thought of saying when she invited participants to imagine ourselves as Zacchaeus and express what he was saying to his wife as he reflected on 'the day he met Jesus'.

These are my imaginings:

"My dear wife, how our lives have changed! When I think of that day, I still get shivers in my spine. You know, deep in my heart, I was changed. It was as if all that I had always lived for (you know, gathering all that I could to ensure the security for you and the children and keeping our home better than so many of our neighbours) just shifted in priority. As important as those things still are, I just knew that there was more to living than accumulating things faster than those other people.

As I told you, I just said to him, 'I have decided to give away half of all I have to the poor,' and any excess that I took from anyone that I shouldn't have, I am giving it back four times.

The look he gave me, I will never forget. I always knew something was wrong with this foreign occupation by the Roman Empire though I benefited from it. When he said to me, 'Today salvation has come to this house, I felt so good in myself. I wasn't even sure what he meant, but you can see how differently people are treating us now. For the first time in a long time, I feel like I belong. I think that salvation thing he talked about was all about relationships.'

Like all the human experiences recounted in the Bible, the Zacchaeus encounter is about so much more than Zacchaeus himself. Each of us can deeply consider what aspects of Zacchaeus' being are replicated in our experience and what needs to be reconciled. The Church, too, can consider what the Zacchaeus experience means to it as reflected in its history and its being today.

The Reparations movement is a call for justice and a recalibration of relationships in the community. It is echoing in many parts of the globe as a time in which (at last?) the over 300 years of enslavement and trade in African peoples and its legacies are to be confronted.

CWM's actions over the last decade are to be embraced and affirmed for their bravery and honesty, unearthing the complicity of its antecedent organisations and uncovering levels of complicity in the sin of slavery. Its act of repentance laments the injuries of the period and their legacies and now begins action towards reparatory justice for these wrongs. Some other organisations and denominations are currently doing the same. These are to be lauded and celebrated worldwide and remembered, like Zacchaeus' experience, for their reconciling capacity.

Some may find Jesus' confrontation particularly challenging and unsettling. I have no doubt Zacchaeus did. But Jesus never left before Zacchaeus, in an honest and brave response, reckoned with his truth. That day (in Jesus' words, not mine), 'Salvation came to this house.

PRAYER

Triune God, by the presence and power of your Holy Spirit in the world, reconcile us today. We pray, Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Imagine yourself in place of Zacchaeus! How would you respond to the suggestion of Jesus?

Gordon Cowans

United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands



28 May 2023

Day of Pentecost

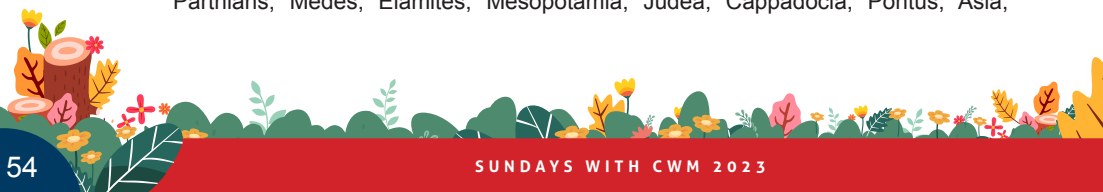
WONDERS OF GOD IN 'COSMIC' OWN TONGUES



"..... declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!". "What does this mean?" (Acts 2:11-12 NIV).

There are two basic messages in the event of Pentecost in Acts: the heavenly "energy" that comes through tongues of fire and the borderless participation of the believers. The event where the Triune God enabled the many tongues to declare divine wonders reminds me of Rev. Jaulung Wismar Saragih (1888-1968), a first Simalungun Christian Protestant Church's Priest who is also the first Indonesian who translated the Bible into his local Simalungun language. He extends the legacy of Pentecost that emphasizes all languages are the languages of God. All languages may declare the wonders of God.

However, Pentecost is not only about human native languages. The book of Acts witnesses the marvellous works of God through the many native languages: the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia,



Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Cyrene, Rome, Cretans, and Arabs (vs 9-12). Since the empire of Rome used Greek as the officially dominating language, these languages were rarely heard in the liturgy and politics of Biblical times. As the people of Jerusalem were wondrously amazed by asking: "What does this mean?" (v. 12). I am also evocatively curious to articulate what does the phrase "What does this mean?" means today, after borderlessly travelling for 2000 years.

If God recognizes the unheard voices, as many native languages above (vs 9-12), and employ it as the agency of God's wonders, don't we think we need to sincerely and carefully reimagine what or whose unheard language that the Holy Spirit invites us to hear today? We repeatedly read the phrase our "own language" (v. 6), "our native" (v. 7) and "our own tongues" (v. 11). Of course, the word "our" is an inclusive, plural, and equal expression. We need to extend it not only in an anthropocentric sense but cosmic native language. We need to listen to the unheard cosmic languages which continuously cry through the burned forest, polluted ocean, contaminated air, land, and water, extinction of creation, and the rise of the earth's temperature, to name a few. Their native natural-environmental languages are interconnected parts of "ours", too. Cosmic tongues are an inseparable part of humans' conversely. Cosmic and human bodies are inter-being. Moreover, cosmic is also God's official agency that faithfully declares God's wonders. Thus, Pentecost is not only about the existence of human tongues but also cosmic tongues.

May the cosmic's voiceless voice be heard. May the cosmic's ecological-Pentecostal agency be recognized. Let the cosmic speak in its native tongues. Let Pentecost be a cosmic Pentecost. "What does this mean?" It means to let the creation celebrate the cosmic Pentecost and declare the wonders of God in its own tongues.

PRAYER

Triune God, on this holy day of Pentecost, let the energy of the Holy Spirit (Ruah), Our Divine Mother, enthusiastically burn in our hearts as you recognize our voice, empower us to recognize the mother earth's oppressed voice also that we all may declare your wonders. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Reflect upon how we would hear the voice of creation when it proclaims the wonders of God!

Parulihan Sipayung

Gereja Kristen Protestan Simalungun



4 June 2023

Trinity Sunday

A COMMUNITY OF SHARING

2 Corinthians 13:11-13; Matthew 28:16-20

Today is Trinity Sunday—the day when we think about the way we understand who God is—as Three in One, One in Three. This is not an easy concept to get our heads around, and it is important to remember that the idea of the Trinity is actually a doctrine we use because we can never understand the whole reality of God. Many pastors, including me, feel inadequate to preach on the Trinity. The Holy Trinity is such a mystery. In eighteen years as a pastor, I do not believe that I have ever shared a satisfactory sermon about the Holy Trinity—which is probably a good thing for humility!

If we take a closer look at today's text on St Paul's second letter to Corinthians 13:11-13, we will see that they help us better appreciate the most important truth about the Holy Trinity. The letter concludes with a blessing proclaiming God's grace, love and fellowship: "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all." This blessing suggests that to know God as Three and, at the same time to know God as One, has to do with responding to God's invitation to be in a relationship with God as a community and not simply about having information or knowledge about God.

Blessing is perhaps the most unique way of experiencing God's unifying grace, love, and fellowship. It reminds us that we have life and faith only because God is committed to us and is surrounding us always in the continuing embrace of the Spirit. Today, many are so exhausted that it is hard to find love and grace towards our neighbour. The late Catholic Bishop of Tanzania, Christopher Mwoleka, once said, "The mystery of the Trinity is not a doctrine dealing with a division of power in the Godhead, but a statement about the way in which God shares (God)self with the creation and calls us who believe not so much to explain as to imitate that sharing by sharing our own lives with the creation."

That is the core message of the "Great Commission" in the Gospel of St Matthew 28:16-20. It is much more than a command to establish a few local missions in



foreign countries. It is a call to discipleship and sharing the gospel of Jesus wherever we are. Making disciples has nothing to do with proselytising or increasing church statistics. It has to do with taking the message of Jesus in and through the grace, love and fellowship of the Triune God. We lovingly and inclusively share ourselves with all the people around us in the community: no one is excluded.

The Bible depicts God as communal, being in a relationship from the beginning and wanting to invite all into that relationship. As disciples of Jesus, we are also encouraged to welcome others and invite them to a place where they can enjoy their relationship with God as a community.

PRAYER

God, our creator, redeemer, and sustainer, you held nothing back when you shared all you have with Jesus, who shared all of himself with us. Help us to be generous in our relationships with others sharing our time, treasure, and talent. May your Spirit continue to guide us into your grace, love, and fellowship. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How do we transform our communities as places of fellowship and sharing with those around us and with God?

Sim Joo Yee (Julie)

Council for World Mission



11 June 2023

COMMUNITIES OF RESILIENCE

"Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12, recommend reading the full text, 1:1-18)

As I am doing my theological study at Trinity Theological College in Singapore with a scholarship from CWM, God has given me an opportunity to be involved and served in one of the Myanmar Christian communities in Singapore. Most of them are migrant workers from Myanmar working as domestic helpers and in the construction sector. Many of them are in distress due to various problems arising in their families back in Myanmar, especially due to the military coup, and here they face hardships in their work and from their employers. They are not fluent in English and, therefore, unable to join local churches. As a result, different dialect groups have formed fellowships with two main objectives: to conduct regular worship service in their respective dialects and to assist each other when in need so that their spiritual, mental, and physical well-being is taken care of while they are in Singapore as foreigners. They are, in fact, the communities of resilience.

James, probably the brother of Jesus, sent the letter to the (Jewish) Christian communities scattered all over the Palestinian world, perhaps due to persecution



(Ja. 1:1). James points out two kinds of difficulties encountered by the communities: trials that come from extreme circumstances (Ja. 1:2), and temptations to sin which come from the inner man (1:13-15). In both cases, James names three essential reasons they should keep in mind so that they might preserve their faith amidst difficulties. First, he wanted them to see hardships as means of blessing, not as curses. The Jewish people strongly believed that hardship, suffering, and death were God's curse upon sinners (Gen. 3:16-19). But Jesus, by his suffering, death, and resurrection, changed the curse into a blessing for believers through faith (Gal. 3:13-14). Therefore, James encouraged the believers to be happy when facing different trials because the hardships will help their faith grow into maturity or Christlikeness (Ja. 1:2-4).

Second, James assured them of God's love. They should know that temptations stem from their own evil desires and not from God (Ja. 1:13-15). Therefore, amidst trials and temptations, they should trust God who works for the good of those who love him (Rom. 8:28), who gives generously to all who ask with true faith (Ja. 1:5-8), and from whom all good and perfect gifts come (Ja. 1:16-18). Third, James encouraged them to fix their eyes on their future glory, not on the present hardships. Although they faced different kinds of trials and temptations and might not receive glory and honour on earth, God, who keeps an eye on their struggles against the difficulties, will reward them with eternal life, that is, living with God forever (Ja. 1:12). Christians who are scattered all over the world face trials from external circumstances and inner temptations and hence live in distress. We need to remember that hardships are the means for our growth in faith, that God in love gives all things generously, and that we fix our eyes on our future glory—to live with God forever.

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, thank you for your Son who suffered and died on our behalf and gave us new life. Thank you for your Holy Spirit, whom you sent to be with us and strengthen us. Grant us your grace so that we may support our brothers and sisters all over the world who are in distress due to trials and temptations. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What is the significance of the temptation, suffering, and death of Jesus for our day-to-day trials and temptations?

Van Biak Muan

Presbyterian Church of Myanmar



18 June 2023

International day for countering Hate speech

MINDING OUR SPEECH

Ephesians 4:17-32, James 3:6-12

Nowadays, the development of technology helps people connect beyond boundaries. It is much easier and faster to deliver a message and receive information through internet networking. While we enjoy the convenience of connecting people far and wide, we also tend to forget how precious it is to be connected.

Do you recall the days without an internet network? I remember when I was in primary school, one of my friends was moving as she transferred to another school. We were so worried that our friendship would end at that moment as we felt disconnected even though we were in the same city. We treasure every letter we wrote, and the call we made for it is not affordable for a child. One may surprise simply by receiving a fancy greeting card. Every communication would purely contain love and care.

Due to the new communication technologies, the scale of connectedness is expanding. It is not only about the conversation between two people but also inside



a community network. We can share things that we want to share and comment on others simply by tapping keys on our keyboards. We quickly get lost in the flood of information and freely share our viewpoints. Even a simple emoji can communicate our intention. However, such freedom of speech could lead us to neglect the principles of living and the importance of respect.

