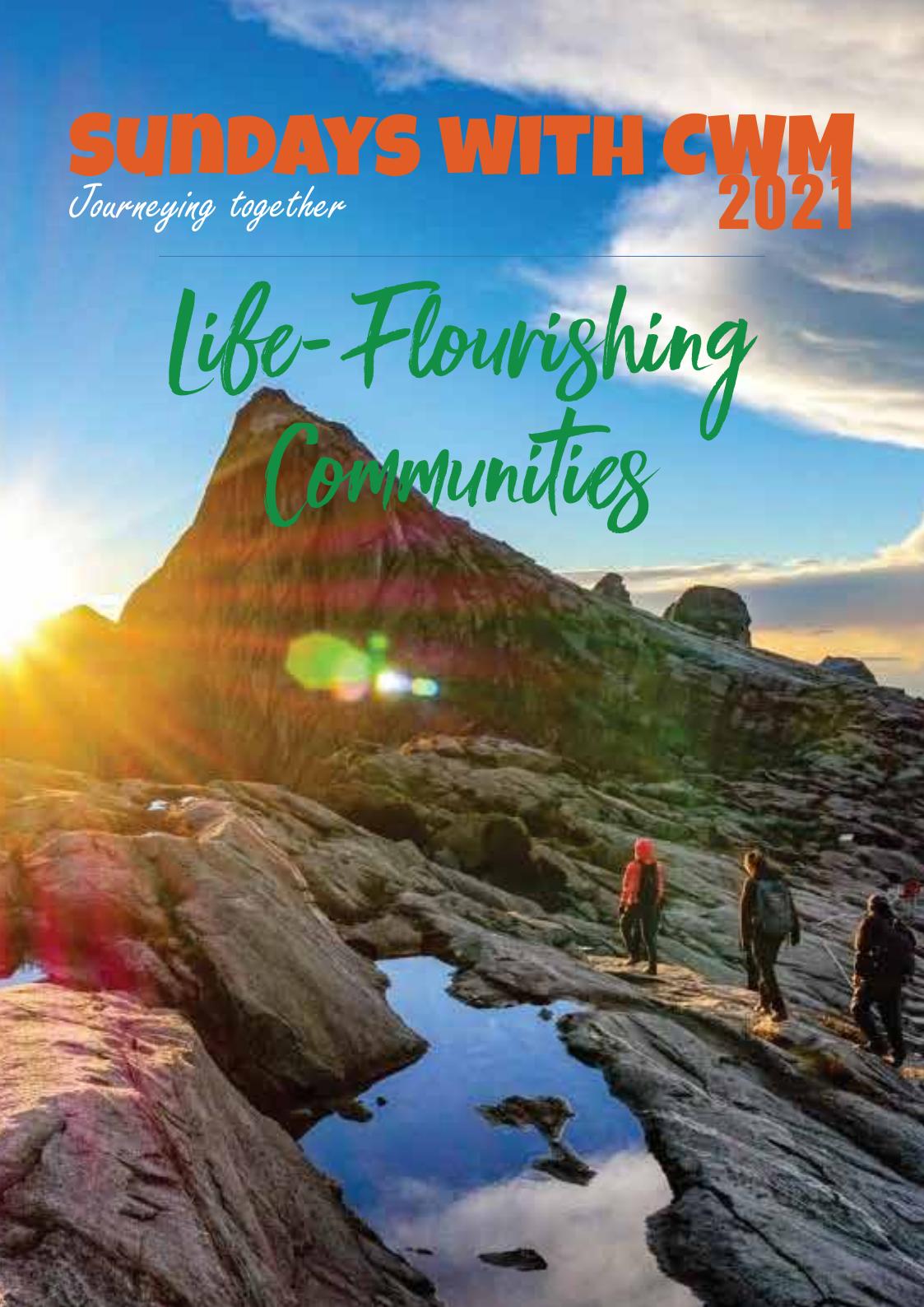


SUNDAYS WITH CWM

Journeying together

2021

Life-Flourishing Communities





Sunrise above the rocky terrain of Malaysian Borneo's Mount Kinabalu on the hike down from Low's Peak.

Photo: Nam Cheah

<https://www.scmp.com/lifestyle/travel-leisure/article/3019298/highest-mountain-southeast-asia-mount-kinabalu-rewards>



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, support justice and model life-flourishing communities.



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

EUROPE

- Congregational Federation (CF)
- Presbyterian Church of Wales (PCW)
- Protestantse Kerk in Nederland (PKN)
- Union of Welsh Independents (UWI)
- United Reformed Church (URC)

EAST ASIA

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

SOUTH ASIA

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

PACIFIC

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



Foreword

The disruptive and unrelenting force of COVID-19 greeted us at the beginning of 2020 and grounded us for the entire year. The coronavirus has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands of our loved ones and infected millions more, causing severe pain and dislocation. As we seek to discern the future, we pray for grace, sufficient to our needs. It will certainly take time for us to adjust to new ways of being, juxtaposed to the pre-COVID-19 period; but by God's grace we will stand secure.

We enter this New Year, 2021, with some degree of uncertainty. But we are a people of faith and we stand assuredly on the solid rock of our salvation, believing that our faith will not shrink under pressure. Now, when the storms of life are raging, we seek God's help to remain strong in faith, resilient under pressure and faithful in our witness. We pray that God will guide us to the lessons for the moment and that we will heed the call and respond obediently.

During the period when several plagues devastated Egypt, the Pharaoh failed to see the writing on the wall and he chose instead to continue with business as usual, stubbornly defying the signs of the time and the voice of God through God's messenger. COVID-19, despite its devastations, offers us an invitation to see and act differently – to examine the pandemic through our faith in God's incarnational presence and the lens of our values of hospitality and generosity of spirit. To do so is to hear God's voice as we look at the social ills that the pandemic reveals - economic inequalities, inadequate healthcare system and the incapacity for international cooperation, in times of crisis. Now is the time for people of faith and all people of goodwill to come together and act with justice to right the wrongs of our time and to work together for life-flourishing alternatives, marked by equity, justice and peace for all.

Sundays with CWM is a series of weekly devotional meant to inspire faith and deepen our relationship with God, as we face the challenges and opportunities of life. I commend this devotional to you with prayers for your spiritual enrichment and growth.

Rev. Dr Collin Cowan
CWM General Secretary

January



"Today I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." Luke 23:43

Notes

Life-Flourishing Communities

John 1:1-9

From this powerful introduction to John 1, we learn three things about John:

Firstly that "he himself was not the light" (v.8a)

We, like John, are called to bring about life-flourishing communities. But we, like John, also have human limitations, weaknesses and even contradictions. John was the son of a respectable priest, but instead of serving under his father in the temple and learning in that setting like a normal priest's son, he was busy living in the desert, dressed in animal skin, eating locusts and honey, yet God was using him to point people to Jesus in spite of his quirks and idiosyncrasies. God calls us too. We do not have to be perfect to be called, but we do have to be willing. We have no real excuses for not following God's call.

Secondly, "he came only as a witness to the light" (v.8b)

In spite of human limitations, John had a divine commission, to witness to another, that is Christ. We too are called to show people what is possible in Christ's power. To influence our communities for blessings and for good, to bring about life-flourishing behaviours like reconciliation, healing and restoration. And to use our talents and gifts to show Christ's values in our communities.

Third, that Jesus is "the true light that gives light to every person" (v.9)

So, it was not about John. And it is not about us either, because we are not the light. Jesus is the Light of the world, the one who shines upon our situations and makes clear the true meaning and destiny of human existence. Jesus is the light who came so that we may have abundant life.

And because it is all about Jesus the only true light, then we ought to be following His methods and teachings. Teachings about kingdom values like peace-seeking, challenging the evil around us, seeking mercy, and acting in righteousness. And Jesus, the Light of the world, will use us to bring transformation in the world.

Lydia Neshangwe, CWM Moderator

Prayer

Come Lord Jesus, that your light might shine on our communities, churches, and ourselves as we turn to a new year. Kindle a light in us through which others can discover hope, healing and courage.

Prayer Points

For the People of Mozambique

The life-flourishing communities are an alternative, hence their rejection of systemic racism, economic exploitation, modern-day slavery and human trafficking. We therefore pray:

- ▶ For the situation in Mozambique: In the insurgency in Cabo Delgado, the demands of the fighters are not known. The nature of the war is not clear - is it a religious war?.
- ▶ Secondly, pray for the economic situation. This province is among the poorest in Mozambique; the fighting started with machetes and now guns are being used. It is not certain if there are external parties involved and how they are benefitting. Whatever the truth of these happenings, there is the radicalisation of the youth, worsening this humanitarian crisis in which people are killed.
- ▶ We therefore lift up in prayer UPCSA, UCCSA, the Mozambique Christian Council and CWM Africa as they join God in His mission in and with the people of Mozambique.



<https://www.aljazeera.com/program/inside-story/2020/8/14/could-fighting-in-northern-mozambique-destabilise-the-region/>

Repent and Reform

Mark 1:4-11

The reading for today is about repentance and the remission of sins.

Repentance is the activity of reviewing one's actions and feeling contrition or regret for the past wrongs, accompanied by commitment to actual actions that show the turning away from self-serving activities and turning to follow God's will. John preached the forgiveness of sins, which is the great gospel privilege. He addressed repentance to the Jews, that there must be a renewal of their heart and reformations of their lives.

John the Baptist is trying to flourish the great Good News to all, inviting them to confess and repent completely for their sins. John the Baptist is preparing the people that they may flourish, rooting their spiritual life in Christ. Repentance offers the way to have unity with Christ in order to have a new, peace-filled life.

This powerful message really touched the people. They came from all over the land of Judea and from Jerusalem, and found him in the Jordan River. They confessed their sins and were baptised. John's powerful message enabled the reforming and reshaping of the sinner's way of living, according to the will of God. These hearers experienced the great promise Christ makes in his gospels to those who have repented. They experienced forgiveness of sins and so they were baptised with the Holy Spirit and enrolled as His disciples.

'Repent - reform – believe' is as important as we are in the era of COVID-19. We ask for Jesus' Spirit to flourish our lives, societies and churches with good attitudes, stop discrimination, stop violence, be good stewards, be good disciples and continue loving one another as the new commandment that was given by Jesus.

Have a strong faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, for his love gives us strength for the COVID-19 pandemic!