Today's scripture is about the instruction for Christian living. At the beginning of Ephesians 4, Paul urges us to live a life that is worthy of the calling we have received from God. We are not simply a community that enjoys the grace that Christ brought to us through his cross. We need to keep renewing ourselves in God's will by putting off our old selves and not conforming to the world to build up the body of Christ until we all reach unity in the faith. In verse 29, Paul reminds, "let no corrupt communication proceed out of our mouth, but which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers." (KJV). James 3:6 also mentions that the tongue is a world of evil among the parts of the body. Blessing and cursing should not come out of the same mouth, for we are all made in God's likeness. (James 3:9) We need to perfect ourselves to speak according to the word of God, which is truth and full of love that benefits the listeners. We need to make it a daily practice to seek the presence of the Holy Spirit to help us be sensitive to evils and temptation and get rid of every form of malice.

In the midst of the ongoing flood of information and connectedness, it is necessary for us to guard our speech and fill it with the love of God so that we may eradicate hate speech and form a language of love.

PRAYER

Dear God, we give thanks for enabling us to live in an era where technology makes communication convenient. Help us that through every word we speak and type, we spread truth and love. Teach us to love and forgive one another just as you have forgiven us. May our lives show your righteousness to those around us. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What should we do to form a love language?

Doris Wong

Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China



25 June 2023

A HEART FOR PEACE



If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all. (Romans 12:18)

Christians are called to be peacemakers. Peace is beyond what the world experiences as it involves the heart. Often, peace is settled on the table between two warring groups without practical implementation. The peace that the world understands is more inclined to the absence of war and conflicts. World leaders are advocating peace so do community leaders. In fact, everyone in the world supports peace. But the reality we see is quite the opposite of that. Conflicts prevail, and wars resurface in multiple forms. Enmity cannot die out between many ethnic groups.

During the 18th and 19th centuries, Mizo Tribes in northeast India were at war with neighbouring tribes. They were so aggressive that they attacked other tribes for possession of their guns, women, domestic animals, and other valuable properties. They plundered, killed, and beheaded their victims to take them home as war trophies. Many smaller tribes feared them, and the women even used to intimidate their crying children by saying, 'Stop crying; otherwise, Lushais (Mizos) will come.' The British rulers in India tried to stop their atrocities through two punitive military expeditions followed by colonial rule in the late 19th century. The Mizos were somehow then



controlled but not changed at heart. Then the missionaries arrived, and the gospel was preached to them. It was the Gospel that changed their hearts. The war-loving Mizos became peacemakers preaching the gospel to the neighbouring tribes. The once fearsome community was eventually transformed into a loving community. The head hunters became soul hunters with peacemaking attitudes.

The word of God tells us to be at peace with others (Romans 12:18). Even if others may not, we as believers must have a heart of peace. Some people from neighbouring tribes did not welcome some early Mizo missionaries due to their past experiences. But the missionaries were more focused on the gospel of love. They preached and maintained a heart for peace. We often expect others to take peace initiative so that we, too, can join. We are more inclined to wait for them. But as disciples of the prince of peace, we can start peace initiatives. The gospel does not encourage us to wait for peace but requires us to act for peace.

There is an ongoing discussion on human rights in the current global situation. We tend to focus on our own rights and interests at the cost of others. Putting ourselves first will lead us to develop a one-sided perspective causing a clash of values with others. We need to keep a balance between us and others to promote peace. Peace is like a partnership where both sides enjoy equal status having the same right. Jesus teaches us to put others first. That is the way to make peace.

PRAYER

God Almighty, give me a heart of peace so I may truly serve others. Make me become your agent for healing the wounds of the World. Let others benefit through my sufferings and gain from my loss. May your words become flesh in me. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What must I do to promote peace in my community?

Lalrinkima

Presbyterian Church of India



2 July 2023

COMMUNITIES OF FELLOWSHIP

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32, Recommend reading the full text 4: 32-37)

The ultimate plan of God for the Church is to be united. Apostle Paul talks about this 'mystery' in Ephesians 3:6, that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. But historically, as we dissect, we must acknowledge that a lot of divisions and factions ensued in Church due to the lack of unity. God, in his divine will, wants his children to be united, exhibiting a great mark of a flourishing community. One such example of a flourishing community that follows his will can be seen in Acts 4:32. It states Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. This community visualises the concept of David, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell together in unity." The setting in which God works is of love and unity.



When God is in the community or the head of a community, individuals no longer seek personal interests; instead, they care about what God wants them to testify for him in the world. Therefore, in the early Church, many were willing to give up all the assets God gave them and ultimately put themselves in God's hands. That's how we can tell it was a community flourishing with unity and fellowship. There should be no schism in the body, but the members should have the same care for one another. The high priestly prayer of Jesus in John 17:21 also underscores that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

A further standpoint of this flourishing community was that they all shared their possessions equally. Everyone forfeited for the good of others. The outcome of this unity was that the apostles continued to spread the gospel. From time to time, someone would bring the money from selling their home or land and lay it at the apostle's feet in a wonderful act of sacrifice and faith. Then the Apostles would have it given to those who had a need. This also echoes the incident back in Exodus 35 and 36, when the Tabernacle was being constructed. A display of unity among the people was witnessed, as Moses had to restrain people from bringing in more gifts for building the Tabernacle. They all worked together under the leadership of Besalel, Ohaliab and Moses. Such a great display of a flourishing community. Let this unity in a community be visibly characterised by sharing the resources.

PRAYER

Triune God, the giver and sustainer of our lives, we beseech your help in equipping ourselves to demonstrate unity in fellowship. Help us to be good stewards of the gifts and talents that You have bestowed upon us. Help us to be sensitive to the needs of the Church and our communities. In Jesus' name. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What are some practical ways in which we can demonstrate unity in fellowship amid the deeply polarised communities? How can we cultivate a culture of fellowship?

Ebin Thankachan

Council for World Mission

9 July 2023

COMMUNITIES OF CHRIST-LIKE RESISTANCE



Matthew 11:16-19, 25-30

The world we live in is wonderful. We cannot but marvel at how beautiful the natural world created by God is. But what happens in this beautiful world is often not optimal. A world full of exploitation, oppression, and a world without love that threatens the lives of others. As the years passed by, such exploitation and corruption grew gradually. Greed and corruption not only cause damage to societies but to the environment as well. All living creatures, including humans and other creatures, are now heading toward collective ecological suicide due to our greed.

Today's passage was used earlier for the feast of the Sacred Heart. But in RCL (Revised Common Lectionary), with the help of the first reading (Zechariah 9:9-12), we see Jesus as the humble Messiah.

In the world we live in, humility is no longer a virtue. We are forced to prove our abilities and get ahead of others, even by trampling them on. Sometimes exploitation



and oppression for achievement are taken for granted. However, in the face of this world, Jesus Christ shows that he is the ultimate expression of humility. He did not tread the path of triumph over his others. He humbled himself in humility, even to death. Jesus declared, "I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and the intelligent and have revealed them to infants;" (v.25)

The world wants to be God, and it will do whatever it takes to achieve it. But God's revelation is hidden from those who consider themselves smart and only reveal it to the little ones. To receive this revelation from the Son, a person must set aside all human wisdom and become "a little one." We must also set aside human wisdom if we are to recognize the Son present in our midst through his miracles and words. The wise people in the world mistakenly think that they are on the high road. But that's just a low-key way. The lowly way in the world is actually the highway. We do not fight violence with violence but absorb it with peace. We do not confront power with force but embrace it with love. The path that seems foolish is the path of wisdom and resistance.

To do this, we must diligently know God. We must live like Christ, who humbled himself and became gentle and lowly in heart. If we do, we will find rest and peace, even while we carry the Lord's yoke. When the world goes low, we go high. That is the way of resistance Jesus taught us.

PRAYER

Lord God, you have shown through Jesus Christ that there is true victory in humility. Help us to resist, not by way of the world, but by following the way of Jesus Christ. So that we may see the salvation that the wise men of the world cannot see. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Can we resist the powers of this world like Christ, who humbled and obeyed till death? How would such a model of resistance be relevant today?

An-Wei Nehemiah Tan

The Presbyterian Church of Korea



16 July 2023

CWM Sunday

MISSING THE POINT

Now the apostles and the brothers and sisters who were in Judea heard that the gentiles had also accepted the word of God. So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him, saying, "Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?" (Acts 11:1-3)

Criticism! That word that makes you cringe with discomfort and frustration. That word that gives you sleepless nights or even depression. That word that Peter was experiencing criticism of his actions. Criticism is part of the human experience, and you will face it in various seasons of your life.

The sad thing is that Peter was being criticized, not by strangers or the opposition. He was being criticized by his own! Fellow Jews. Fellow believers. Fellow circumcised brothers. Fellow colleagues. And when criticism comes from your own, it is especially painful. You will feel 'on your own' while you are 'among your own.'

So, what had happened to cause the criticism? Peter had obeyed God's instruction to go to the house of Cornelius, a Gentile, to be hosted there and to preach to them, following which the Gentile crowd had converted and received the Holy Spirit. Back in Jerusalem, Peter was welcomed with criticism over this.

The truth about the criticism is that the fellow circumcised believers totally missed the point! Here was an amazing act of God where "the Holy Spirit was poured on the Gentiles" (v.45), and they were "speaking in tongues and praising God" (v.46). This was no human-made occurrence; this was God in action because only God had the power to pour out God's Spirit upon people. They missed the point that this was an act of God, not an act of Peter!

We must beware that when we are criticized, we, too, begin to miss the point. We must remember the saying, "the main thing is to keep the main thing the main thing." The main thing here was God's action, but the circumcised believers focused on the minor thing—on Peter the human, and their cultural laws.

There is a need to look at the truth behind any criticism. In this case, the believers criticized because what God had done through Peter was unfamiliar territory for



them. It destabilized their superior position over Gentiles. It challenged their long-held traditions and laws. It meant no more privilege in the faith. No more on-upmanship. No more high ground. No more putting the gospel in their pocket like a personal possession.

All because the Gentiles “also” had received the word of God (v.1). That word “also” is problematic to those who live with privilege. “Also” means inclusivity, opening the doors, letting go of gate-keeping, allowing others in, and sharing privilege. Whenever you are criticized for doing any of these things for the sake of Christ, hang in there, God will fight for you. And remember the earlier words of Peter: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:9). Peter did not cower because of the criticism against him. He confidently explained what God had done, and the result was amazing: “When they heard this, they had no further objections and praised God” (v.18). From bitter criticism to praising God for the same thing!

PRAYER

Lord, teach us to stand strong in the face of criticism against your outcomes.

Give us the courage to explain your actions to those around us like Peter did to the fellow believers. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Remember and list out the experiences where you have faced criticism for the good things you have done for God-sake.

Lydia C. Neshangwe

Moderator, Council for World Mission



23 July 2023

COMMUNITIES OF UNSHAKEN FOUNDATION

Luke 6:46-49

I'm elated today to share about my community's faith story during the time of pandemic, a story that comes from a state in Northeast India called Mizoram. India happened to be one of the worst Covid-19 affected countries and along with the outbreak came an uninvited wave of racial discrimination for our community. Indigenous people from the Northeast who resided in various other regions in India were harassed, abused, and disparagingly called "coronavirus" mainly due to our similar physical features with the people of China. Churches where worship services were held at least five to eight times in a week were suddenly brought to a halt. Thousands of youths who are the backbone of our society lost their jobs and their long-term career prospects. Needless to say, the new normal was a challenge for the community from all corners.

While the first Covid-19 case was registered in Mizoram in March 2020, we managed to remain the only State in India without any Covid-19 fatality for a good seven months



despite lacking adequate facilities and proper health infrastructure. The commitment and dedication of the healthcare workers as well as the role of the people in observing Covid-19 protocols were fairly commendable. This can be largely attributed to the role played by the State and the collective efforts of the community which have been largely inspired by Christian faith and hope in the midst of our battles. Churches and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) willingly offered their premises to be converted into Covid Care Centres. Since life in Aizawl, the capital city, came to a standstill owing to the extensive lockdowns and rising cases, a number of villages from different parts of Mizoram sent trucks fully loaded with fresh vegetables from their agricultural farms to the residents of Aizawl without expecting anything in return. Mizoram also takes pride in the existence of dedicated taskforces all over the State comprising largely of youth volunteers. Churches, organisations, individuals and even children raised and donated huge amounts to the relief fund. By honouring our Christian beliefs and exemplifying humanitarian values, we provide answers to the question, "What does God require of us?" in the midst of the pandemic.

In Luke 6:46-49, we find references to a house that could not be shaken because it has been well built on a rock and one that quickly collapsed because it has no foundation. People of God today need to remind ourselves to build our house on a solid rock. We need to discern the signs of times and be ready when crisis hits. A community or church whose hope and foundation are built on a sturdy rock will continue to stand firm and flourish in the midst of life's storms and will not be easily ruined. By doing what the word of God tells us, we can confidently stand up to any storm and show others the way forward.

PRAYER

Lord, may our hopes be built on strong foundation so that in good and bad times we will continue to flourish and enjoy life in all its fullness. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How often do we discern the signs of times and keep our faith and hope going to face life's uncertainties every day?

Lalmuanpuii Hmar

Bishop's College, Kolkata



30 July 2023

CHRIST-CENTRED COMMUNITIES



Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. (John 15:4, Recommend reading the full text, 15:1-7)

The passage John 15:1-7 expounds about abiding in Christ with an analogy of the vine and its branches. The Bible speaks about the vine in many passages, such as “The vineyard of the Lord is the house of Israel” (Isa. 5:1-7), “Israel is a luxuriant vine,” said Hosea (Hos.10:1). “Yet, I planted you a choice vine” (Jer. 2:21). Thus golden vine became the symbol of Israel and Maccabees had it etched on their coins. So vine was an image of a theocratic community where Israelites are presumed to have a healthy relationship with reconciled God, but in the old testament, Israel is compared to the old vine, which doesn’t abide by God. A “degenerate vine” and a “Wild Vine” because Israel was self-righteous about being Jewish in every walk and in an apparition of living according to the law, their piety was very peripheral since they failed to be grafted with God, their father.



John 15:5 says, “I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit because apart from me you can do nothing”. This verse shows the relationship between God and his children through the divine-human personality of Jesus. Here Jesus gives an open invitation to all his children to abide in him to bear good fruit to have a stronger connection with the author of life. Any branch that doesn’t abide goes sapless, dry, and inefficacious, which is to be thrown away and burned in the fire. This call is a stronger promise for mutual in-dwelling (I abide in you, and you abide in me). When fulfilled, it leads to a vital connection with a living source that bears good fruit. The living grace unifies with the believer’s life as a result of consistent faith. Severed from the true vine ends up in eternal condemnation.

A Christian must reflect Christ in his every walk of life, which can be attained through an inseparable connection with Christ daily. The word enriches the fellowship, and the prayer perfects the relationship with Christ. Jesus always had a good connection with Father God. We are mere humans, and since we are weaklings and often fall into the cobwebs of the world, we need a strong friend who reinforces, protects, and guides us from falling into the fiery pit. Our lives must be Christocentric to flourish. It begins with an individual living a life pleasing to God as a living sacrifice and a fragrant offering. This can be achieved only with a Christ-centred lifestyle. Achieving a Christ-centred society begins with a Christ-centred individual, a Christ-centred family, and a Christ-centred community that impacts a Christ-centred society. As Israel had the vine as their emblem, every Christian should have Christ as our emblem. Let us submit our lives to the divine vinedresser, the author of life abiding in whom gives the fruit of eternity severed from him we perish.

PRAYER

God, the true vine, author of life, help us to abide in you so that you abide in us. Severed from you, we perish. Help our communities be united with you so that Christ-centred communities will be a boon to society at large. In your name, we pray. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Are we abiding in Christ in our every walk of life?

Kodali Moses Dayan

CSI Krishna Godavari Diocese



6 August 2023

PEACE EVERLASTING



Psalm 72: 3 - 7

Probably one of the most misleading words in Christian discourse is the word “everlasting.” I think Christians have romanticised this word to the point that many of us find it difficult to relate our faith to tangible issues of our world. The word everlasting for many Christians is associated with the afterlife, or a life far better than the one we live in. In light of this, we despise reality and become careless in our living. We become indifferent to the havoc we cause through our carelessness. In the same way, many of us have treated the idea of “peace.” Peace can only be realised in the afterlife. This life is troublesome, and we are just pilgrims passing through. When we speak peace on earth, we speak of negotiations, cease-fires, borders, security, and even war as a way to bring peace. Therefore, peace is somewhat elusive and abstract.

I want to focus on verse three of Psalm 72. “Let there be peace and justice throughout the land, known on every mountain and hill.” What strikes me most about this verse



is the absence of humans as recipients of peace and justice. The verse following, verse four, speaks of the peace and justice that is to be administered by those in authority to those under their control. Already in this separation of status, we find the gap between kings and the poor a breeding pond for injustice. Peace is not merely the absence of violence, but peace is the absence of injustice.

I would like us to see the beauty of verse three without verse four. I would like us to see peace on all the earth without human disturbances. This is more a call for human abstinences from activities that make peace and justice a no-reality for the hills and mountains. Peace can be realised here and now. We do not have to wait for it to come to us; it is in us. We give birth to the peace that is already in us through Christ, our Lord. Everlasting is not abstract but a tangible realisation of something that assures life here and now. Everlasting is when the mountain tops feel the sustaining breeze of life, that, in reciprocity, sustains every living thing. This co-sustenance of life in all of creation is a perfect picture of peace everlasting.

What else do you need when everything is in order? What else would your heart long for when what you need to live is experiencing life in fullness and peace everlasting? But we fret always the lie that not having more than we need is to be at the underhand of life. If we learn abstinence, self-control and the art of appreciating the simple things in life, like the mountains and hills, we have already begun to live in peace everlasting.

PRAYER

We are always grateful dear Lord, for all that is around us. Peace is when all of the creation experience justice. Peace is when humans see their limits and live by them. Help us, Lord, to bring peace everlasting to our world. May the trees, beaches, snails, birds, and even the rivers feel the peace—your peace. And may we find our peace in the peace they feel. May our peace come from you. In Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What are some of the things that disturb peace everlasting in your society?

Nikotemo Sopepa

Council for World Mission



13 August 2023

NAVIGATOR (ANA TIA BORAU) OF CHRIST

To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, first let me go and bury my father." (Luke 9:59, Recommend reading the full text, 9:57-62)

Navigator of Christ Te tia borau in the Kiribati context is a person, either man or woman, who has special knowledge to read the movement of the waves and the current in the ocean, skies, stars, clouds, moon in heaven, winds, animals, creatures in the sea, people, and the land.

In the concept of the Borau, navigators did not deny the fact that in life, problems may happen, and lives may be lost because, for example, of a sea accident, that becomes a catalyst to affect the lives of people. All of these believed in the concept of the word bo, which represents devastating problems and calamities. Therefore, after te bo happened, then te rau - peace shall be proclaimed.

The central theme in Luke's gospel is the cost of te tia borau, the "navigator-discipleship." The cost of te tia borau is that it denies the earthly world and prioritises only Jesus, and it demands a radical commitment that supersedes all social, cultural, and familial ties. In the reading, there are three different people who want to join te borau of Jesus (cf. vs. 57, 59 and 61). There were no names given. However, while these three men were interested in Jesus' navigation, they failed to do so because it was impossible for them to leave their families and follow Christ. So, they started to give a response that is culturally based (vs. 59 and 61)

Although the sayings of our saviour, Jesus Christ, seem to go against a cultural identity that a family is an important part of our lives, he is referring to this important borau, the navigation. The target has already been set to join this challenging navigation to Jerusalem. Everything should be left behind so that a goal may be fulfilled. Verse 62 "no one having put his hand to the plough and looking back is fit for the kingdom of God". The cost of a navigator-discipleship is to never turn back.



He uses the word of the farmer who must keep looking forward in order to plough a straight furrow. Likewise, a navigator constantly distracted by past associations cannot provide effective service for the kingdom of God.

The navigation to the journey of Jesus Christ from Galilee to Jerusalem is one of the primary tasks that Jesus was eager to fulfil. It was a journey that met with two reasonable reasons which Jesus must be encountered.

On the one hand, Jesus, in his mission, must encounter the bo, which reflected in many obstacles, difficulties and oppositions to fulfil his mission. And on the other hand, it is a task to fulfill God's will, which is the rau (peace), by educating, teaching and leading people to God even though calamities or the boo existed.

The navigation of Jesus Christ from Galilee to Jerusalem is very suitable and applicable to our Christian journey. The message not only lies within the journey, navigation, rather the two words, the bo and the rau also proclaim important messages. In our Pacific navigation, we encounter the bo utterly that is the impact of climate change, pollution, domestic violence, and globalization.

Jesus sends us as navigators with special talents and wisdom for the world. We should never fear and be burdened, for Jesus Christ is our true Navigator who accomplished his journey from Galilee to Jerusalem to bring darkness to light and hope onto the Cross of Salvation. The peace, the rau, of Christ is upon us all.

PRAYER

May we follow our Lord Jesus Christ to bring Peace (rau) where the bo (difficulties) is experienced. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

As a disciple of Christ participating in the mission of bringing peace, what distractions must you let go to navigate till the end?

Waiana Tatiree

Tangitebu Theological College



20 August 2023

MISSION OF PEACE

"A time to love and a time to hate; a time for war and a time for peace." (Ecclesiastes 3:8)

The poetic nature of Ecclesiastes 3 could easily deceive us into ignoring the severity of some of the topics listed. A time to kill and a time to heal. Wait, what? A time for war and a time for peace? Hang on a minute! Some serious reflection is needed here: a time to kill and a time for war? How could anyone ever suggest that there is a time for war? Surely it is ideal to live in a world where there is no time for these horrific ordeals, but Qohelet – the author of this book – prescribes this series of difficult dichotomies in poetic form. This is quite ironic and perhaps deliberate. So what does Qohelet mean by this?

Ecclesiastes is, among other designations, a book of ironies. It speaks to the contradictions that life continues to dish up/out and offers commentary on the uselessness, meaninglessness, vanity, and ambiguity of it all. Qohelet's tone, therefore, is one of scepticism and doubt. In this light, we need to reconsider the words of Qohelet in Chapter 3 in the light of his own scepticism.

The spirit behind Chapter 3 reflects an acknowledgement that life is cyclical. Nature itself follows this pattern. The sun rises, and the sun sets. Intriguingly, in my Samoan culture, nature's patterns are observed wittingly as nature discerns wisdom for Samoans. One particular pattern is that of cyclones where Samoans say, "E sosoo maninoa ma afa, e sosoo foi afa ma maninoa." (After the calm, there comes a storm, but after the storm, there comes calm). The interesting thing in this proverb is that



Samoans expect a storm to happen. It is not something that is sudden because when it happens, Samoans know that it is part of life, it is part of nature's cycle. In a similar notion, Qohelet may be expecting something similar. That perhaps after peace, one can expect hostility. This provides an interesting and rather radical point of reflection. But let us think for a second, is hostility, like peace, not a part of life? While we are shocked when turmoil and terror occur, is there not some expectation within us that things like this do happen? I am reminded of the words of another biblical sceptic, Job, here: "Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?" (Job 2:10) Life, as we have come to expect, will not just dish up good, but it can also give us a plate full of bad. But herein lies the message of hope: just like the maninoa (calm) that comes after the storm, we can also expect maninoa (peace) after the war. But maninoa is a word that also speaks to the open space of the skies. For Samoans, maninoa is, therefore, a space for learning and discernment. If the wisdom writers, as well as Samoans (and Pasifika people), can perceive wisdom and hope from the environment, might we also look to the earth, air, and ocean for inspiration?

This must be our mission: A mission of peace, a mission of maninoa! To embrace the cyclical patterns of nature as a reminder of the peace that follows pain and suffering. It's not easy to get over the pain, and when war comes around, whichever form it manifests, it is not easy to overcome the terror. But as Qohelet reminds us that when we are at war, that is the time for war, but also know that there is a time for peace to follow, a time for maninoa to emerge after the storm.

PRAYER

God of peace, help us when we are in times of war and hostility. Give us strength to endure the terror and grant us comfort to bear the pain. Open our hearts to seek wisdom in your creation, to remind us that beyond the war comes the maninoa (space) for us to channel your maninoa (peace). In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What are some lessons that you learn from your local culture that teaches you about peace?

Brian Fiu Kolia

Malua Theological College, SAMOA



27 August 2023

THE POWER OF VULNERABILITY

And he said, "Hagar, slave of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" She said, "I am running away from my mistress Sarai." (Genesis 16:8, Recommend reading the full chapter)

The story of Hagar in Genesis 16 reflects the power of vulnerability. Vulnerability is the quality or state of being exposed to the possibility of being attacked or harmed, either physically or emotionally. It is that unstable feeling of uneasiness when we are not in our comfort zone or when we lose control—for example, taking risks that might lead to rejection, talking about our own mistakes or facing difficult emotions like fear and shame. However, vulnerability is powerful. Renee Brown said, "Owning our story can be hard, but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerability is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love, intimacy and belonging".

Hagar entered the story as a vulnerable character. This was the first time she spoke in the story. She had no voice, a woman servant and an object of another's command. But when she and her son Ishmael were banished and had to step out of their comfort zone and journey into the wilderness, Hagar realised herself as a human being, an individual rather than a property. There are many people like Hagar in our communities who have been banished from their homes and suffering. What should we do to help them? Being vulnerable may be seen as a weakness, but it is a strength. It can be the birthplace of joy, creativity, belonging and love. Let us not forget to teach each other the value and foundation of our faith.