Malisi Honolulu Pine, Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu

Prayer

Lord God, we pray to make all Christians become true followers of Jesus so they may flourish and disperse the grain of Jesus' gospels in all places to have a fullness of life we find in Jesus Christ.

We pray for those affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. Guide and protect them carefully.

Prayer Points

Guyana Congregational Union

- ▶ Change and transformation in the hearts and lives of members across the congregations as the Union seeks to move away from the maintenance mode of ministry towards adopting a missional approach.
- ▶ The successful implementation of our MSP-2, 3 and 4 programmes.
- ▶ Revival across various ministries of the congregations which are currently being affected by the impact of COVID-19 – women, youth, sunday school and men.
- ▶ God's guidance and leadership in the political, social, cultural and economic domains as the country responds.
- ▶ That the people of Guyana adopt a more disciplined and responsible attitude in the observing of the health protocols as prescribed by health officials in the fight against the spread of this global pandemic.



Source: Guyana Congregational Union

Life-flourishing Creation

1 Samuel 1: 1-20; John 1: 43-51

To live as servants of God's life-flourishing creation, we need to be with God constantly and to cultivate a practice to encounter Him whenever we receive the opportunity. Moreover, a culture of inclusiveness helps us to leave behind our exclusive claims and embody a life that flourishes our being as well as the whole creation.

Being with and encountering God are important factors for life to flourish. 1 Samuel 1:1-20 describes that life comes from God, but very often only through encounter with Him. The opportunity to encounter God comes from one's constant relationship with Him. This spiritual practice gave Samuel the opportunity for his life-flourishing ministry, especially to convey the prophetic voice truthfully and courageously. In this passage Eli, the priest, serves as a mentor to Samuel to respond to the call and mission of God. When a person responds to God's call, God entrusts them with His mission and commissions them to serve as a prophetic witness to life-flourishing communities.

The conversation between Philip and Nathaniel, the disciples of Jesus Christ, gives us the idea that to develop life-flourishing communities we need to leave behind a culture of exclusive claims to embody a culture of inclusiveness. After hearing the question of Nathaniel, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip did not spend any time arguing with him, but said, "Come and see" (John 1:46). In other words, Philip said to him, "forget your exclusive claims and see what is happening around us through the living presence of the Messiah, the son of God." Your seat under the fig tree gives you fame and people may call you 'researcher of the scriptures,' but come out of that safe place and enjoy life in the presence of Jesus Christ, the life-giver. Let us come out of our comfort zone of fame and safety; instead let us live among the destitute and marginalised to serve as agents of God's original purpose of creation.

Prinstone Ben, Church of South India

Prayer

God of Life, help our churches to do God's mission and ministry serving all people, especially those who are disenfranchised and marginalised by oppressive structures. Give ministers, missionaries and all who work in the church the discernment to work meaningfully in the context of the deadly pandemic COVID-19.

Prayer Points

Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa

- ▶ From January to September 2020, a record number of 15 young people lost their lives to suicide. Pray for the young people of American Samoa that they may know how to cherish God's gift of life and make wise life decisions. Pray for their parents and families who are coping with their sudden departure. Pray for the CCCAS and all churches in American Samoa, that their ministries will be able to address this issue among the young people.
- ▶ CCCAS member churches in the United States, New Zealand and Australia suffered a lot from the impact of COVID-19. Please pray for their well-being, individual ministries and mission as they adapt to the 'new normal' brought about by this global pandemic.
- ▶ The CCCAS has several elderly members as well as members living with disabilities. We pray for their well-being, and may God keep them safe from COVID-19.



Source: <https://www.samoaanews.com/features/suicide-awareness-church-service-photo-caption>

Life-Flourishing Economy

Jonah 3:1-5,10; Psalm 62:5-12; 1 Corinthians 7:29-31; Mark 1:14-20

There is a thread running through the assigned readings for this Sunday: it is the shape of God's Oikonomia (economy or plan) for a world in which all can share in full and flourishing life. This is God's dream for the world that God loves so much. This shape of God's economy both highlights that which robs God's creation of fullness and invites us to step out and embody a different way of living and being. There is a necessary call to repent and to radically turn away from ways, habits, and practices that exclude, extort, rob, create inequalities – in essence denying full living.

The invitation is a call to embody habits that reflect God's heart (Psalm 62 and Jonah 3). For God's economy to thrive and take root, what currently chains us (Empire's economy) must pass away (1 Corinthians). But this will not happen magically. Repenting of our own complicity to the allure of empire's economy, which largely thrives on the commodification of every aspect of creation for profit, and believing in the illogic that a give-away God of fullness for all is the good news (Mark). This is the way to follow, where to gain is to lose and the first will be the last, which is a massive subversion of empire's economic logic. There is an urgency in this call so we should not miss the immediacy of responding to it. Mark's signalling of urgency is pointing to action. Reflect on this: especially how our inclinations to overthink and over-analyse often lead into inaction and the sin gradualism - exactly what empire's economic grip wishes of us as we genuflect to its ways. The urgency here is not when but what; it is the habits and values we must embody to break, loosen, and transform all that stifles flourishing life for all.

Life-flourishing economy of the way of Jesus is about quality living and must include the redressing of all sorts of deficits in order that all can share fully in society, where harmonious 'thrive-ability' is God's desire for all of creation.

Michael Jagessar, Council for World Mission

Prayer

God-always-with-us, we pray your Spirit will bring freshness to our thoughts, words and actions, so we can dream new and creative possibilities, discern the challenges before us, find life-giving ways to care and embrace, and dare to join the adventure of walking your way of flourishing life for all.

Prayer Points

Gender-Based Violence

Oh creator God, we give you thanks that you call us to name gender-based violence that happens all over the world and especially in India. Today we pray for all the women who continue to care for family, church and society in spite of the violence they face. We pray that you may grant them release from violence of all kinds.

Oh God our creator, women in India are facing horrible violence. We remember rape victims and those who are sexually assaulted, as well as their families. We pray that you may bring justice to our country. We pray for prophets to proclaim God's judgment upon those who take part in gender-based violence. We pray that women's voices may be heard in building peace communities through reconciliation. Finally, we pray for the transformation in our church and society so that people may live in peace and harmony.

Nelavala Gnana Prasuna,
Gurukul Lutheran Theological College & Research Institute



<http://www.deccanherald.com/opinion/second-edit/domestic-violence-clear-ugly-picture-729975.html>



<https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2014/dec/10/india-gender-violence-women-activism>

To the God who hears,
Just like the daughters of Zelophehad, we raise our voices refusing to submit to the culture of silence around gender-based violence.
Just like the persistent widow of Luke 18, we are relentless in demanding justice for all who have faced gender-based violence.
Holy one, hear us! Hear our lament!
Deliver all from systems of sexual exploitation!
Restore the dignity robbed of them!
Dismantle systems of patriarchy that perpetuate and reinforce sexual violence!
Hear this prayer. Amen.

Lynnette Li, Council for World Mission

Good News of Liberation

Mark 1:21-28

At its essence "evangelism" is about the euangelion, the good news concerning Jesus Christ; also known as the "gospel". This good news speaks of the new life we can have through Christ and how that not only transforms the individual but the family, community and society. Whereas there are many forces that may want to hinder and inhibit the experience of a new life, Jesus the Christ represents God's way to enter into this new life. Jesus comes not to harm or destroy; rather, he comes to heal and to deliver.

In Jesus' encounter with this unnamed man who was bound by an unclean spirit he shows how keenly interested God is in offering life and liberty to those who are in bondage. The question that the unclean spirit asked, "have you come to destroy us?" may be interpreted as an indication that the evil powers were aware of their vulnerability and weakness. Additionally, they knew who Jesus was and what Jesus could do to them. In that regard, we need not be afraid of the powers of evil and death that may seek to rob people of the life that God has designed for them. The good news is that evil and death are subject to the power of God.

In this event Jesus showed us that the things which hold people in bondage will have to flee when confronted by the presence and power of God. Some of the chains may be internal and others external; some may be of an individual nature whilst others may be structural and institutional. Whatever the situation may be, the gospel is a message of liberation: Jesus has come to set the captives free! Enabled by the power and equipped with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, followers of Christ are called and sent to proclaim this good news so that all peoples may experience new life through Christ.

In a world where there is much bad news, our task is to offer in real and tangible ways this message of the gospel so that God's salvation will be experienced.

Anthony Chung, United Church in Jamaica & the Cayman Islands

Prayer

Liberating God, in Jesus of Nazareth you have revealed your love, power and grace. His life, death and resurrection bear witness to the truth of who you are and your plan for the world. Help your church in this time to be a beacon of hope and light so that others will see and hear the gospel. Amen.

Prayer Points

United Church in Jamaica & the Cayman Islands

- ▶ Pray that students in Jamaica, who are without internet access and the required technology to engage in online learning in schools, may receive assistance. Also remember teachers who are required to acquire new skills and engage new methodologies for imparting knowledge using online platforms. Thirdly, parents who have to adjust to the new learning model in order to support their children.
- ▶ Remember persons in both Jamaica and the Cayman Islands who struggle with overcoming psychological issues such as anxiety, depression, relational issues and bereavement as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.
- ▶ Pray that the church will continue to be responsive to the 'new normal' for worship, work and witness through innovative and impactful ministry expressions and engagements.

Source: United Church in Jamaica & the Cayman Islands



Covid-19



Technology in School



New way of interacting

Notes

February

If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.

-Desmond Tutu



Life-Flourishing Societies

Isaiah 40: 21-31

Do you ever feel overwhelmed by what's happening in the world around us? There are so many voices constantly raised in anger, creating division and seeking to exclude. The scale of the task we're facing can be disheartening. We can feel as if we're making a stand for the values of God's kingdom in the face of an insurmountable tide of hate and selfishness. How on earth can we even be heard, let alone have an impact? It's easy to give up.

However, Isaiah 40 helps us to regain a sense of perspective, and to realise that we must not let the world and its skewed priorities prevent us from keeping the bigger picture in our sights. The Holy One portrayed here is an all-powerful being, on a scale far beyond our imagining, who 'reduces the rulers of this world to nothing', and for whom our concept of time and longevity is irrelevant. In that context we must place our hope in the Lord, and have faith that our efforts to bring about change in the world, small as they might be, can be blessed and bear fruit, whether we see that happen in our own lifetime or not.

We are also promised renewal of our strength when we hope in the Lord, but how do we keep that hope alive? As always, the answer comes from Jesus, whom we see, throughout what must have been an exhausting ministry, consistently spending many hours in prayer to gain strength and renewal. If he, who was and is one with God, needed such support, how much more should we be taking advantage of this door which is open to us? Turning to God in prayer is, in effect, our powerhouse, and we need to ensure that the cares of this world don't crowd out our prayer time. If we place ourselves in God's hands, and offer ourselves, imperfect as we are, in prayer, we will be given strength and perseverance to carry out work for God's kingdom, and as we are reminded in Ephesians, the results may well be 'immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine'.

Fiona Gannon, Union of Welsh Independents

Prayer

Lord, forgive us for being blinded by our worldly perspective, and attempting to confine you to the narrow limits of our human experience and understanding. Open our hearts to marvel anew at your love for us, and respond to it by turning constantly to you in prayer. Amen.

Prayer Points

Congregational Federation

- ▶ Congregations to have a new passion and openness for serving Jesus through the CWM MSP-4 discipleship resource.
- ▶ Congregational ministers to have wisdom, strength and protection for themselves and their families.
- ▶ Churches worrying about the financial losses because of COVID-19 closures and the impact this will have.



Source: Congregational Federation

Life-Flourishing Creation

2 Kings 2:1-12; Psalm 50:1-6; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9

In a text where the true glory of Jesus is unmasked as the Son of God, his death is also revealed. Thus, even this moment exposes Jesus' struggle with those who will ultimately seek to extinguish his light. Jesus was executed by powers because they were threatened by his works and his shining identity and integrity.

The transfiguration explicates that the way of the cross is related to the way of the kingdom of God. In the gospels, Jesus' disciples were unable to understand Jesus' ministry. While they sought power and position, Jesus' ministry was resistive to it. God's voice in the text shows us that through the cross, God will carry out his saving activity for those who are uncared for. To preach Jesus is to follow his works (2 Corinthians 4:3-6). The way of the cross and the way of resurrection cannot be separated. They both offer a life that is free of all life-negating structures.

The transfiguration shows resistance to the empire that is built upon oppressive hierarchical order. The context of Jesus' life, the Roman society was hierarchically divided. The ones at the bottom had no experience of life in its fullness. The response of Peter is representative of such an ideology. Rather than understanding the true identity of Jesus and his imminent death, his suggestions of building shelters reinforces the hierarchy where building shelters would increase the popularity of Jesus. Popularity would bring power and status. However, Jesus' mission was establishing the Kingdom of God, which was opposed to hierarchy. It built on love, equality and justice because God is a God of Justice (Psalm 50:6).

The transfiguration offers hope of life that is flourishing in all aspects. The resurrection of Jesus calls us to live a resurrected life. Such resurrected life is shown in acts of resistance to the life-negating realities of the world. In whatever contexts we might be in, the transfiguration of Jesus gives us courage and hope in the face of death and uncertainty. The hope of the establishing kingdom of God in this world continually inspires us to overcome death and destruction and continually move towards establishing life-flourishing communities where life in its fullness is lived and experienced.

Sudipta Singh, Council for World Mission

Prayer

God our parent, by your shining presence in our lives, give us courage to reject ideologies that do not promote love, care and justice. Inspire us through Jesus, who always stood with the uncared and resisted oppressive ideologies. Let the Holy Spirit be our guide in establishing life-flourishing creation.

Prayer Points

CWM Board of Directors

Loving God, we place the members of the Board at your altar, grant them:

- ▶ The gift of wisdom. Give them vision to see outside the norm and to make decisions that are life-affirming.
- ▶ Good health and divine protection to serve with humility, a compassionate heart, and a joyful spirit.
- ▶ Faith and hope as they serve in uncertain times where the spirit of hopelessness abound. May their faith remain uncompromised and their hope firm in you.
- ▶ Embrace them during moments of despair when decisions are difficult and disheartening; encourage them when their work feels unbearable, and recognition seems unnoticed and educate them to act with a spirit-led heart according to your will and purpose.

Vickeisha King-Burke, Council for World Mission

February 20 - World Day of Social Justice

17 FEB



**Create in me a clean heart, O God and
put a new and right spirit within me.**

– Psalm 51:10



Life-Flourishing Economy

Genesis 9:8-17; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Peter 3: 18-22; Mark: 1: 9-15

In Genesis 9, we find that God had a plan to save human beings from their fallen and sinful nature but they did not listen to God. Therefore, God sent the flood and only the family of Noah was saved due to their righteousness. God made the covenant with Noah that He will not send this kind of destruction again. 1 Peter 3 says that due to this fallen nature of human beings, God has made a great plan, a plan of salvation in and through His son Jesus Christ who came down to earth to save fallen humanity and all creation. Therefore, Mark 1 begins with the baptism of Jesus Christ, showing why Jesus has come to this world and what would be His Mission and Ministry in this world. Through the baptism of Jesus Christ and through the solidarity with the fallen human beings, we can find that the Triune God is now at work to reverse this fallen situation of rebellious humanity and the condition of sinners of this world.

The declaration of God, "You are my son... with you I am well pleased" (Mark 1:11), and Jesus Christ's first declaration, "The time has come. The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the Good News" (Mark 1:15) show that it is Jesus' mission and ministry to accomplish God's plan now. Jesus seeks to establish the Kingdom of God in this world where there will be no injustice, oppression, inequality, division or discrimination among any of the creatures of the world. There will be life, and in the reign of God peace, justice and life in abundance, wholeness and fullness of life will prevail. As St. Paul also affirms that in baptism we all are children of God, there will be no division in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3:26-28, 1 Cor. 12).

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the threat to lives and livelihoods: God does not want it to continue at all. So let us change our minds, surrender completely to the Lord to be spiritually rich and live anew.

Samuel S. Mankhin, Church of Bangladesh

Prayer

God, help us to change. To change ourselves and to change the world. To know the need for it. To deal with the pain of it. To feel the joy of it. To undertake the journey without understanding the destination. Teach us the art of gentle revolution. Amen.

Prayer Points

Partner in Mission

One of the biggest issues in Myanmar is the Rohingyas. The Rohingyas claim to be one of the many ethnic minorities who reside in the western state of Rakhine, formerly known as Arakan in Myanmar. Numbering around one million, the Rohingya people are considered "stateless entities" as the Myanmar government does not recognise them as an ethnic group or citizens of Myanmar. Thus, the Rohingyas lack legal protection from the government and are regarded as Muslim refugees from neighbouring countries and face strong hostility in the country. The Rohingyas were excluded from Myanmar's Union Citizenship Act which included 135 other ethnic groups.

A number of violent incidents broke out in the region and the Rohingyas began to flee from Myanmar to the neighbouring countries as refugees. The mass exodus started since the 2012 Rakhine state riot in Myanmar.

Let us pray for the people of Myanmar, for the establishment and restoration of peace and justice in the country.

Zohmangaihi Rokhum, Partner In Mission (South Asia)



Source: Zohmangaihi Rokhum

February 21 - International Mother Tongue Day

The Misunderstood Person

Mark 8:31-38

Today's text falls within the middle section of Mark's gospel (set as Jesus makes his way towards Jerusalem). The section revolves around the disciples' incomprehension of who Jesus really is! Through the question, "Do you not understand yet?" (8:17-21), that Jesus keeps asking, Mark sets the context for such incomprehension, and masterfully employs a literary style in the gradual and eventual unveiling of Jesus' identity. It is significant to note that Mark begins and ends this central portion with stories of healing the blind: In 8:22-26 Jesus privately heals a man's blindness, though it requires two steps to complete the process. In 10:46-52, Jesus publicly heals the blindness of Bartimaeus, the beggar, in an instant.

"Sight" is used in these miracles as a metaphor in the gradual unveiling of Jesus' identity. In between the stories of healing the blind come Jesus' three predictions of his passion, of which Mark 8:31-38 is the first. Mark means to say that Jesus' identity does not fit into the mould of the leader expected by his disciples, carved by tradition and exemplified through Peter's rebuke of Jesus. Jesus' counter-rebuke of Peter also follows after his own declaration of Jesus as Messiah (8:29)! While Peter declares Jesus as Christos (Christ), at the same time he attempts to limit the understanding of Christ to his own desire. Jesus will have nothing of this! *Î»esous Christos* ('Jesus Christ' in Koine Greek) continues to be an enigma in the 21st century. The real challenge for Christian evangelism is the limiting of God's ways of being in the world in an attempt to make Jesus Christ fit into our own mould.

Life-flourishing evangelism calls for recognising and affirming God's ways of being amongst peoples and cultures across the world. It calls for a radical discipleship that re-examines and revalues our commitment to the gospel of *Î»esous Christos* and our engagement with the world towards reclaiming God's offer of fullness of life for all creation. Evangelism which thrives in such radical discipleship cuts as a double-edged sword: it is both a gaining and emptying of one's own life.

Cliff Bird, CWM Board of Directors

Prayer

God of all creation, God of all people, in our eagerness to tell others about the good news declared and lived by Jesus the Christ, help us to refrain from making Jesus fit into our own moulds, and keep us from limiting God's ways of being in the world. Amen.

Prayer Points

Gereja Presbyterian Malaysia

- ▶ 2020 has been a hard year for humanity, especially our poor and persecuted global church family, many suffering from locusts, natural disasters and now COVID-19 on top of the discrimination they already face.
- ▶ But in this suffering there is also hope. The persecuted church is resilient, courageous and, most importantly, faithful to God.
- ▶ Through our suffering family, be inspired to find strength for today in the face of pressures and struggles, as we look to the bright hope Jesus promises us for tomorrow.
- ▶ Pray for GPM's Barnabas Fund for the suffering church. Bringing action and awareness of the suffering church right into homes, we hope that more people than ever will learn about, empathise with, pray for and speak out about suffering and persecuted Christians around the world.



Source: Gereja Presbyterian Malaysia

March 3 - World Wildlife Day

Notes

March

**Capitalism is destroying the
Earth. We need a new human
right for future generations.**

— George Monbiot

The Passion for Worship

John 2:13-22

This text indicates that the worship of God has been corrupted and needs to be refined and reformed. During the Passover celebration, Jesus went to the temple to worship and found in the outer courtyard area the glory of his Father's house being turned into a marketplace.

The pilgrims who came with lambs and doves spotless and without blemish would never meet the requirements of the temple. They were forced to purchase very expensive lambs and doves as required for their sacrifices, and they were charged a fee to exchange their money for the temple currency. This system of making money was shrouded under a cloak of religion.