The wilderness presents a new perspective of seeing God's covenant not only descending from a male but also from a female, Hagar. Through Hagar, Ishmael found his place as a freed, courageous child who grew through her mother's arms. In the wilderness, Hagar is exposed to the danger of being devoured by wild animals, starvation, and homelessness. However, in her state of vulnerability, Hagar encountered God, and she named God El Roi, the God who hears and sees. Hagar's experience with God reminds us that our God is bigger than any problems we encounter in life. God knows our struggles, our cries and our pain. When our lives are down, God is always up to something better.





After God made a covenant with Hagar, God commanded her to return and submit to her oppressors. The call to resubmit is a call to reconnect with others, reminding us that engaging with people and communities is risky and dangerous. We are submitting ourselves to more disagreements and headaches. But Hagar's story reminded us that being courageous does not mean walking alone but rather walking with God. Whenever we walk faithfully with God, God will always help us go through any problems we face in life, no matter how difficult it is. When God allows us to go through a storm in life, it is not to destroy us but to show us who God is on another level and dimension that we have never seen God move before.

PRAYER

Lord, we thank you for your presence and grace. We thank you for those who have encouraged us on our journey of faith. Give us strength to find the power of God in our state of vulnerability, weakness, and suffering. May we live together in spiritual unity and harmony. Help us to value the needs and concerns of another and reflect your grace in our lives. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What can we learn from Hagar's story in finding hope and courage in our vulnerabilities?

Geraldine Varea

Pacific Theological College



3 September 2023

SAVE THE LAND



The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. (Genesis 2:15)

The nations raged, but your wrath has come, and the time for judging the dead, for rewarding your servants, the prophets and saints and all who fear your name, both small and great, and for destroying those who destroy the earth. (Revelation 11:18)

It cannot be doubted that land has suffered a lot of injustice at the hands of people resulting in countless adverse effects on all creation, including human beings. Today's reflection invites us to champion land justice.

Genesis 2:4-5 presents the narrative of the creation of the land of Eden and the placing of Adam in it. The passage gives us a glimpse of how beautiful God intended the land to be. It is pictured as having beautiful animals, rivers, plants, birds, minerals



and precious stones. God, as a just God, demonstrated justice when creating the Earth. He ensured justice for all creation by making all things to be in harmony. The narrative draws us to imagine how wonderful and awesome the land was. It further draws us to imagine the care and responsibility which God had when making our common home. He paid attention to all the detail which balance the survival of all creatures.

Adam was placed in the garden and given two responsibilities. To till the land and to take care of it. The two responsibilities are at the heart of “land justice”. If humanity is to do justice to the land, the two must be balanced. Tilling the land points to using the land in a productive way. Taking care of the land invites people to be responsible for it. It is an invitation to protect the land from destruction. While people must use the land to produce goods and services, it must be done in a caring manner, ensuring the continued beauty and harmony of all creation.

Revelation 11:18 warns of the time of the destruction of those who destroy the earth. This shows how much God cares for the beautiful land he created. We are, therefore, invited to reflect on the responsible use of land resources to ensure the continued harmonious living of all creatures. The land has suffered destruction by people. Justice demands that we all take responsibility and act justly towards the land. Otherwise, we risk being destroyed. Those who treat the land with justice will be rewarded. The time is now for us to join hands and redeem the land from destruction for the good of all.

PRAYER

God, the creator of all things, open our hearts to understand the beauty of the land you have given us. Give us the wisdom to make it even more beautiful and harmonious. Help us to save the land from destruction and our own destruction. We ask you to help us to love and care for the land just as you love and care for it. In Christ Jesus, Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

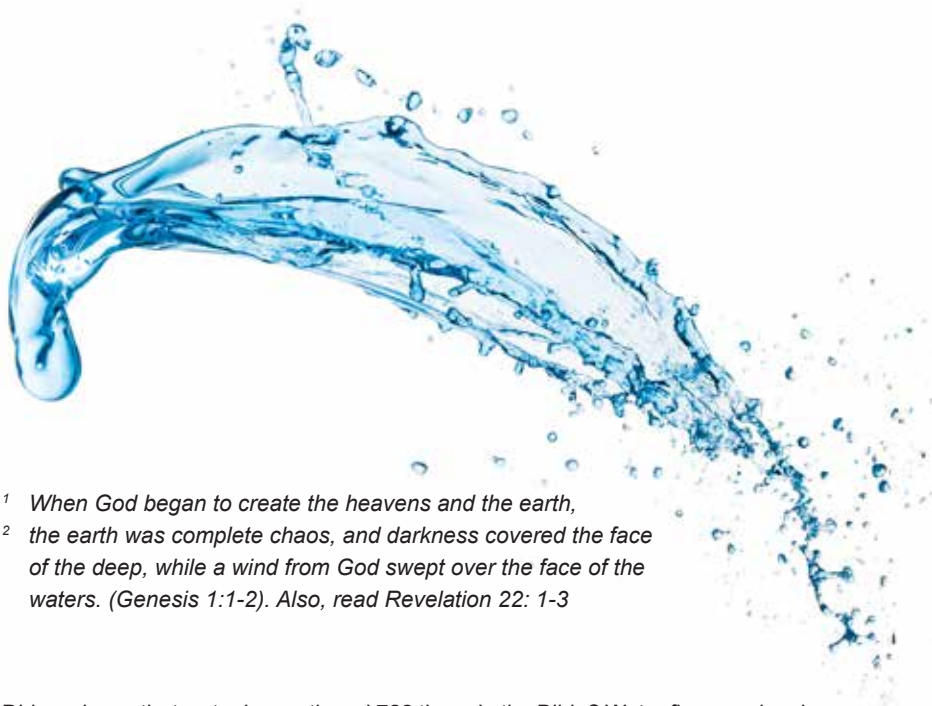
Discuss ways you can contribute to saving the land from destruction.

Morgan Mambwe

United Church of Zambia



WATER IS LIFE



- ¹ *When God began to create the heavens and the earth,*
² *the earth was complete chaos, and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters. (Genesis 1:1-2). Also, read Revelation 22: 1-3*

Did you know that water is mentioned 722 times in the Bible? Water flows and rushes and gurgles through the pages of Scripture, literally framing the Biblical story. In the opening verses of the Bible, we read the story of water and creation. Even before Creation took place, the waters were there. Water is a primal element necessary for life. When we turn to the closing chapter of the Bible, Revelation 22, we read the vision of re-creation in.

Here, in Rev. 22:1-3, at the heart of restored creation, we encounter the river of the water of life, flowing from the hand of God. The water is clear and clean. What a vision for our nations if we work together to clean our rivers and plant trees—for the healing of the nations! Imagine polluted rivers restored to life, safe green places filled with trees where families can walk safely. So what is God calling us to do?

Firstly, we must remember that water is sacred. We have lost the sense of sacredness in water, seeing it as a commodity that ‘comes out of a tap’. How can we reconnect with water as something sacred and precious? We became members of the body of



Christ through the sacred waters of baptism. Water is a sacred gift from God, and every Christian is called to be a steward of God's creation – not just the full-time conservationists! We need to treasure it and make sure we use water carefully—turn off dripping taps, and check for leaks.

Secondly, we need to care for our oceans and rivers. Let water inspire and heal us. We must adopt and protect natural water source areas and help ensure we have examples of pristine habitats to leave as a legacy to our children and children's children. Enormous quantities of garbage end up in rivers and oceans. The statistics on waste are shocking. By 2050 there will be more plastic in the oceans per weight than fish.

The best way we care for our oceans and rivers is to be passionate campaigners against waste. In the Diocese of Harare in Zimbabwe, each church has adopted an area where they clean up, whether a taxi rank or a street. They say the 4 Rs: Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rejoice! Once they have cleaned up, they plant something beautiful in its place.

And thirdly, we need to fight climate change. In many parts of the world, rainfall is decreasing as the temperatures rise. In the horn of Africa, they are facing a fourth year with virtually no rain, the harvests have failed, and people are being forced off their unproductive land. Many children are so malnourished that they no longer go to school. As a global community, we can make a difference, but we need to prioritise the needs of our global neighbours. Without a rapid transition away from fossil fuels, the future of Africa is bleak, very bleak indeed.

PRAYER

Creator God, your dry lands are thirsty. Help us find a way to renew the Earth. Your rivers are choking with debris and pollution. Help us find a way to restore the living waters. Our hearts have become dry from selfishness and materialism. Help the tears of compassion to flow again so that we may act in response to the earth's cry. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What personal changes can you make in your life to treat water with more care, protect it and celebrate it?

Rachel Mash

Anglican Church of Southern Africa

17 September 2023

WHEN GOD'S WILL IS DONE IN THE FORESTS

Ezekiel 47

The Book of Ezekiel chapter 47 shares a vision of the prophet Ezekiel in which he observes water flowing from below the Temple of God and moving in all directions. As God leads him along the path of the water, which quickly becomes a deep river and as they come in contact with the sacred waters of God's Temple, the stagnant waters of the sea become fresh. Wherever the river flows by, life is restored, and a great many trees begin to grow alongside the banks of the river. The vision of the prophet Ezekiel illustrates what happens to Earth when God's will is done, as it is in Heaven: stagnant waters become fresh, life is restored, and flourishes and a great many trees grow in a deserted land.

The prophet Ezekiel announces, "On the banks, on both sides of the river, there will grow all kinds of trees for food. Their leaves will not wither, nor their fruit fail, but they will bear fresh fruit every month because the water for them flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for healing" (47:12). In the face of the tragic destruction of tropical rainforests worldwide, our religious imagination can easily help us to recognize the sacred vocation of rainforests as healers of the land and of God's people (Rev. 22:2).



The Rainforests make life possible on the land and in the seas for myriad human and non-human creatures. They bring rains that shower and fill rivers. Rainforests help deliver water and nutrients, even thousands of miles away. They are indeed the lungs of the world, providing oxygen to our atmosphere. And today, we recognize their healing properties, not just through the medicines they provide, but through their capacity to absorb our excess carbon from the atmosphere and regulate regional and global weather patterns in a way that can sustain life on planet Earth.

Unfortunately, the human family has not embraced the wisdom of Ezekiel's vision seriously enough. Now we face the real challenge of the climate crisis and the urgent need to protect life on Earth. This challenge calls us to live out Christ's vision of abundant life for the world, flushing through from God's heavenly temple in all directions. As Jesus' own disciples understood it, the promise of abundant life is not a future promise but is present when the People of God share and act from God's vision.

Today, we can also grasp this vision by listening to the voices of other inhabitants of the land: indigenous peoples, climate and forest scientists, environmental activists, eco-theologians, NGOs, rainforest communities, people of diverse faith and leaders, and God's wisdom in nature.

Indeed, the destruction of the planet as a whole through climate change and in the microcosm of rainforests is part of the groaning of creation that Christ's resurrection redeems.

PRAYER

Creator God, you created everything to allow us to live with nothing left over and without anything missing. You did everything so that we could live the life you gave us. May we never forget, Lord, that this world is yours, only yours, and that the life we have is a gift of your grace that we should appreciate, be grateful for, and share. In Christ's name, we pray. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What environmental values do you perceive in Ezekiel's passage that are needed today to protect forests?

Neddy Astudillo

Tampa, Florida



STEWARDS, NOT OWNERS



- ¹ *The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it,*
² *for he has founded it on the seas and established it on the rivers. (Psalm 24: 1-2)*

The Psalmist reminds us that creation's wonders are not all about us! Their purpose is to glorify God. Their beauty speaks of God as an artist, and their complexity speaks of God's intelligence. Since one purpose of creation is to testify to God, it follows that when a species is destroyed or a natural feature of nature is wiped out, a voice is silenced that was intended to praise God. We should do all that we can to prevent that from happening. The other biblical principle is that God owns the creation but loans it to us. "The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers." (Psalm 24:1,2) The earth belongs to God. It is not ours to do however we please. Remember the familiar words from Genesis 1, (Gen. 1:26, 28, 29). To sum up, the Bible teaches that God made our world; therefore, it has value, and it is to glorify God. God has entrusted it to us to use it and care for it. We are stewards or managers of the earth. So what are the implications of these biblical principles regarding God's creation for how we ought to live?



First, God permits us to use his creation for our own benefit. We are obviously dependent upon the air to breathe and the water to drink. We may eat the plants, animals and fish, and use other animals, like dogs and horses, to help us. We can make use of coal, oil, minerals, and metals that we gather from the earth for energy and manufacturing. We can also use the sun, wind, water, and atom to generate energy. All of this use of creation is within God's original plan given to us in Genesis. But we are not permitted to abuse the creation. Instead, we must protect it as God-appointed stewards of it. Often we have not done a very good job of this.