These practices had been going on for so long in the temple that the people had gotten used to them and thought they were right. There are also things going wrong in the church but they are not considered wrong as the church has gotten used to them too. There are strategies that are effective for the running of the church but it has never been considered how oppressive and discriminating towards the poor they may be. Jesus was sick of witnessing these swindlers taking advantage of the people. He was sick and tired of the worship of God clothed in human greed and selfishness. With His whip Jesus cleansed the temple, chasing traders and money-changers out.

This reading addresses the issue existing in the church today where human interest and authority is taking over the purpose of the temple and worship. Many churches are using worship matters to make profits. Religious leaders are employing their authority upon the vulnerable to achieve their own desires. The church in its missional identity and vocation tends not to consider the corruption against the poor and the vulnerable.

With the whip of Jesus can you destroy the idolatry that is taking place in your church? Can you refine the tradition in your church that is perverting the true worship of God? Can you reform the worship in your church that is exchanging love for God for idol worship and specifically the love of money and covetousness?

Tioti Timon, Kiribati Uniting Church

Prayer

God of love and mercy, thank you for cleansing the temple for our worship. Your name is sung in our daily praises but our hearts are confined in worldly things. Cleanse our hearts, Lord, that we may hear the cry of the poor and share your love in Christ, our God and saviour. Amen.

Prayer Points

Union of Welsh Independents

- ▶ The recently-launched Innovation and Investment Programme. Pray that the churches may grasp this new and exciting opportunity to invest in their future and seek out new and pioneering ways into their local communities.
- ▶ The work of the Economy of Life and Climate Change Working Group set up to respond to the CWM NIFEA Colloquials. Pray that the churches of the UWI will respond to the working groups' call to use their funds and resources responsibly in pursuit of justice for all and care for the environment.
- ▶ Pray that the churches of Wales will return from their period in lockdown with a deeper understanding of what it means to be welcoming, compassionate and loving communities in the post-COVID Wales.



Source: Union of Welsh Independents

March 8 - International Women's Day

Let's Get to Work

Ephesians 2:1-10

From the world of popular music, American singer Lou Rawls crooned,

What's the matter with the world, has the world gone mad?
There's nothing wrong with the world
It's the people that's in it

We need only pay attention to the headlines of various news media to know that there is so much in this world that contravenes what we understand to be God's will for justice and peace among humanity and with creation. Violent assaults based on race, religion, gender, sexual orientation and socio-economic status are some of the atrocities which deny people fullness of life as Jesus envisioned in John 10:10.

Can we, like Jesus, visualise societies which allow people and the environment to flourish? Can we, like Jesus, envision relationships which affirm the inherent value of all human beings and which allow us all to seek to understand each other, serve each other and respect each other because of the profound truth that each of us was made in the image of the Creator and equally loved?

If the people in the world of which Lou Rawls sings sought peace which calls for the right relationship with God and human beings - in alignment with the two greatest commandments which declare the primacy of the love of God and love of neighbour - then justice would be achievable. Jesus has set the agenda of life in fullness, and God has provided the resources in each of us, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do" (Ephesians 2:10).

From the world of traditional Christian music, we hear the words penned by Fanny Crosby in 1869 heralding the call:

To the work! To the work! We are servants of God;
Let us follow the path that our Master has trod;
With the balm of His counsel our strength to renew,
Let us do with our might what our hands find to do.
Toiling on, toiling on,
Toiling on, toiling on;
Let us hope, let us watch,
And labour till the Master comes.
So, what are we waiting for?

Karen Francis, Council for World Mission

Prayer

God our source and our resource, may we lean on you and draw from you the courage and conviction to work for the liberation of those physically and ideologically imprisoned. May we do the work you have prepared for us to do. Amen.

Prayer Points

New Leadership in Member Church

- ▶ Pray for the new leadership in some of CWM's member churches. May God grant a smooth leadership transition, strengthening and re-imagining of the churches' vision and mission. Pray also for opportunities for the new leaders and CWM to connect in order for both parties to understand each other's unique contexts and work more closely and effectively together.
- ▶ We pray for boldness amongst the new and existing leaders in our member churches. May they have the courage to stand up for what is just and what is right, and may that continue to press towards the goal of life flourishing communities, even when faced with criticism and persecution from the world.

Sainimili Kata and Stephen Chia, Council for World Mission

A Call to Prophetic Witness

Jeremiah 31:31-34 & John 12:20-33

In many instances, Jeremiah is known as 'the weeping prophet'; the anguish of Jeremiah conveys the anguish of God at the sin of the people of Judah and Israel. This book, among many things, shows us that God is deeply vested in creation and in the well-being of His people. It appears that during the time of prophet Jeremiah, people's well-being was greatly neglected due to many social ills of the day as they broke the covenant. Similarly, today, many are breaking God's law when pursuing meaningless idols of power, fame and wealth, while in the process the well-being of many people who are on the margins is violated.

Though such is the case, Jeremiah announces a new covenant to his people that will bring hope and freedom to the oppressed masses. The new covenant promised in Jeremiah 31 is fulfilled in Jesus Christ (John 12:32-33). With His blood through His death on the cross, Jesus establishes the new covenant where God's law is written upon people's hearts, and God shall be their God and they shall be God's people. The new covenant emphasises an order that ensures emancipation in all areas of life, including financial and economic freedom. The influx of civil unrest and protests in our world seems to suggest that economic freedom is a far-fetched idea. Violence and looting cannot solve the social, political and economic problems, but maybe it is the only way of sending a message to the people in power. A sign that political and religious rulers are out of touch, evidenced by the implementation of bad economic policies of neglect that infringe on communities of the poor.

The church today ought to act as prophet Jeremiah to challenge and examine economic systems of today for modification where it is needed to benefit the communities of the poor and the marginalised. It is the mandate of the church to advocate for basic welfare rights, including the right to basic needs such as shelter, food, work opportunities, income security and all those aspects that promote the well-being of all people.

Goodwin Zainga, Churches of Christ in Malawi

Prayer

We pray for the well-being of all creation, and we pray especially for pastors in the world as they offer pastoral care and counselling services to many people, in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

Prayer Points

Congregational Christian Church of Samoa

- ▶ Samoa - Our people struggle with a lot of issues. Our political arena is becoming more authoritarian given the domination of the ruling HRPP party. CCCS is caught within all issues affecting members of the church. Please pray for Samoa and its upcoming election. May the Spirit of God lead people's choices and votes.
- ▶ Samoa National Council of Churches (FES) - Pray for FES to play its ecumenical roles for the member churches and the Samoa people. FES works in partnership with the government, yet may they speak up boldly against corruption. Please pray that the Spirit of our Lord leads and strengthens FES so it can proclaim the prophetic liberation voice/message of the gospel of Jesus Christ.
- ▶ World & COVID-19 - May God lead and equip the wisdom and knowledge of scientific researches and studies so a vaccine can be produced soon.



Source: Congregational Christian Church of Samoa

March 21 - International Day of Forests; World Down Syndrome Day

Jesus' Subversive Ride

Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29; Mark 11:1-11 or John 12:12-16

Today's readings focus on what has become known as Palm Sunday, the first day of Holy Week. For centuries, the church commemorated this special day because of the palm branches and cloaks that the crowd spread out before Jesus as He proceeded toward Jerusalem on a borrowed donkey. Jesus entered Jerusalem accompanied by a group of followers that he had been connecting with all along: the outcast, the sick and blind, the possessed and foreigners. The crowd that shouted, "*Hosanna! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!*" would have been laughed at by any sensible member of society who happened to witness this 'strange' celebration. Commentators Borg and Crossan in their book *The Last Week* wrote that this celebration of Palms is a counter-procession, mimicking an imperial procession entering the other side of Jerusalem with war horse, chariot and weapons. Accordingly, the imperial procession was meant to amplify the emperor's power over the weak and the powerless. So, on the first celebration of Palms, we have Jesus and his followers creatively re-imagine their weaknesses as strengths. They did not deny their poverty as the very instruments of celebration (i.e. palms, cloaks and a borrowed donkey) proclaimed it publicly, but they resisted the empire and celebrated their own messiah rather than worshipping at the feet of a political tyrant.

This Holy Week, may Mark's story of Jesus' subversive ride continue to challenge and inspire us as we discern how God is calling us today in our time and context to follow Jesus' nonviolent way of counter-action in resisting all forms of life-denying forces and systems. The celebration of Palms should cause us to pause and stand in solidarity with the vulnerable and the fearful who are facing storms of various kinds in their lives. As Psalm 84:11 reminds us, "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favour and honour; no good thing does He withhold from those whose walk is blameless."

Takluem Cherry, Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

Prayer

Thank you Lord, even though life is already hard enough without this Coronavirus that has spread around the world. We always remember that Your ways are better than our ways, and Your will is beyond our wills. We put our trust in You. We pour out our praise and devotion to You, as You have never failed us and we know You never will. Through your son Jesus Christ our saviour and Lord, Amen.

Prayer Points

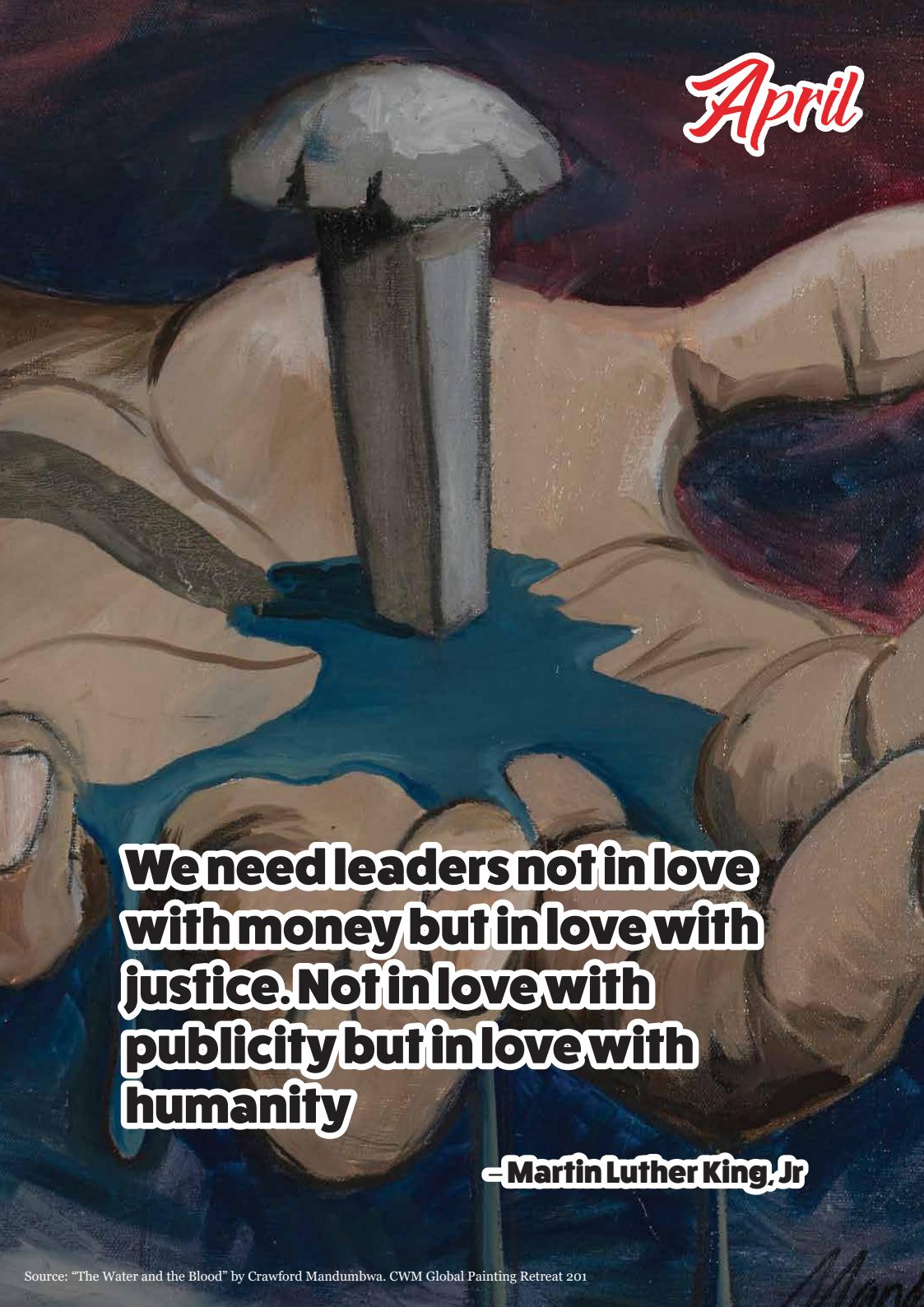
Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China

- ▶ Hong Kong and the world are under the threat of COVID-19. Please pray for the people in different countries to put in concerted and effective effort to fight against the pandemic. May the Lord protect all medical staff and give them strength to provide adequate services to citizens.
- ▶ Hong Kong is facing social unrest because of political issues. Pray that the government will take the initiative to address those issues and try to solve deep-seated social conflicts with all stakeholders.
- ▶ Pray for all local churches of HKCCCC to embrace the mission to serve those in need in the society, including people with disabilities, the elderly, foreign domestic helpers, new immigrants, refugees and prisoners.



Source: Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China

Notes



April

**We need leaders not in love
with money but in love with
justice. Not in love with
publicity but in love with
humanity**

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

Maundy Thursday

*"This is my body
that is for you.
Do this in remembrance
of me."*

*This cup is the new
covenant in my blood.
Do this, as often as you
drink it, in remembrance
of me."*

1 Corinthians 11:24-25





Source: "Komunyon" by Filipino artist Emmanuel Garibay. Courtesy of the artist.

Love Crucified

Psalm 22

One song that has often gripped my heart is this: "Were You There?" It has three stanzas that describe the crucifixion, the death and the burial. Each stanza guides and helps worshippers remember the excruciating pain and suffering of Jesus on the cross: Were you there when they crucified my Lord? Were you there when they nailed Him to the tree? Were you there when they laid Him in the tomb? The words of the song aptly describe the whole mood of Good Friday. It causes us to pause and wonder at the great love of God for all people. – Love crucified.

Today we are invited back to remember the final moments as Jesus breathes His last. We let the words of the scriptures grip our hearts and evoke our emotions as we ponder at Jesus' last moments – that lonely, tortured figure on the cross, nails through hands and feet, back lacerated, lips dry, throat parched, brow bleeding from thorn-pricks, shunned and forsaken for our sake. On the cross, Jesus laid aside His immunity to pain and suffering. He entered our world of flesh and blood, tears and pain. Jesus came to give Himself to us, for us. And He did stop giving until "It is finished." – Love crucified.

Let us remember Jesus, who did not consider equality with God
something to be used to His own advantage.
(silence of remembrance)

May we ever be grateful for Jesus and what He has done for us!

Let us remember Jesus, who prayed for the forgiveness of those
who denied, rejected and crucified Him.
(silence of remembrance)

May we ever be grateful for Jesus and what He has done for us!

Let us remember Jesus who humbled Himself,
made Himself nothing by becoming obedient to death.
(silence of remembrance)

**May we ever be grateful for Jesus and what He has done
and continues to do for us!**

Julie Sim, Council for World Mission

Prayer

We pray for the well-being of all creation, and we pray especially for pastors in the world as they offer pastoral care and counselling services to many people, in the era of the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.



Source: Banal (holy) by Emmanuel Garibay. Courtesy of the artist.

God's Earth, Our Shared Home

John 1:1-9

From the beginning (verses 1-8), this passage depicts a song of joyful celebration, praising God in the midst of tribulation and judgment. How is it possible to praise God when our city lies in ruin? Confidence in God's fairness and justice leads us to rejoice and declare faith in a God who makes provision for righteousness even in the midst of tribulation.

The city that lies in ruin is not named. In reality the unnamed city represents every city, as a figurative description of organised human society. God will ultimately bring to judgment and upset existing selfish human order, that is the ultimate hope we have because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Every human institution built on a logic that deals death will yield to life everlasting. God judges already judges injustice now, even when that does not seem evident.

Verse 6, announces a feast on a mountain that God will prepare to honor all peoples. It is an inclusive feast that signals the destruction and removal of calamity (v.7), death and disgrace from the whole earth (v. 8). The feast is a declaration of God's victory over injustice that marginalises the poor and powerless.

The culmination of the song praise glorifies God as One who can be trusted. Trust in God who raised Jesus Christ from death to life motivates God's people to remain faithful. The powerful in our communities, churches and organisations may self-preserve. God sees through their apparent success and God people should too. Called to contradict injustice, God's people defiantly declare, 'Surely this is our God ... let us rejoice and be glad in (God's) salvation.' Flourishing societies that are built on God's just principle of love are possible through the determined, faithful and defiant acts of the faithful who know through faith that life defies death.

We joyfully declare and proclaim Christ's ultimate resurrection victory, as the basis for our defiant life-affirming actions, even if not popular or associated with what is deemed powerful in the present.

The gift of everlasting in Christ must lead us to live and act justly.

Kuzipa Nalwamba, World Council of Churches

Prayer

God of justice, inspire faith in us deep enough to declare your praises and work to build flourishing societies. We pose to examine the magnitude of ruin we have caused in our communities and to creation with our self-indulgent ways. Inspire our actions to proclaim justice for all of creation. Amen!

Prayer Points

Praise God for:

- ▶ Leaders of member churches who lead justly.
- ▶ Church interventions and leaders who stand up for justice regarding migrants, victims of sexual abuse and violence, political mismanagement and plunder of national resources.

We pray for:

- ▶ Member churches and leaders to uphold justice in church structures, personal life and in society.
- ▶ Faithful preaching of the gospel of Christ to challenge greed in churches and society.



Source: <http://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/diglib-viewimage.pl?SID=2020111676500628&code=ACT&RC=54879&Row=&code=act&return=act>

April 7 - World Health Day

Togetherness - Church as a Community

Acts 4:32-35; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:2; John 20:19-31

It is a joyous feeling to know the Lord. The life that we experience in Christ gives us a sense of peace and comfort. It is even more joyous when shared with others. Growing up, I experienced a lot of unfortunate circumstances and I felt joy whenever I attended church. The church was like a family or community where I sang praises, danced, enjoyed fellowship, listened to and shared God's word. Even David sang expressively about how good it is to dwell in togetherness.

But we must admit that the church community is not always harmonious. Sometimes there are things that get in the way and cause disunity in our own Christian communities. And although it may not be our intention, we can make people feel left out. The Christian community is diverse and it is a divine calling that brings us all together as one. We are to share and we are to heal. We are to practice faith through our actions. We are to love and we are to have peace – just as Christ brought us peace. And by worshipping together we also draw nearer to Christ and are in fellowship with Him as well.

When the disciples gathered after Jesus' death – He showed Himself to them. And Thomas who was not present did not believe once he was told about it. Later, when he was with the disciples in fellowship, Jesus appeared once again. Although Thomas doubted, he was not mocked by the disciples or disowned by Jesus. Instead Jesus showed Himself to Thomas in order for him to believe. When a fellow believer makes a mistake, we should not be quick to judge or ridicule. Instead we should encourage one another, in fellowship and unity. To truly experience flourishing life in Christ we should make sure that no one is left behind.

We should embrace our fellow believers with the love of Christ. And in doing so, we must also extend this same kind of love to our neighbours.

Leila Parina, United Church of Papua New Guinea

Prayer

We pray for an end to violence in families and homes, and we pray for the church to use its voice to speak out against injustice in communities. May the church be a centre of hope – a true representation of Christ during these trying times. Amen

Prayer Points

Partner in Mission

- ▶ Please pray for wisdom and strength from God to enable me to carry on working with Korean children in the UK during the 9-month lockdown. During lockdown I have been trying hard to focus the children's attention on church. Children have so many changing interests and rather limited concentration - this applies particularly to online worship. I have tried every style of biblical activity so far and have been visiting their homes to maintain contact, in addition to arranging outdoor meetings. I am developing ways of presenting bible stories which catch the children's interest. I provide a 40-50 minute biblical activity time using Zoom up to 7 times every Sunday: the content is the same, but the style varies according to the children. I know they are happy and concentrate well when they are focused and experience love. I have been delivering letters, sweets, and gifts to their homes every week. I know the importance of helping children to grow in faith, but this requires a lot of energy. Please pray for me to receive God's creative wisdom, endless strength and confidence to continue with this work.
- ▶ Secondly, I have a big dream and hope that I will be able to communicate with British children and adults in English very well so that I may send God's loving message between Korea and the UK fluently. For this, I am studying English whenever I have a little spare time to achieve this vision. Please pray for me to improve my English and not be exhausted in the process.
- ▶ Finally, I need encouragement to do this work as a single, young, ethnic minority female missionary. Sometimes, I feel discouraged by this. Please pray for me not to lose courage to do this God-pleasing work and bridge the ministry among people of different nationalities in the UK.