Most of us are familiar with the serious problems caused by air pollution. In many of our cities, smog causes difficulty breathing for the elderly, children, and those with asthma and other respiratory diseases. In addition to the health risk that polluted air brings, there is not much question that global warming is taking place today. And the vast majority of our scientists believe that human activity is at least partially responsible for this warming. This trend may well have devastating consequences if it is not stopped. Protecting the planet from drastic and destructive climate change certainly falls under our mandate to care for and protect the creation. We do not want to leave a legacy of a dirty, warming planet to our children and grandchildren. That said, these are not easy issues. Corporations, who control much of the pollution in our world, will need to be pushed to make changes. There are significant costs involved, and some changes in our lifestyles may be demanded. Clearly, there are all kinds of balances that need to be struck here. But let's talk and work together to fulfil our mandate to be good stewards of God's earth.

PRAYER

God of creation, help us to care for the resources you have created on this planet for our use. Help us to realise, created as part of this creation, we are stewards of this creation and not the owners. The Earth and everything in it belong to you, and may we be ever grateful for your gift of grace to use these resources freely for our sustenance. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What are some of the things that we all can do to express our stewardship over the creation?

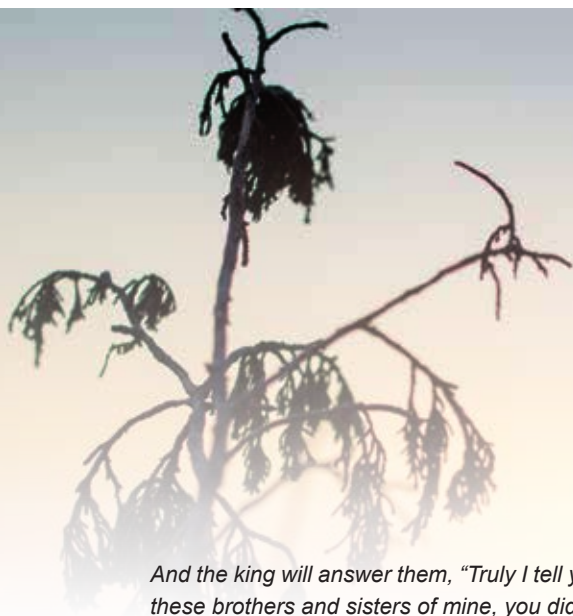
Daimon Mkandawire

Council for World Mission



1 October 2023

GOD OF JUSTICE AND OPPRESSED COMMUNITIES



And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:40)

In 2020 a crime that took place in a village in Uttar Pradesh state, Hathras district, which is 200 km. from the Capital of India, is just one of many atrocities that happened in India against the Dalits. Dalits are people who do not belong to the Hindu caste system; hence are treated as untouchables and continue to suffer at the hands of the so-called upper caste people. A 19-year-old Girl was raped by four men belonging to the upper caste. The victim was left paralysed, bleeding and injured. She was rushed to the hospital and died there two weeks later.

When she died, the body was taken to the village in the middle of the night. Her family was locked behind the doors while the Police forcefully burnt her body without the family's consent. Journalists who tried to cover the incident had to face threats and violence from the state and dominant people.



The body is the evidence, and it was burnt; otherwise, there would have been a massive protest with her body. The dominant caste men raped her and killed her while the Police burned her body so, silencing the issue and denying justice. The Dalits are oppressed while the entire system seeks to protect not the victim but the perpetrator of the crime.

Bilkis Banu is a pregnant Muslim woman raped by 11 men during the 2002 Gujarat riots in India. During the riots, she lost several family members. The accused were sent to jail, but they were released recently, which sent a shockwave nationwide. At this time, the Dalits protested and raised their voice against the injustice done to Bilkis Banu. Dalits are oppressed and broken by violence, but their voices continue to cry for justice and resist injustice. Jesus stood against oppressive systems to the point of death, and the resistance of the Dalits in the face of injustice, giving hope to the struggle for the reign of God.

God is with the suffering communities all over the world and calls the body of Christ to stand with the communities that are broken but resisting violence and injustice with their lives, giving hope of a just world by following the crucified Christ, denying self, and carrying the cross. The God of Justice will surely establish Justice. That is the hope with which the Dalits stand, boldly dreaming of a just world not only for them but also for their oppressors. God brought the oppressed community out of Egypt with a mighty and outstretched arm. The same God is with the Dalits to establish Justice and calls the body of Christ to take the pilgrim of Justice with the oppressed communities to establish the reign of God. God of justice gives us the hope to take the journey of Justice boldly like Christ.

PRAYER

Loving God, we pray for the Dalits in India who face dehumanisation, rape, violence, and death as everyday realities. Thank you for the resilience this community has shown to the world by standing up for justice. Strengthen us to stand in solidarity with the Dalits resisting as communities of resilience. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Are communities that are oppressed around me? And what God wants me to do?

Shakespeare Sigamoney

Yonsei University, South Korea



8 October 2023

WHY DO YOU TROUBLE HER?

For the International Day of Girl Child on 11 October 2023

Matthew 15:21-28

This is the Question Jesus asked the disciples around him in Mark 14:6. When Jesus was at the table in Simon's house, a woman came and anointed him with a very costly ointment. As the disciples criticized her act of anointing, Jesus warned them by posing a question, Let her be herself, Why do you trouble her? Jesus presents two crucial elements in his response to the attitude of men—religious leaders or disciples—who criticized her. They are, one, let her be herself; and two, don't trouble her.

I would like to appropriate these two questions to the miracle story of the Canaanite woman's daughter in Matthew 15:21-28. This miracle story is about the healing of a small girl child (v. 22; cf. 26) who was possessed by a demon which almost took her life. The Greek expression of the mother's cry explicitly demonstrates that she was crying aloud by shouting, with a demand for the life of her girl child (v. 22). She was demanding Jesus for her child's life with a loud cry by addressing him as Lord. Jesus, as Messiah for all, was obligated to heal her girl child though she was a Canaanite.

However, Jesus's attitude towards her urgent cry for life seems dehumanizing. But, the textual study of the miracle story clearly demonstrates the deeper theological framework of Jesus' healing process. The dominating spirit of the child needs to be dealt with in order to heal her. The child has to become her own self and not be overpowered by someone or something.

Jesus' silence to the mother's cry was to deal with the social, cultural, and religious power structures by which she was bounded. The cultural norms, faith convictions, and socio-political structures that perpetuate the subjugation and gender-based violence need to be addressed and dealt with first-hand to announce the deliverance and healing to the ill and victimized girl child(ren).

Jesus' healings in the gospels always deal with all aspects of a person's illness. In the process of healing a person, Jesus would also deal with what causes the person to be sick. Here in this miracle story of girl child also, Jesus dealt with all





aspects of social, cultural and religious norms in the healing process. These norms and convictions denied the liberated life of the girl children and women. Thus, it was crucial for Jesus to deal with them first-hand in order to pronounce the mother, Let it be done as you wish. And the Scripture says, “in that hour, her daughter was healed.” In today’s context, the challenges around girl children in our communities demand us to say, like Jesus, Let her be herself. In order to announce that, we need to dare to deal with structural frameworks of all kinds. If we, as a Christian community, are demanded to live as a liberated/liberating community, then we are obliged to affirm that our girl children are enjoying gender equality in all spheres of their life. They are not burdened with cultural and religious norms, which often criminalize, devalue, and neglect their rights, interests and dreams.

PRAYER

God the mother and father, we thank you for the girl children of our communities. Liberate us from the gender-biased understanding of life. Challenge us to journey with our girl children in their every attempt to be themselves—as your Son and our Lord said, Let her be herself. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What are the cultural and religious norms that dominate the worldview of our girl children?

Vethakani Vedhanayagam

Master’s College of Theology, Vizag



15 October 2023

WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

BUILDING LIFE-AFFIRMING COMMUNITIES

There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus. (Galatians. 3: 28)

If men and women are one in Christ, what are some of the implications for Christian families, churches, and organizations? How can God's people daily reflect their oneness in Christ?

The text says, there is neither male nor female, they are one in Christ. But in today's context or in my own church, women are not only the silent majority but the 'silenced majority' of the church. Even today, it is believed that women should occupy an inferior position in the church. Women are not given equal opportunities in the church, and their ministry is limited in the church. Some women who take the scripture seriously and have a great passion for theology and evangelism feel frustrated, not knowing whether just to "shut up and be passive wimps" being instructed by their husbands at home or can use their minds and abilities to God's glory. Most women who feel they were called to ministry have experienced the pain of speaking with men who have told them that their desires are unbiblical.



One of the reasons behind such conditions for women in the church today is that the authority of the apostle Paul has been invoked against women's preaching and teaching in the church. Paul's statements against women like "women should be silent in the churches," (1 Cor. 14:34), "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority..." (1 Timothy. 2:12) and so on. Paul made such statements in a context where women were considered an object, mostly prostitutes, uneducated, and less privileged. We should, therefore, not allow our tradition or an uncertain and most likely mistaken interpretation of a single passage to deny the calling of women who otherwise prove themselves fit for ministry.

Galatians 3:28 provides a paradigm that can include a vision of equality regardless of race, class, and sex/gender. We are called to act as agents of change with regard to the struggles of women. The hopes and dreams of women to be complete humans need to be considered as part and parcel of the mission of the church. Jesus himself spoke and acted always in the context of His time, reaching out to those in need and fulfilling those needs where he saw them. Therefore, as we are called to be agents of change, our responsibility is to take our direction from this, attempting to identify the gender issues prevailing in the church, and then seeing what we can do to bring equality or give equal opportunities to both men and women in the church to build life-affirming communities in midst of patriarchal structures prevailing in the church today. If a society is envisioned and created based on equal opportunity between men and women in the church where men and women can equally participate, and work together, then that will be a progressive step towards empowering a human culture where no individual has struggled for either identity or position in the church.

PRAYER

O God of justice and equality, guide us in envisioning and creating a church where men and women equally participate and minister together. Help us to take inclusive and compassionate steps toward empowering a human culture where your love, justice and peace shall prevail. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What must we do to facilitate equal participation of women in decision-making discussions in churches and families?

Gifta Angline Kumar

Church of North India

22 October 2023

JOHN THE PROPHETIC



- ² *As it is written in the prophet Isaiah, “See, I am sending my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way;*
- ³ *the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: ‘Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight,’ (Mark 1:2-3, recommend reading the full text, 1:1-8)*

John the Baptist was more than a visionary. He was prophetic in nature to proclaim a new world order, different from that of the ruling empire of the time. John’s uprising strategically encapsulated a vision warm enough to prove a sense of ‘dis-order,’ which eventually provoked his death. It was nothing new to the ruling empire. Anyone who had sprung up were put down. Jesus is often praised while our dear brother John was laid to rest for the movement he had arguably solicited.

The story of John reminds me of our very own “Cuffy and Quamina” of the rebellions that perhaps brought the slave empire to a questionable end. Cuffy was seen as a peaceful slave from within the Colony of Berbice in a then-Dutch enterprise. Harsh



conditions of work provoked Cuffy to round up slaves who were also willing to join the parade of preempted independence. Due to Cuffy's peaceful nature in opposition to war, he failed to bring about a sense of 'isolation' from the Dutch Empire. The Dutch regained control, but the empire would never be the same again, word got back to the overarching leaders of the empire about the bloodshed that had taken place during this process, and the 'arc of the moral universe was beginning to turn towards the justice and liberation.' Remember that this was 1763, while a sense of abolishment was achieved less than a century later.

Cuffy's progression and rebellion was a story that perhaps inspired many, including a young Quamina, who created controversy for the ruling leaders when he prompted a rebellion in the Demerara Colony. In 1823, The empire crumbled in the fight for justice for slaves. The everyday people of Britain, when they had heard of the circumstances surrounding these slaves, didn't appreciate what was done. Today Quamina and Cuffy are hailed as heroes, and rightfully so.

Drawing from these stories is the parallel between John and Jesus's life; John was courageous enough to proclaim a new world, one that he knew little about but was not afraid of. It may be difficult to imagine the thoughts, emotions, and feelings of these icons, as they were deemed as crazy, possessed and even troubled. But these stories may serve as inspiration that we, too, are to be visionaries in provoking action, in troubling the unjust realities that exist. Apparently, resisting modern-day empires and colonial entities will lead to condemnation and upheaval. Perhaps it could be the conclusion that it is how we may know when we are on track to justice and peace.