So Young Jung, CWM Partner in Mission (Europe)

Source: So Young Jung



Zoom Biblical Activity



Displaying Kids' work in front of Church Fence

Life-Flourishing Economy

Psalm 4

Amidst his distress, David asked for God's mercy and relief. His distress stemmed from people in power around him who have delusional values, despise the righteousness of God and do not have the devout attitude that they should have. The psalmist proclaimed that the ultimate promise for those who are faithful in the Lord is to be filled with joy and dwell peacefully in Him.

An Old Testament theologian defined suffering as the restriction of life; the source of suffering comes from the unjustice of others' and our own sins. The former oppresses people through power, while the latter replaces God with their ego and when both intertwine, it leads to endless suffering. In the first 20 years of the 21st century, the world underwent a drastic change – climate changes, global warming that brought disaster to various ecosystems, the COVID-19 virus which followed the steps of globalisation and harmed the health of many, taking away millions of lives. The unjust economy has caused God's family to be unsustainable and disrupted the peace for all inhabitants on earth. Human's greed is undoubtedly a key cause of all these suffering.

Repentance is the first step of Jesus' gospel for the kingdom for heaven, by turning to God's kingdom and His righteousness will humanity then be able to enter relief, so that all creation can live peacefully always.

Li Hau Tiong, CWM Partner in Mission (East Asia)

Prayer

Holy Spirit, may you liberate us, so that the people of God's family will receive freedom. Deliver us from the brokenness of our forefather Adam so that we can turn to your will finding the power to love as you love and live ever in your Spirit.

Prayer Points

United Reformed Church

- ▶ The UK post-Brexit situation and especially for those worst affected by the economic, social and political effects of the departure from the European Union.
- ▶ The communities disproportionately affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact.
- ▶ Local United Reformed Churches as they seek to serve their communities in mission and discipleship in the new COVID-19 reality.



Source: United Reformed Church

April 22 - International Mother Earth Day

Love In Truth and Action

1 John 3:16-24

The call of discipleship is the call of radical love. It's a costly call that each of us receive from Christ Jesus when we turn towards Him in faith.

Yet in our age of social media and political liberalism, we must be reminded of John's words in verse 18, that we aren't called to love 'in word or speech' alone, but also 'in truth and action.'

As disciples of Jesus, it is essential for us to recognise God's preferential option for the poor and oppressed, but that is only the beginning of our calling. We must also learn to enact God's preference in our lives. "For," as James asks in his New Testament letter, "What good is it if a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food and one of you says to him, 'Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill,' and yet you do not supply their bodily needs?" (2:15-16).

For the author of 1 John, it is in our actions, rather than our good intentions or good theology, that we can recognise that God's love abides in us.

Structural issues of poverty and injustice can be very complicated philosophical and political matters, and we all have different ideas of how to best address them. And we must give much time, thought, and energy in this God-honouring work. But, for John, the question that will always hit a little closer to home is, how are we, who have the 'world's goods', going to respond when we are going about our business and see someone who is in need?

Sisters and brothers, let us not separate what God has brought together. Let us not separate our faith in Christ Jesus from our spirit-empowered love for one another. Rather, let us grow in our faith and in our love. The Christ that we are called to put our trust in fully (v. 23) is the same Christ that laid down His life for others, so that we might do the same for one another (v. 16).

Corey Hampton, Presbyterian Church of Wales

Prayer

God of glory and grace, we thank you this day for your great love for the world. Empower us to see the world through the tenderness of your eyes, so that we might reflect your radical love and generosity into the world.
Amen.

Prayer Points

Church of North India

- ▶ On 29th Nov. 2021, the Church of North India celebrates 51 years of God's faithfulness as a united and uniting church. Pray that CNI would continue to effectively further God's mission through unity, witness and service.
- ▶ A significant section of Indian society could possibly be categorised as minorities (religious, ethnic and gender-based, etc.), as vulnerable (women and children) and as marginalised (Dalits, tribals and the poor). Pray that those in authority and the stakeholders, including the church, would always protect and uphold the rights of the last and the least.
- ▶ India was one among the pioneering countries to develop the National Mental Health Programme in 1980. Since then, India has come a long way in prioritising mental health, especially through the National Mental Healthcare Act 2017. Yet, due to poor awareness and limited resources, the mentally ill are deprived of appropriate care. Pray that the state would intensify the efforts for better mental healthcare facilities and that society may become sensitive to mental health issues.



Source: Church of North India

May 3 - World Press Freedom Day

Notes



May

**There may be times when we
are powerless to prevent
injustice, but there must
never be a time when we fail
to protest.**

-Elie Wiesel

As He Is, So Are We In This World

1 John 4:17

CWM's Confessing Witness statement gives shape to what it means to be 'as he is, so are we in this world':

**Creation is hurting
People are dying
The powerful are profiting
God is crying, God is calling!**

Our divisions are power constructs for the benefit of the powerful. Christ's coming was to transgress the boundaries and borders of human life so that the New Heaven and Earth might come to subvert all our maps, means and methods of living.

Let us rise up and proclaim in the face of Babylon that humanity is one.

The earth is being despoiled for the profit of the few. Christ's coming to raise up the lowly and bring down the wealthy was to proclaim and honour the common wealth of the New Heaven and Earth.

Let us rise up and proclaim in the face of Babylon that our economies must deliver life for all.

Our systems are filled with hunger that harms and destroys. Christ's coming to challenge Empire's hierarchy of life was to reveal that all created life is dignified, affirmed, included and blessed by God in the new Heaven and Earth it brings.

Let us rise up and proclaim in the face of Babylon that the last must be first, and those who want to be great must be the servants of all.

Let us rise up and proclaim in the face of Babylon that we can no longer live in ways which destroy the earth, that Christ's coming was to show God so loved the world **that all the world's lives would be gathered up in the promise of the New Heaven and Earth.**

In this spirituality of divine resistance, the counter-creation of God's Spirit becomes known. And where the Spirit is present, new life, new worlds flourish.

Prayer:

God amongst the vulnerable and the exploited,
God with the uprising movements,
God within the aching polluted earth,
God beyond the confines of Babylon,
**You call us to be as you are in this world
and thus embody ways of living in which
life flourishes, justice grows and peace takes hold.**

Peter Cruchley, Council for World Mission

Prayer Points

Congregational Union of New Zealand

- ▶ Pray for the new government and all social and political changes (positive) they will bring to New Zealand.
- ▶ Pray for new leadership of CUNZ. Mrs. Luisa Faitaua's term as the Church Secretary has come to an end, and Mr. Harry Frost is now the new General Secretary.
- ▶ Pray for CUNZ's children and youth ministry.



Source: Congregational Union of New Zealand

May 3 - World Press Freedom Day

Radical Love

John 15:9-17; Acts 10:44-48

Jesus commanded us to love each other as he has loved us (John 15:12). Sometimes this seems to be a form of defeat in the world but paradoxically, this love is radical because it is engaging with new life. Specifically, this love commanded by Jesus is to save or make safe spaces for those who would have been sacrificed against dominion powers, which deprive life to sustain its privileges by any means. Jesus was killed by the collusion between the Roman political powers and the Jewish religious authorities. It is paradoxical that in Jesus, life-flourishing creation is being caused by life-demolishing forces, especially the followers of Jesus. Jesus says in the Scripture that greater love is laying down one's life for friends (John 15:12-13) as Jesus himself was crucified on the cross to give life to us. Radical love is practised by sacrificing oneself against unjust evil authorities in order to flourish others' lives, as Jesus did.

This radical love, therefore, calls Christians to struggle against any discriminating and excluding tradition, law, dominion or authority in the world by manifesting God's love for others. Peter witnessed at Cornelius' house that the Holy Spirit was poured out on the gentiles as on the Jews. In fact, accepting Cornelius' invitation and visiting his home was to break Jewish tradition (Acts 10:28). However, Peter obeyed God's word in his vision from God, namely, "Do not call anything impure that God had made clean." (Acts 10:15). He proceeded to break Jewish tradition by going to Cornelius' house to baptise him (the gentile). If Peter obstinately kept Jewish tradition rather than obey God's word, he would have been a discriminating and exclusive disciple of Jesus who ignored God's love for the gentiles, the others.

It is the power of radical love given us from Jesus that enables us to defeat earthly evil powers, cracking down their discriminatory and exclusive traditions and laws that favour only their vested interests and privileges. Practicing this radical love means to manifest our love for God, believing God's promise that His commandments are not burdensome (1 John 5:3-4).

Sangdo Choi, Presbyterian Church of Korea

Prayer

Life-giving God, let us sacrifice our lives to save others' lives against life-depriving powers. Encourage us to practice this radical love even though we may be under risk due to breaking the established traditions of discrimination and exclusiveness to make an inclusive and peaceful world.

Prayer Points

CWM Secretariat

- ▶ Covid-19 places an impetus for churches to adapt to the ever-changing needs of their constituents. We ask that you keep CWM staff in prayer as they navigate uncharted waters as they continue to support the missional work of member churches.
- ▶ As CWM embarks on its 2020-2029 missiological and theological vision, we ask that you keep CWM staff in prayer as they explore innovative, contextual and practical ways to implement and embody what it means to rise to life in Christ and contribute to co-creating life-flourishing communities.
- ▶ As CWM commits itself to repent for our complicity in enslavement, racism and colonization, we ask that you keep CWM staff in prayer as they confront systemic issues around whiteness, white supremacy, racism and imperialism to move CWM towards radical systemic changes that are anti-racist and anti-imperialistic.

Lynnette Li, Council for World Mission

May 15 - International Day of Families

Manifesting God's Economy of Life Within our Contextual Realities

John 15:9-17; Acts 10:44-48

The Council for World Mission has raised this life-awakening theme, "Life-Flourishing Economy", that motivates us to further explore and theologically reflect on how we see and handle life in the midst of this global context of change, especially this very crucial time during which we have encountered this global pandemic, the viral disease COVID-19. I want to bring home this CWM theme of "Life-Flourishing Economy" within our various contextual realities by suggesting this topic calls and invites all of us as God's children to take up our God-given responsibility of manifesting God's economy of life within our contextual realities of life.