PRAYER

Decenter us, Lord, and transform our being to be bold and courageous to uproot systems of oppression and Justice. We will not turn away from the pain of our brothers, cries of our sisters, and grieving of others. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Can you draw parallels between John the Baptist and any such prophetic visionary in your context?

Christopher Latchman
Guyana Presbyterian Church



29 October 2023

SPEAKING TO THE GREATEST STORMS

Mark 5:35-41



The text we read today comes from the gospel, according to Mark. The story begins in typical Markan fashion of writing, 'That day when the evening came.' At the heart of Mark's Christology, he is keen to present Jesus as one who did not operate in the same space. At this stage, Jesus is on a journey. Mark says he did four miracles on this journey, and this is the first of them where he calmed the storm on the lake. Some of us are coming out of a storm like the world stood still during Covid-19, where our lives were disrupted, and death became an equaliser. Whether you are rich or poor, young or old, we all felt like we were in the midst of a bad storm. Some of us are like the disciples today in the midst of a storm. Some of us have an impending storm that is waiting to happen. And lastly, some of us have crossed over to the other side.



Jesus says, 'let us cross over to the other side; This is after he had been with the crowd, and maybe he wanted to go and have a quiet time of rest. It is Jesus who says, 'come let us cross over to the side'. So, the beauty of this journey is that it has a destination and a captain. It's now about to get dark, they are tired, and a great storm of wind arose. We should note that there were many boats in the sea, but the difference with this one is that Jesus was on it. With Jesus on your boat, the storms of life may still rock you, yet you won't sink. Jesus was inside the boat, tired and asleep, and the disciples called out," Teacher, don't you care if we drown? He got up, rebuked the wind, and said Be still, and there was peace. There are times in life when you just want to ask Jesus on why he is quiet. The disciples had forgotten that Jesus was the one who said get in and let us cross over to the other side.

CWM's vision articulates CWM's conviction that the life-giving alternative that characterised the mission of Jesus is the basis of our hope. Dare to hope when everything says no. Simply because Jesus has promised that you will reach the other side of the shore is no guarantee that they will be no storms while in transit, but when they come, he will control them. Jesus crossed boundaries and invites us to cross over to the other side, to embrace the stranger, to affirm those who have been marginalised and to participate in the suffering and struggles of the poor and powerless.

PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for the authority over the storms of life that arises. We pray that you will calm the storm in our lives and communities. May every wind that takes our joy away be still. In the name of our Lord and saviour Jesus Christ. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How do we cling on to hope when the storms of life hit one after another?

Wellington Mthobisi Sibanda

United Congregational Church of Southern Africa



5 November 2023

WHY DOESN'T SHE LEAVE?



Where can I go from your spirit?

Or where can I flee from your presence?

(Psalm 139:7, Recommend reading full text, Psalm 139)

I feel suffocated and condemned, I feel rejected, I feel unloved. My heart bleeds as I ask why my body is subjected to so much pain. “Where can I go from your Spirit, O Lord? Where can I flee from your presence?” I feel used, as I have been raised to believe that “my body is meant to please man”- when I am sexually and physically abused and run away from him, my elders tell me to go back and submit. “You must have wronged him; it is how you talk back to him! Look at your dress! So why should you blame him when you are dressed like a “harlot”? I ask myself – is being a harlot



defined by dressing? Should I not express my needs and not be seen as not being submissive or as a harlot? "Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?"

Indeed, you have hemmed me in, yet I have hope. You formed my inward being, and I am fearfully made in your image. I love the way you say that my frame was not hidden from you when I was made in secret! Ha ha, Lord, so you ordained that I should be formed in secret! I love that you gave us the gift of being asexual to bring to life those you have ordained. There is neither male nor female to you, but those that have been formed and knitted in secret in their mother's womb. You, O Lord, are my Mother God, the one who loves and nurtures us to fullness. You are the one who preserves and protects even when the devourer uses your name in vain to assault me.

I am comforted to know that your knowledge of me is perfect! I cannot leave you nor run away from your Spirit! My life flourishes in you. You strengthen me with your joy and show light in the darkness. My body may be bruised and bashed, yet you assure me of your presence, that you "have searched me and known me; you know my sitting down and my rising up..." Indeed, where can I go from your Spirit, O Lord? Where can I flee from your presence?

I will sit and wait patiently for your redeeming salvation. Search me, remove my anxieties as I trust you to lead me in your everlasting ways. I will not leave you too.

PRAYER

Lord, you are asexual. Help me to love and respect the other with your love and mercy. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Think about God's Motherhood - how does it reflect how you should relate to the other gender?

Mary Zulu-Mwiche

The United Church of Zambia



JESUS' MODEL OF POSITIVE MASCULINITY

Mark 5: 21-42

The passage has four main characters: Jesus, Jairus, an unnamed adult woman, and an unnamed little girl. Both the female characters needed healing from Jesus. In these verses, we see how Jesus is busy with the crowd that followed him. Jesus is quick to respect women and give them the dignity they deserve. We do not know why the women in the passage have no names. Were their names forgotten or omitted because they were women? Gender violence is when we think one person is less important than the other and, in this case, always denote women as less important. The stories of the two women in the passage will teach us how Jesus treats women as equal to others.



According to the Jewish tradition, power resided in men. Men were significant and were leaders. Here we see a man named Jairus, the leader in the synagogue with power, humbling himself and kneeling before Jesus to heal his daughter. This is a Jewish leader who is concerned with a girl child. She was his child, and he valued her, ready to do anything for her to be cured. In some homes today, girl children are not valued. Jairus gives us an example of a responsible man and father over his family. If parents, especially fathers, were more responsible and good parents, many girls would be protected by them and respected as human beings. Other people would fear abusing them.



Jesus, on the other hand, as a male, has divine power. He uses his power positively to the advantage of the women in the passage. Here we see positive masculinity, one that is ready to protect women from gender violence and exploitation. He affirms the two female figures in the story by healing them and giving them the dignity they require as human beings. Jesus demonstrated his healing power and, at the same time, the power to treat people with the dignity they deserve.

According to Jewish traditions, Jesus should have been unclean after being touched by a woman who had a flow of blood and touching a girl who was declared dead. Blood and death are serious issues that would make one unclean. However, Jesus was not restrained by society's cultural and traditional norms, which were negative to women and gave them what was right for them. Women suffer gender-based violence because of some of the negative cultural and traditional practices that victimise women. We need to take a serious look at all such negative practices to free women and make them feel accepted in the communities.

Jesus calls the woman with the flow of blood, daughter, giving her the dignity she deserved as a child of God. Jesus was aware of her situation and freed her from all the stigmas. He demonstrated the importance of every person despite gender differences. He gave the woman the dignity she deserved. To the little girl, Jesus said, Talitha kumi meaning, "little girl, get up". No need to be looked down upon, get up.

We are expected to honour and value one another as humans. Women must be treated equally as men are. When women are violated, we are violating the image of God as they, too, are created in the image of God.

PRAYER

Lord, our parent, you have created and treated all of us equally. Help us that we, too, have your mind in treating the women in our families and societies with the same respect that we expect others to give us. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What do I need to change in my home (and myself) so that women's safety and dignity are preserved?

Gertrude Kapuma

Zomba Theological University, Malawi



TRAPPED IN WORDS



²⁹ *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Ephesians 4: 29, Recommend reading full text, 4:29 - 32)*

On 1st January 2021, news broke out that a 16-year-old young lady in her 12th grade at Lunga Day Secondary School in Mwinlunga had committed suicide after her mother confronted her about stealing three new pants which belonged to her mother in the Northwestern part of Zambia. It was reported that after many investigations, the three pants were found in her mother's bag.

According to the story, the writer narrated that the words used on this young lady were very hurtful, prompting her to commit suicide. It was possible that she had been going through mental abuse, which is another form of gender-based violence that is not given much attention as a form of abuse undergone by most of the youth, women and to some extent by men. The hurtful words could have been part of her daily life which made her feel trapped in them, and at this point, she could not take it anymore. It is easier to notice physical abuse than mental abuse, which many go unnoticed.

In today's text, the writer warns against using corrupt words as they destroy but instead use words which build. Many people have failed to reach their God-given potential because of the words used against them. In anger, many people uttered words which they later regretted, but it was too late. Words are not easily reversed, but they leave a huge impact on the lives of those hearing them, be they negative or positive. Commonly, those with hurtful speech feel the way they speak is ok, in the pretence that they are being frank or honest even when they are just being rude. Instead, they think the receiver of the words should have been stronger to contain the words.

We should be mindful of our words when talking to our spouse, children, family, friends, church members and neighbours. In most instances, insults and hurtful words are used, especially in anger triggering a negative response from the victim. This is because people have different ways of understanding the words or expressions used, which may be interpreted differently and prompt someone to commit suicide or never progress in life. The words, unlike strokes, are placed in the hearts and minds when they are received, such that they are meditated upon each time.

Let us be kind-hearted to one another regardless of who they are, forgiving one another and building Godly relationships with everyone—remembering that each word carries life or death, success or failure depending on how one responds to it. Our aim is intentionally to build the lives of those around us rather than destroy them. Teach ourselves to be alert to mental abuse through the words used in our speech, words which may have killed many physically and in the way they respond in all sectors of life.

PRAYER

Our loving God, help us to tame our tongues so that we may be able to speak life and not death to others. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What kind of words will you choose to use on others?

Chali Mfuta

The United Church of Zambia



26 November 2023

THE VISION OF A GENDER-BASED -VIOLENCE FREE SOCIETY

Violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders; you shall call your walls Salvation, and your gates Praise. (Isaiah 60:18)

The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:31)

There are many types of violence. Gender-based violence is one of them, and it is evil. Many people are hurting. Children, the poor, and many others have lost their lives. This devotion is inspired by the dream and vision of a society that is free of this heinous scourge.

In this part of the third Isaiah, the prophet stems from the immediate context of the post-exilic experience and vision and speaks of the future where there will be no violence amongst other social evils. It is interesting that the background of this text (Isaiah 59: 20) is the promise and expectation of the Messiah, and thus, it makes



sense to contemplate this text as we prepare to enter Advent. It then means that chapter 60 speaks to the church as the reign of God.

I then derive nurturing that feeds my vision of a gender-based-violence-free society from this reading of the text. I see Isaiah 60:18 as presenting a vision of an ideal society. As people of the messiah today, our society is far from this ideal, and hence there is a need to engage in a struggle towards the ideal.

As a church, we must be inspired by the vision and ideal of a violence-free society. This must challenge us to be feminists, seeking equal and humane treatment for all people. Activists of gender-based violence embrace such initiatives and movements as 'Thursday in Black' by which people take a prophetic stand against gender-based violence and related evils in the world. We pray for a world free from such vices and hurts from any form of violence.

The Bible tells us that we must love our neighbours. Our close neighbours are those we live with, and yet they are the very same people who bear the brunt of violence perpetrated by us. Love is the opposite of hate and hurt. It stands against the spirit and roots of gender-based violence. May we be inspired and pray for a society that is free from any form of gender-based violence.

PRAYER

Heavenly Parent, we call upon your great name as your children. We pray against gender-based violence in any of its forms and shapes. Grant us to love as Christ taught us in deed and in word. We call upon your name as we hold on to a vision of a gender-based violence free society. May your kingdom come. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Can the dream for a GBV Society materialise, then what can we do?

Xolani Maseko

United Congregational Church of Southern Africa



ADVENT: A SEASON OF WAITING AND PREPARING



⁶ *For a child has been born for us, a son given to us; authority rests upon his shoulders, and he is named Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

⁷ *Great will be his authority, and there shall be endless peace for the throne of David and his kingdom. He will establish and uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time onward and forevermore. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)*

Advent is a season that Christians all over the world celebrate with joy and hope. Advent begins on the fourth Sunday before Christmas, or the closest Sunday to November 30, and ends on Christmas Eve. The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning “coming or arrival”, which is the translation of the Greek word *parousia*, which we commonly use in relation to the second coming of Jesus Christ. As we enter the season and prepare to celebrate Christmas, we remember that this season provides us with two opportunities.

First, Advent gives us an opportunity to share in the ancient longing and expectation for the coming of Messiah. God promised the people of Israel about the coming of a



Messiah on numerous occasions through Isaiah, Jeremiah, and other prophets. One such promise was made through Isaiah in Isaiah 9:6-7 which was 700 years before Jesus' coming. In the midst of captivity, oppression, occupation, peacelessness and chaos, they have waited 700 years in anticipation for a Prince of Peace who would provide everlasting peace and deliver them from oppression by bringing justice and righteousness. We were not there during Israel's waiting for the coming Messiah. However, as we wait for Christmas today, we participate in ancient Israel's longing for a Messiah.

Second, it provides us with an opportunity to be alert and to be prepared for His Second Coming, parousia trusting in the promises of Christ and waiting for the ultimate deliverance. The advent season is not only about anticipation but also about preparation. It is an individual as well as communal preparation for the second coming of Christ. Our context is not so much different from that of the people of Israel. The global society today has been faced with numerous threats to life. Rising wars, conflicts and occupations, rising sea levels and natural calamities, deepening social, political, and religious polarizations, increasing number of diseases and pandemics, etc., are threatening life on this earth. In the midst of all these threats to life, we remember the promise of Christ that he would come again and take us to live with God (John 14:1-3), and we need to be prepared for that day (Matthew 24:42-44). This season of Advent, therefore, reminds us that while we celebrate Christ's coming, we also need to diligently prepare for his second coming asking God, Maranatha!

PRAYER

Come, Lord, the Prince of Peace, to give peace in this world of peacelessness. Come Christ the anointed king, to bring justice and righteousness into this world of corruption and exploitation. Come Jesus, the Saviour, to save us and the entire universe from all threats of life. May your Advent bring us joy, peace, and eternal salvation. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

As we prepare for the Advent (coming) of Christ, what do we need to do to welcome Christ to our communities and families?

Joshua Tadikonda

CSI Krishna-Godavari Diocese



10 December 2023

ADVENT: PREPARE THE WAY FOR THE LORD

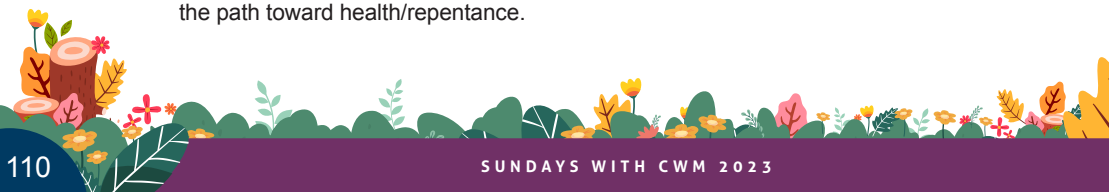
the voice of one crying out in the wilderness: 'Prepare the way of the Lord; make his paths straight,' (Mark 1:3, Recommend reading full text, 1:1-8)

A precious guest is coming to your house. What will you prepare? The news that the guest is coming is the prelude to the meeting. You will be the first to start cleaning when you hear this news. You will prepare and cook fresh ingredients for the meal and prepare the most fragrant coffee and sweet desserts. When everything is ready, you will dress neatly and wait for your guest to arrive. When all these processes are completed, the preparations to receive the guest will be complete, and a pleasant fellowship will begin with the guest's arrival. However, if you hear the news of a guest's visit and make no preparations, the guest will perceive that you are unprepared, and the guest is unwelcomed. However, a beautiful fellowship can be established when the host is well-prepared to welcome guests.

According to the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL), the Gospel message for the second Sunday of Advent is the preparation of the way of the Lord. Before Jesus Christ began his public ministry, John the Baptist prepared his way as a "crying voice in the wilderness." But his message was not just that the Lord was coming. Anyone who greets him should be adequately prepared for it, he says.

Jesus Christ was born 2,000 years ago in a small manger in Bethlehem. He said that although he came to his land, people did not recognise it and did not treat him as he deserved. Many people heard the message of Jesus Christ through the cry of John the Baptist, but only some were ready with their preparations. John the Baptist says that preparation is repentance.

Repentance is not just a change of state of mind. I am taking pills every day due to high blood pressure. High blood pressure is a family history, but it may also mean poor health care. Family history is related to the eating habits and lifestyle of the family. If you have been diagnosed with high blood pressure, you should recognise it and change your eating habits and lifestyle that cause high blood pressure. Instead of living the way you have always been, hearing the news, and making changes—that is the path toward health/repentance.





Repentance is bound to produce good fruit. However, there is a complicated process to bear fruit. And the Bible speaks of those who have not produced the fruit of repentance as “children of vipers.” However, the Bible also offers hope. It is in the words of John the Baptist, “After me will come one more powerful than I”. The Bible gives promises and hopes in this way.

The message of Advent is in the tension between maranatha, “Our Lord has come,” and maranatha “, Come, our Lord!” The Lord had already come 2,000 years ago. And he will come again. Do you want this good news to relate to you? Now is the time to begin preparing for His return.

PRAYER

God of hope, you are the one who gives strength to those who wish to walk in your path. Help us turn back from our path against you and begin our journey toward you so that we may welcome you with the fruit of repentance when you come again. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What does the news of Jesus Christ’s coming and coming again mean to you? How should you prepare to meet him?

An-Wei Nehemiah Tan

The Presbyterian Church of Korea



BECOMING THE GIFT OF CHRISTMAS



The spirit of the Lord God is upon me because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and release to the prisoners, (Isaiah 61:1)

The first thing that comes to mind during Christmas is everything but Christ. People would first think of presents, parties, and festive meals. In Singapore, Christmas is always a time when the main shopping strip on Orchard road is filled with photo-worthy decorative lights and unending posters of shopping sales. Christmas is a time for increased consumerism. We also grew up hearing Christmas songs that have been focused on spending, buying and receiving gifts. But is this the true nature of Christmas?

Christmas has always been about giving. It has always been about God giving us Jesus, whose destiny was to die for us so that we can have eternal life. It has always been about giving hope to the hopeless. So instead of just focusing on getting gifts for families and friends, it's time to switch our giving to reflecting Christ's love.



Humanity is suffering. The pandemic has magnified isolation resulting in an increase in depression. The ongoing war has affected prices, causing the poor to suffer even more. Hope is lost, and there is increased pessimism in the world. From a position of privilege, we should respond to the needs and suffering of the world. Learning from the prophet Isaiah, we should bring good news to the afflicted, release the captive and imprisoned, to comfort those who mourn, and to encourage the disheartened. All of these can and should be done by those (individuals, Churches, organisations) who are able to give.

It is also true that Christmas is a time to rejoice, to give thanks for the year that has passed and to remind ourselves of the significance of Christ in our lives. Regardless of our circumstances, we should live our lives with the same significance as the birth of Christ. We are agents of change and of hope. In all that we do, our work should reflect Christ's love. Our words should speak life to the hopeless situation. Our journey should constantly be a testimony that glorifies Christ.

Leading up to Christmas, we should take the time to thank God for all that has been done throughout the year, the good and the bad. We should also keep our sisters and brothers in prayer; for the injustices they face, for the daily silent suffering, for the sick and for God's peace to reign on earth. With that, we can then reflect and work towards enacting actionable plans to complement the prayers uttered. Then, we will be like Christ. We become the gift that keeps on giving.

PRAYER

Lord, who came to this world like us and died for us, help us that we celebrate your coming with true meaning. Help us that we may not get distracted by the attractions of this consumer society. May we always celebrate your coming in the spirit of true hope, joy and love. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Christmas is coming. So what do I do to share Christ's love and joy with those disadvantaged and unloved?

Faris Ariffin

Council for World Mission

24 December 20233

Christmas Eve

THE BRANCH: OUR HOPE AND GLORY



Jeremiah 33:14-16

Human beings all over the world are crying and complaining. Various challenges have hit the world in these few years. First came Covid-19, which changed the lifestyle of many, and then the Russian-Ukraine war and other military conflicts in the world, which have pushed the world into a severe economic crisis. Let us not forget the fight against discrimination, stigmatization, racism, oppression, various forms of injustice against humanity, and poverty. These systemic and systematic evils perpetuated by humans because of their selfish ambition and greed have led the world, which could have been a place of joy, possibilities, and a comfortable abode, to be a place of suffering and pain. Is there hope in such an evil world full of misery and suffering?

One could recount a similar situation during the time of Jeremiah, the prophet. Because of the people's disobedience, they had to endure all these pains. Irrespective



of the noncompliance and the evil they had brought upon themselves due to their selfish desire and greed, God still promised them that there was hope for them. The prophet Jeremiah began to present the message of hope in Jeremiah 33. In verse 14, he pointed out that the Lord would perform a good thing among the people. Amid adversity, misery and pain, God still promises his people the good things he is about to do in their lives. Jeremiah continues to demonstrate how the good things God promises will take effect. In verse 15, it is mentioned that God was going to cause a “Branch of righteousness” to emanate from the bloodline of David. What was going to be the purpose of this Branch? The primary duty of this Branch is to execute judgement. The actions of the Branch will bring liberation to the people who have been oppressed, stigmatized, discriminated against, and rejected. As verse 16 puts it, the Branch will save anyone and anything held in bondage by the evils of this world, which includes living and non-living things. The Branch will acquire the name “The Lord our Righteousness.”

Beloved in the Lord, I might not know what you are going through, but as Jeremiah rightly said, the coming of the Branch is God’s answer to your pain and misery. Our hope in these trying times is the Branch who came in the person of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. As we remember His coming in this advent season, may we emulate His character of justice and righteousness to make the world better. Jesus Christ is indeed our hope and glory.

PRAYER

Dear God, we thank you for this day and for sending your son Jesus Christ into this world. We thank you for the promise that you gave through your prophet. Even as we find ourselves in these days of pain and struggles, we pray that your spirit of justice may be uplifted. Grant us your peace, and let your peace and your love reign in this world. We thank you for this and many other blessings. We ask in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Savior. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Is it possible to live a life without hope?

Samuel K.B. Nkrumah-Pobi

Azusa Revival Outreach Ministry, Ghana

25 December 2023

Christmas

PEACE ON EARTH

"Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors! (Luke 2:14, Recommend reading the full text, 2:1-14)

World Council of Churches, as a body of 253 member churches, is working relentlessly for peace among the churches of different denominations. August 31 to September 8, 2022, are the days I will never forget. Around 4000 Christians from around the world and from different denominations gathered in Karlsruhe, Germany, for the WCC General Assembly. I personally witnessed peace among God's people all over the world.

'Peace' is a term we hear often, and we are all looking for it. Peace in personal life, family life, churches, and community life. World peace is a matter discussed everywhere. The year 2022 is another year of conflicts, especially due to the war between Russia and Ukraine. Many people, including innocent children, died because of various military conflicts worldwide. Global leaders and Churches are trying their best to create peace in those nations impacted by war and conflicts.

In the text for reflection, we see the birth of Jesus, during which the angels proclaimed peace to all people living in different situations.

Most people are living in fearful and unsafe situations. Many people from Ukraine and other war-ridden nations migrated to nearby Countries because of the fear of living in their own countries. The shepherds who were in the fields were not in a safe situation. They were afraid of wild animals and other threats in the fields. Moreover, they were outcasted people who lived out of the common societies. The word 'do not be afraid' is a real comfort for them. This is the same good news for those living in unsafe situations and workplaces. Let us pray for God's people all over the world to receive power through the birth of Jesus. In the same way, God gives us strength through the birth of Jesus.

In Churches, we pray for peace on earth. There are places where people still live in contexts of threat, and they seek peace. The increase in the number of suicides clearly reveals the real-life situation of people. Poverty is one of the reasons. The



birth of Jesus in a manger, even without a proper place, is an example of people living in poverty. The birth situation itself comforts the people of God. We read Jesus giving peace during his birth as well as during his resurrection. Jesus is the word that became flesh and lives among us full of Grace and truth (John 1: 14). His Grace is sufficient for peace in our life (2 Corinthians 12: 9).

Let us pray that the birth of Jesus gives real peace to people all over the world and to those who are seeking peace in their life.

PRAYER

Gracious God, thank you for your gospel of Peace. Our lives of threatened by ongoing conflicts and wars all over the world. Help us to receive your Peace. In Jesus' name. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What do we need to do to establish peace in our communities?

Abraham Nesa

Bossey Institute of Ecumenical Studies, Switzerland



31 December 2023

New Year's Eve

LOOKING BACKWARD, LOOKING FORWARD

¹³ *Brothers and sisters, I do not consider that I have laid hold of it, but one thing I have laid hold of: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead,*

¹⁴ *I press on toward the goal, toward the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 3:13-14)*

The decade of 2020 started with numerous global challenges. It began with the spread of Coronavirus, called Covid-19, which quickly became a global pandemic taking the lives of millions across the globe and causing one of the greatest health crises that we haven't witnessed in the past hundred years. In addition to many other problems, Covid-19 also caused the global economic recession devastating even the rich nations causing ongoing inflation and its impacts on the supply chain. In the meantime, several countries, primarily Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Ukraine, have witnessed military occupations. Many other global challenges, including climate change, international conflicts, economic fallout, social inequalities, etc., have characterized the beginning of this decade as a decade of pain and suffering.