The English word "economy", prior to its technical usage in the world of academics and business, was derived from two Greek words – Oikos-Nomos meaning "house-rules," the rules and regulations of the house. In the light of this etymological understanding of the word "economy", we as Christ's body, the Church, can truly appreciate and take the CWM theme "Life-Flourishing Economy" to mean "life-flourishing house rules": our mission is one that will reflect God's economy of life.

Our earth in a global perspective is more than just a geographical landmass demarcated with political boundaries by the Empires and Colonisers. Our earth is our God-given "house" with rich natural resources from which the whole human race can benefit should there be equal and fair distribution of these resources. This is where our theme calls and invites us to actively participate in the "Missio Dei" (Mission of God) where we can in little ways encourage and promote good governance in both the church and government that will promote and enhance a life-flourishing economy.

In Psalms 1, the psalmist invites us to walk in God's economy of life. Joy belongs to those who do not walk in the pathway of the wicked, but their delight is in the law of the Lord. The gospel of John in chapter 17, also records our Lord's powerful prayer of unity to work together in oneness with God for a life-flourishing economy.

Armstrong Pitakaji, United Church in Solomon Islands

Prayer

God our source of life, our lives begin in you and will end in you. You have taught us that in you we live, move and have our beings. We pray and ask you to forgive us for the works that we should have done but are left undone. We pray and seek new visions and insights. Amen.

Prayer Points

Presbyterian Church of India

The Presbyterian Church of India requests prayer in their efforts to:

- ▶ Dispel the prejudices created against Christians and other minority communities and to actively engage in the promotion of better relationships between the communities.
- ▶ Encourage and actively promote the prophetic engagement of the church in the socio-political and economic life of the nation.
- ▶ Respond to specific instances of atrocities against the Christian community and other minority communities.
- ▶ Educate the community towards the various provisions safeguarding their rights, privileges and opportunities designed for their development.
- ▶ Safeguard and promote human rights; in particular, the rights of people belonging to scheduled castes, scheduled tribes and backward classes, minority communities, children, women, the poor and the marginalised.
- ▶ Make meaningful interventions in areas of policy-making/opinion-shaping and to make appropriate representations before the government and other concerned bodies on issues as mentioned above.



Source: CWM South Asia Region

Power in the Spirit

Acts 2:1-21

On the day of Pentecost, the work of the Holy Spirit was demonstrated in the life of the church. Three thousand new believers were added to the church that day.

i. The baptism of the Holy Spirit makes us the body of Christ, and marks the start of our Christian experience.

Life-flourishing evangelism therefore requires spiritual grounding, and the Holy Spirit is still available to the church today.

ii. The Spirit enables us to receive Christ as our saviour by faith which begins our personal relationship with Christ.

The Holy Spirit then works in us to help us become like Christ. Life-flourishing evangelism is built on healthy relationships, first with Christ and then with our neighbours. The Spirit enables us to love God, and to love our neighbours as ourselves, enabling us to act for the good of others.

iii. The disciples were to be witnesses.

When we know Jesus, we must make Him known. Life-flourishing evangelism happens when the Spirit unites the church in Christ to carry out Christ's mission of transformation in the world.

The Holy Spirit made Peter bold to speak the Good News. Jason no doubt depended on the Spirit and because of his courage Paul and Silas were enabled to carry out their ministry. They were described as having "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6). Is the Jesus of whom these disciples witnessed the one we are making known today in our evangelism? Jesus who told us to go and make disciples of all nations, transcending racial, national and linguistic barriers; Jesus who broke down all social barriers making black lives matter the same as white lives; Jesus who caused people to care deeply for one another so that a coronavirus vaccine, when discovered, will be available to all; Jesus who brings good news to the poor, makes the blind see, throws open prison doors and releases captives and frees the oppressed; Jesus who assures us that this is the time of His favour?

Through the power of the Holy Spirit may our communities flourish as Christ intended.

Rose Wedderburn, CWM Board of Directors

Prayer

We pray for CWM churches to reclaim the power the Holy Spirit affords us in carrying out Christ's mission. We pray that evangelism will once again become the heartbeat of the church and that our communities will truly reflect Christ and flourish. Amen.

Prayer Points

United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

- ▶ God may restore, heal and mend victims of gender based violence.
- ▶ God will emancipate men, women, boys and girls, unite us as one and remind us that we are all [both male and female] made in the image of God par excellence.
- ▶ God may give the victims strength to forgive.
- ▶ God may guide both men and women to find equal ground where they are able to complement one another.
- ▶ That men and women recognise themselves as co-workers and participants in building up healthy families that stay away from harm and violence.
- ▶ That men and women demonstrate Christ-like faithfulness through the transforming power of the gospel.
- ▶ That the descending power of the Holy Spirit transforms the perpetrators.



Source: <https://www.aciafrica.org/news/1591/what-church-leaders-in-southern-africa-are-doing-to-tackle-gender-based-violence>

Called to go!

Romans 8:15-16

The church, literally the community of the Lord, is called to go, making disciples, baptising in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching everything her Lord has commanded.

Being called to go, the church became part of society, for better and for worse, as a day-to-day challenge. How to be a part of society? Permeating social structures like salt or yeast? Moving ahead as a role model? What, in the end, has been - and still is - the contribution of Christian communities, locally and globally?

One option is to consider the church a firstling, the body of Christ as an alternative community. In the world but not from the world, a community of peace and justice, of virtues. Another option is to consider the church a community for the world - an intercessory, serving, prophetic church for others.

Whatever option one might choose, the mission of the Christian community is instrumental in going and fearlessly sharing God's love and engaging in the life-flourishing of society. And certainly not as slaves, but as loving sisters and brothers. In the challenging times we are living, the church and her members should not let themselves be confined to specific places, spaces or faces. Our planet earth and all of God's children need God's love and our respect. The church needs to be engaged in the flourishing of society, in the promotion of the common good.

The celebration of Trinity Sunday is the celebration of this love in relationship, this love of God the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit.

Neither society nor church could exist without love in relationship to the planet and to others, regardless of faith, age, gender, ethnicity, etc. Therefore, we are enabled to go and sing – with the words of Peter Scholtes' hymn, "And they'll know we are Christians by our love", by walking together and working side by side, by praying that one day our unity will be restored. The unity of God and creation – of which human society is an integral part. The unity of the children of God.

Kathleen Ferrier and Tjeerd de Boer,
Protestantse Kerk in Nederland

Prayer

God of delight,
at the crossroads where humanity and divinity meet,
we pray that we may manifest your unity
in the diverse ministries you entrust to us,
truly reflecting your triune majesty
in the faith that acts,
in the hope that does not disappoint,
and in the love that endures. Amen.

Prayer Points

CWM Board of Directors & Annual Members' Meeting

- ▶ We thank God for the partnership and working relationship between CWM Members, Board of Directors & Trustees and Secretariat in carrying God's mission in the world over the years. We are grateful to God for the gift of leadership, skills and competencies in the family of CWM. We pray for godly discernment, wisdom and strength for the Members, Directors and Secretariat in their deliberation at the Annual Members' Meeting and the Board of Directors' Meeting for the furtherance of the work and life of CWM. Pray that Members, Directors and Secretariat will continue to mutually challenge, equip and encourage each other for the advancement of CWM strategic direction.

Julie Sim, Council for World Mission

- ▶ Praise God for the ample resources that have been showered upon CWM through the years. We are grateful for God's endowment. We pray that all who have been called to serve for CWM, are individuals with purity of heart, who contend for God and will make godly decisions for the fulfilment of our Lord's commission to His disciples "to make disciples of and baptise all nations in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit". May the secretariat, directors, trustees and members make decisions and act for the sole purpose of the furtherance of God's mission, especially in the area of resource allocation and utilisation.

Nina Foo, Council for World Mission

June 5 - World Environment Day

Notes

**If takes courage to speak up
against complacency and
injustice while others remain
silent. But that's what
leadership is.**

—Rosabeth Moss Kanter

Stewards of the Created World

1 Samuel 2:14-11, (12-15), 16-20, (11:14-15); Psalm 138; Genesis 3:8-15; Psalm 130; 2 Corinthians 4:13-5:1; Mark 3:20-35

“Life-flourishing creation” calls us to actions rooted in our world now and in the future. It is future-looking because at the moment we are struggling to break away from Babylon, meaning we are still spiritually, economically and politically chained by Babylon whose political ideologies and economic endeavours harm creation. The concept “life-flourishing creation” speaks of humanity’s capacity and calling to deal with the challenges of life. The suggested readings connect the theme to creation. The fact that life-flourishing is connected to creation and stewardship means that humans have choices and it is out of those choices that the created world is destroyed or can be saved.

Genesis 3:8-15 details the fall of human beings whose call was to take care of creation as a trusted and responsible steward. However, before the fall, humanity was living in peace and harmony with creation and it provided them food, water and company. The fall and the human nakedness which resulted means we are exposed to economic harshness, but creation is now naked also and vulnerable to the same. Rising from the fall means eco-justice is urgent in our mission priorities. Humans are called to join God in the protection of the created world as stewards and also as beneficiaries.

Sindiso Jele, Council for World Mission

Prayer

Dear God of love and peace, we pray for your guidance as we discern how to join in your mission in saving the groaning creation. Amen.

Prayer Points

Partner in Mission

► Pray about the issue of crime and violence in Jamaica

Gang violence is a reality in Jamaica which continues to claim thousands of innocent lives every year and the situation seems to be getting worse. Efforts by the government to curb this violence have not been effective. Unfortunately, law enforcement officers themselves have not been spared from the brutal killers who seem to have no regard for anyone. Many people live in great fear as these trigger-happy individuals claim lives without any reason.

► Pray for single mothers in Jamaica

Almost 60% of Jamaican families are headed by single mothers, the majority of whom have no stable source of income making them exposed to all sorts of negative activities just to meet the needs of their families. Other single mothers end up in abusive relationships which they cannot leave because the abusers are the breadwinners and financers. This dehumanising experience has led to loss of lives and pressure on the older generation who has to take care of the children left behind.