As the year 2023 ends, when we look back, there might be more negative memories than positives in our lives as we all have experienced difficulties in the last three years. However, as we look into the new year, which starts tomorrow, we must remember the words of Apostle Paul, who encourages us by saying, "forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal," Paul's life was filled with more pain than ours. When we read his second letter to Corinthians, we understand that he suffered persecution, faced rejection, experienced shipwrecks and dangers on his paths, underwent various hardships of sleeplessness, hunger and thirst, etc. (2 Cor. 11:16-33). Despite all his pains and sufferings, Paul was happy to look into the future with hope. The reason was he fixed his eyes on the end goal, which was not yet achieved and pressed himself on towards that goal like an athlete who strives to reach the goal.

Despite all the negativity surrounding our lives and societies, we still can press forward with hope because, one, we have already survived all the hardships, two, God gives us hope and strength to press forward, and three, we still have to reach



our end goal. Forgetfulness is a blessing in this context. It is important to let the past go and forget our past pains and sufferings. Forgetting the past could heal our souls and bodies. It gives us scope to look into the future with hope.

Paul's statement about forgetting the past and pressing forward also talks about loads of thankfulness. He was thankful to Christ for his protection and strength to press forward. The very fact that we are still here at the end of 2023 is that we have successfully survived all the hardships and pressed forward. Let us avoid carrying past sorrows and continue to press forward with hope into 2024. By looking backwards and forgetting our past sorrows, and looking forward to keeping our trust in God, let us continue to strive to reach the goal.

PRAYER

God of hope, as we look forward to the new year, help us forget our past sorrows, fix our eyes upon you, and press on towards the goal. In the name of Jesus, Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What do you want to let go of from your past to enter the new year with renewed hope?

Dileep Kumar Kandula

Council for World mission



Special Days

20 February 2023

Monday, World Day of Social Justice

OUR DAILY BREAD, NOT OUR DAILY CRUMBS



The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10, Recommend reading the full text, John 10:1-21)

The text comes from the background of Jesus interacting with the man who, through blindness, is being marginalized (John 9). The interaction sparked some anger among the Pharisees as it insinuated that they were blind themselves too, thus far from the gospel truth of justice and helping the marginalized.

The readers of the New Testament argue that the purpose of the gospel of John was to prove conclusively, that Jesus of Nazareth was the Son of God and that all

those who believe in him will have eternal life. Eternal life in social justice must be taken to mean human dignity, economic equality and equity, Gender justice, and racial justice as a missiological mandate. The qualification was not race, economic status, or political proximity to the political and religious centre. The understanding of Jesus of Nazareth's social justice was distributive, i.e., equality, all created in the image of God in unique ways. Luke affirms that the ministry of Jesus could not be separated from the issues of justice (Luke 4:16ff). The respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms was core to his preaching and healing.

As attested by both John and Luke, Jesus of Nazareth's view of social justice is that everyone deserves equal economic, political, and social rights and opportunities, and thus challenging churches to do the same as they participate in the mission of God. Therefore, none of us deserves crumbs that fall from the tables of other people, as this would be an insult to the goal and mission of the Jesus of Nazareth. John 10 is made up of two neatly joint episodes. First (v1-21) sees Jesus as a good shepherd whose role is also found in the second (v22-42) to unsettle Babylon. Participating in the mission of God in the context of social justice calls for the unsettling of life-denying institutions, systems and ideologies and, thus, costly discipleship.

PRAYER

Father of all creation, mother of peace and love, teach us to do your will your way. Teach us to go beyond feeding the poor to eat with them. We have learnt to be an inclusive society, teach us, Lord, to be including as well. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, who are never at cross-purpose, invite the church to participate in the ministry of Social Justice. We pray, hear our prayers. Amen.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

What should be our mission to ensure that everyone gets bread, not crumbs?

Sindiso Jele

Council for World Mission

5 June 2023
World Environment Day

THE EARTH AS YOUR NEIGHBOUR



Ezekiel 34:17-31 and Matthew 22:35-40

In today's gospel reading, we must work out what it means to love others as ourselves. For example, what does it mean to love our neighbour as ourselves when driving our car? What does it mean to love our neighbour when shopping for products on the high street or the internet? Similarly, we—must consider what it means (within the scope of the one world, the one planet we have and share) to love our neighbour as ourselves.

Today's reading from Ezekiel provides us with some helpful imagery and food for thought. Although the verses from Ezekiel may have originally been written metaphorically when chastising the nation of Israel and their abuse of power and privilege, they also provide valuable illustrations of environmental injustice. Environmental injustice is to have your fill of clean water whilst fouling the rest of the water. Environmental injustice is to feed on the good pasture whilst treading down the rest of the pasture for everyone else. Environmental injustice is when our care and use of the environment and the world's resources clearly show that we don't



truly love our neighbour as ourselves. I'm sure we would all understand that, for example, to have a clean and perfectly maintained garden at the expense of having simply thrown all our garden waste over the fence into our neighbour's now ruined garden is unjust and the opposite of neighbour love. This is a flippant example, but like our passage from Ezekiel, it's a useful metaphor for the much more serious state of affairs that we now find ourselves facing today with our environment and climate.

We talk of today's society as a global one. But of course, in terms of the environment, this has always been the case. The way that developed countries have historically ignored, and in some cases continue to ignore, the negative impact of climate change on their poorer neighbours is in direct conflict with a biblical view of justice (as we've heard from both of today's readings). The majority of scientists agree that in the developed world, our exploitation of fossil fuels and the benefits that we have enjoyed, as a result, have been at the expense of climate change and rising global temperatures and sea levels, which will impact many of the world's poorer countries and people first. Those that are least able to cope are, in many cases, those hardest hit, such as when drought sweeps across countries like Zambia, Madagascar, etc.

The justice that we seek as Christians is Life flourishing, the one that restores—makes right—the relationship between each other as humans but also the relationship between humans and nature, a relationship that has been distorted by greed and misuse. Love your neighbour as yourself. As I said at the beginning, such a simple yet demanding commandment. May each of us continue to reflect on what this means when it comes to our relationship with the environment today.

PRAYER

God of all creation, forgive us for not caring about the environment and exploiting it due to our greed. Help us to realise that in caring for the environment, we share our love with our vulnerable neighbours. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Reflect upon the ways in which we express our love and solidarity towards our neighbours by caring for the environment.

Daimon Mkandawire

Council for World Mission

23 August 2023

International Day for the Remembrance of the Slave Trade and its Abolition

ONESIMUS AND PHILEMON: A REDEEMED RELATIONSHIP

Epistle of Paul to Philemon

Today, 23rd August, is celebrated as the international day for the remembrance of the slave trade and its abolition. On this day, we remember not only the causes and consequences of the slave trade but also the active agency of the enslaved people who laboured hard for its abolition. This is not just a simple remembrance, but one that drives us into action so that the oppressive legacies of the slave trade can be countered, and justice becomes a lived reality. This is precisely what the Onesimus Project of the Council of World Mission seeks to achieve. CWM remembers that its mission understanding was complicit with colonisation, enslavement, and racism. However, the project drives CWM onto a path of self-reflection where the dialectic between the past and the present form of slavery helps it to develop insights rooted in justice for overcoming slavery.

Philemon vs. 15-16 show that the master, Philemon, should regard his slave, Onesimus, not as a slave but as a brother in Christ. It is the relationship between the slave and the master in Christ that has rendered them equal.

The person of Onesimus (a slave) and the question of slavery in the early church was addressed by Paul in this letter. Slavery was a common practice in the Roman world, and the early church lived with it. Being the slave of Philemon, Onesimus had no rights whatsoever. It was a relationship that was based on oppression. However, Paul reverses this oppressive relationship by pointing out to Philemon that as he is serving Christ, his slave is also serving Christ. Hence, they stand equal before God in their service of Christ. In a context where slavery was a common practice, the epistle of Paul to Philemon sowed the seeds for its abolition by considering 'master' and 'slave' as equal partners before God.

Based on equality, Paul intercedes with Philemon to welcome Onesimus back. Paul's intercession was rooted in justice as he invites Philemon to see how God's love can manifest itself practically in his life. Since God has loved Philemon and Onesimus equally, the unjust relationship between the 'slave' and the 'master' is transformed by providing a sense of freedom to Onesimus and a course of correction for Philemon. Paul urges Philemon to remember his oppressive relationship with Onesimus, but



now, based on Christ's love, it needs to be transformed. Paul urges Philemon to treat Onesimus as his co-worker. Here Paul concretely identifies himself with Onesimus. The 'slave' and 'master' become equals, and a fellowship is established where God, Christ and humanity are weaved together in equality, love, care and concern.

In the Indian context, Dalits, Tribal and Adivasis experience the horrors of slavery in a very different way. They are considered impure because of the discriminatory nature of the caste system and denied fundamental human rights. Paul's identification with Onesimus reminds us that, as a church, we must identify ourselves with the victims of oppression. Such identification would lead us to the liberation God intends for the suffering.

PRAYER

God of justice and freedom, open our eyes to see the modern forms of slavery, give us the wisdom to understand how it operates in our own world, and give us the courage to establish just relationships for the good of all. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How do we encounter and expose modern manifestations of slavery in our own context? Who benefits from it? What does God's love mean for the victims of slavery?

Sudipta Singh

Council for World Mission



25 November 2023

PEARLS ARE HEALED WOUNDS

16 Days of activism against Sex and Gender-Based Violence

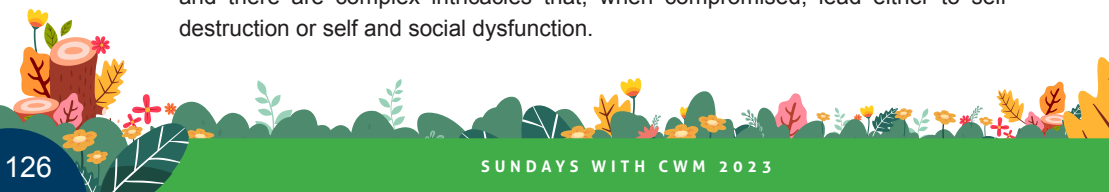


Exodus 15:1-27

The narrative's background is about the Israelites' exodus on their way to the land God had promised them. In this narrative, I want to draw special attention to vs 22-27.

The Israelites were led by a chosen leader of God. They believed in God's ability to save (Jehovah-Hoshe'ah) and deliver them from the Egyptians and the ten plagues. They didn't doubt his ability to cross over the red sea, which, in turn, they rejoiced in a song, but now, 72 hours later, the writer informs us that they had forgotten about the mighty hand of God and had begun to complain. As we had previously heard many times, the Israelites were ungrateful and were a nation of little faith despite the mighty works of God.

However, from a perspective of trauma and deep woundedness, I beg to differ. I would like to argue that they were deeply wounded people by trauma, oppression, and suppression. Slavery was their custom, culture, and normality. It was not so much their physical slavery but a mental one which happens to be the most difficult and complex one to recover from. The biological brain is an ecosystem of its own, and there are complex intricacies that, when compromised, lead either to self-destruction or self and social dysfunction.



In this narrative, God was dealing with traumatised or, should I say, wounded people. In our contemporary Christian culture, individuals who have suffered trauma from SGBV have deep-rooted wounds and difficulty with self-actualisation and social engagement. It is as if God cannot do more than just love and save them from the fires of hell.

Personally, the key verse in this narrative is v. 26. There was an immediate need for water from vs 22-25, and I found God's response striking in verse 27. The Lord identified a need for healing in the quest for water. The Israelites were not crying for healing but for water. God responded to their brokenness, saying, "I will heal you". God responded to their misguided view that he is more than a deliverer and one of the mighty wonders. He is a God that can heal your soul and spirit and sees past the adapted character and personality because wounded and traumatised individuals are often trapped where the trauma has taken place, and not very many recovers and heals from the incident. They adapt characters and personalities that are not their authentic selves and also have a vivid perception of God, which is limiting to theology that God loves you and can save you!

Pearls are healed wounds. When a grain of sand gets into an oyster shell, it is the shiny substance called nacre which the grain enters. The cells go to work and cover the grain of sand with layers to protect the oyster's defenceless body. As a result, a beautiful pearl is formed. An oyster that has not been wounded in any way does not produce pearls because a pearl is a Healed Wound. Is SGBV despicable and uncalled for? Indeed! Nevertheless, there is healing. Jesus is the ultimate oyster which has been wounded for our healing and offers that healing!

PRAYER

God, our heavenly parent, thank you for your extended hand to reach out and heal us. We believe that the redemptive work of cavalry is never in vain. We accept your redemption and will be healed in Jesus' name. Amen!

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

How can you turn your wound with his grace and mercy into a pearl?

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Notes





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