Lembe Sivile, CWM Partner in Mission (Caribbean)



Source: Lembe Sivile

June 12 - World Day Against Child Labour

Parables of the Growing and Mustard Seed

Mark 4:26-34

The parables of the growing seed and the mustard seed have a lot in common. They tell us what the kingdom of God is like; they have to do with seeds and growth. Jesus told these parables to encourage us to keep sharing Christ even when we do not see results. We need to grasp hold of these parables so that we may understand how God's kingdom grows and what our part in it is.

I. The Parable of the Growing Seed (verses 26-29)

The first thing we learn is that if we want to see God's kingdom grow, we must plant the seeds. This is the most basic step in gardening. If you leave out this step, no matter what else you do, you will never harvest a crop.

We know also from the parable of the sower that planting seeds means sharing God's word. But then Jesus' parable makes an equally important point: we must plant the seeds, but God is the one who makes them grow. Once we have planted the seed, there are certain things that are out of our hands.

II. The Parable of the Mustard Seed (verses 30-32)

The first point here is that God's kingdom starts small. It must have seemed strange to the disciples. Here was Jesus, looking like an ordinary man, proclaiming the kingdom of God had come. That must be something big, right? But they look around and see just themselves and Jesus travelling around and teaching people. Jesus and a bunch of unschooled fishermen. They must have felt insignificant compared to the power of Rome with all its legions.

But God's kingdom starts small, and there is a crucial second point: God's kingdom will grow surprisingly large. The mustard seed is tiny but grows into a huge plant. God's kingdom starts small but it is going to finish strong. Christianity began with these twelve ordinary disciples following Jesus around and has now grown to penetrate the world.

Iteata Tavaárauhara, Etaretia Porotetani Maohi

Prayer

God, we pray not to be discouraged, to continue working and praying together for your kingdom. Despite the devastating impacts of COVID-19 and all challenges, let us be faithful to plant seeds and trust that you will make them grow in your time. When your kingdom looks small to us, let us remember you are growing something big. Amen.

Prayer Points

Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu

- ▶ Pray for EKT's plans to hold its General Assembly in 2021.
- ▶ Pray for the leadership of the church and its vision for the church.
- ▶ Pray for the government's and churches' fight against climate change.



Source: Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu

Life-Flourishing Evangelism

Mark 4:35-41

Sometime ago I came upon the expression, "Evangelism is one dog telling another dog where to find bones". The expression struck a chord within me at the time because it is quite unthinkable that a dog would introduce another to bones. In fact, the opposite is true but only because dogs treasure bones that much. This understanding of evangelism is neither cajoling others to our way of thinking nor competing with other religions at the numbers game. Rather, it is about following Jesus in his radical offer of something life-changing.

At the commencement of his public ministry, Jesus invited others to join him on that 'bone-finding' mission. Jesus' 'bone' was a pattern of faith and life, defined by values of social equity, generosity of spirit and justice for all. This founded alternative communities to the Roman Empire. His message was a call to repentance and an invitation to follow Him. Jesus' invitation was to stir a redirection of one's course by causing the individual to see the value of this alternative lifestyle.

In today's reading there is a definition of evangelism, connected to the anxiety, fear and insecurity of the disciples of Jesus. That is life-flourishing good news. The disciples, along with Jesus, left the crowd in search of a quiet place. On their journey they encountered a fierce and ferocious storm that dislocated their composure and threatened to alter the course of their dream. Jesus brought calm to the situation and invited his disciples to rise above the fear and insecurity that could steal their dream and overwhelm their determination.

As we observe World Refugee Day, we are reminded that the evangelical mission is to help redirect the world's death-dealing course by looking and pointing to the God of life. Life for refugees all over the world is at stake; and like the disciples in today's reading, they question whether anyone, including God, cares that they perish. May the gospel of hospitality and generosity be proclaimed and practiced as the alternative to hostility and greed, that we may indeed care and seek communities where refugees might be safe.

Collin Cowan, CWM General Secretary

Prayer

We pray that the evangelical fervour of the church would be rekindled in the midst of life's pain; and that those who are bruised by life's circumstances would find renewed hope for a life-flourishing future. We remember displaced people who seek refuge from political, economic or social discrimination and persecution.

Prayer Points

Church of South India

- ▶ Pray for the elimination of violence against women and girls in India, especially for the protection of Dalit women and girls who are often victims of gang rape and brutal killings.
- ▶ Pray for the eradication of the issues faced by Indian women such as dowry killings, subordination in families, low salary, harassment in workplaces, lack of opportunity for education and domestic violence.
- ▶ Pray for the Church of South India to continue to promote gender equality in church and its ministry by giving more space for women to serve as ordained women pastors and consecrated women bishops.



Source: Church of South India

June 20 - World Refugee Day

Contribute to Life-flourishing Societies According to Ability

Mark 4:35-41

Paul wanted to encourage the Corinthians to give generously to the collection he had organised for the poor believers in Judea. Some of the Corinthians boasted about superior faith, speech and knowledge. Knowing the context, Paul said to them that they should also strive to be sincere, loving and generous. They should demonstrate their faith by the way they live. He did not tell them how much to give, but the quantity of their generosity would be a reflection of their quality.

Many people today do not want to be compared to others, especially when it comes to giving a helping hand. But here Paul apparently felt that the believers in Corinth would be helped by a comparison and so he used the supreme example of the sacrifice of Jesus. "You know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ; rich as he was, he made himself poor for your sake, in order to make you rich by means of his poverty" (8:9). Through Christ's willingness to give we share in his riches.

Paul did not want them to impoverish themselves, but to share willingly, for God looks to the heart and not the amount. Any gift is acceptable according to one's ability. Paul also made it clear that he is not trying to relieve others by putting a burden upon them, but that there should be equality (8:13). If the wealthy Corinthians aimed for equality and gave according to their ability, there would be equality. And when the time came for them to be in need they would be helped, and in this way equality would prevail and that would be a life-flourishing society. Paul then adds a quote, "As it is written, 'the one who gathered much did not have too much'" (8:15; Exodus 16:18).

This sharing of resources increases our positive emotions and helps us develop deep and meaningful relationships. To flourish is to find fulfilment in our lives by way of connecting with others and also being connected with life's passion at a deeper level.

Rolianthanga Lalsim, Presbyterian Church of India

Prayer

Gracious God, we thank you for giving us your only son, our Lord, who emptied his life so that we may become rich. Help us to be rejuvenated together, solidified in our conviction to uphold our faith and to bring equality wherever there is inequality. Amen.

Prayer Points

CWM Committees

O Lord, we thank you for the lives of all our representatives of the CWM committees in finance, investment, audit, staffing and programme reference. We pray for your guidance, wisdom and support in all decisions that they have to make in every meeting. Please help them to engage in meaningful discussions and fill them with your grace as they make decisions that will affect the organisation as a whole. Continue to remind us that all we do here to accomplish is for the truth of the greater glory of you and for service to all humankind. We pray and ask all these things in your mighty name. Amen

Fuata Varea-Singh, Council for World Mission

Notes

July



**The God of the Bible is the
God of liberation rather than
oppression; a God of justice
rather than injustice; a God of
freedom and humanity
rather than enslavement and
subservience; a God of love,
righteousness and
community rather than
hatred, self-interest and
exploitation.**

-Allan Boesak

Choosing Life with Jesus

Mark 6:1-13

In Mark chapter 6 we have two very different stories of how people responded to Jesus' life-giving words.

In the first account, people who heard him were amazed and yet ended up taking offence at him. Jesus in turn was amazed at them - and not in a good way - but for their lack of faith. It is worth pondering how their lack of faith had a direct bearing on limiting what Jesus could do. It implies that our responsiveness to Jesus opens up or shuts down what is possible.

In contrast to people responding negatively towards Jesus and his message is the story of Jesus sending out the twelve who encountered a very positive response to the life-giving message of Jesus. As such, we are told by Mark that they drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

These two stories illustrate the choice Moses gave the Israelites in Deuteronomy 30:15-16.

"See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess."

In Deuteronomy as in our two stories in Mark are choices of life and prosperity, or death and destruction. What we choose has significant spiritual implications as well as very practical ones. In the first account people chose to be offended by Jesus and experienced death, spiritually speaking. They could not see Jesus for who he was and so missed out on life with Jesus.

Choosing life, on the other hand, opens us up to participating in the life-giving creation God brings through Jesus. As Paul affirms in 2 Cor 5:15, "...if anyone is in Christ they are a new creation ..."

We are created to flourish in relationship with God, with others, and with creation. Let us continually choose life.

Carlton Johnstone, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Prayer

Almighty God, you are the giver and sustainer of life. Jesus, your words are life. Holy Spirit, be my guide. Your words are a lamp unto my path and a light unto my feet. I choose life with you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Prayer Points

Kiribati Uniting Church

- ▶ May the Holy Spirit inspire the KUC's New Strategic Plan to allow reformation and transformation of God's mission in Kiribati.
- ▶ Agriculture in Kiribati is not popular, but the only way to become independent from imported food produce is to reform the way we look at food. May God help us grow and cultivate our own food that is GMO-free.
- ▶ Kiribati is very vulnerable because of the water system and dependence on imported food items. COVID-19 could be very devastating if it hits Kiribati. We pray that God may give us wisdom as to which part of our culture and practices could be improved so as to be resilient against man-made disasters.



Source: Kiribati Uniting Church

Dancing

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19

Dancing involves the risk of looking stupid. So often we choose not to do something because of the risk of standing out and losing face. In the eyes of Michal, David ridiculed himself. David might have had a moment of hesitation before throwing off his dignified mantle and starting to freely move his body. He might have looked at those around him.

Self-awareness usually does not encourage one to be brave. David has proven before that he does not scare away from giants. And now he even defies the fear of ridicule. By boldly living out his faith. By courageously committing to an expression of delight. By not fearing to feel and act his deep delight and gratitude, and by daring not to care what others think, or acting despite the feelings and thoughts of others. David tears away the veil of normalcy and shows what is underneath.

May David's example tempt us to dance around foolishly. Something we normally only dare do when we have the hindsight excuse of having had too much to drink.

Yes we risk being laughed at. Moreover, we risk being authentic. We risk being flourishing human beings, inviting and inspiring others to join in the celebration of God.

Rozemarijn Annemieke van 't Einde, CWM Board of Directors

Prayer

Lord, so much holds us back from celebrating the wonders of creation fully. Give us strength to look away from the disdain of others and let us instead focus on you. Make us courageously silly. Help us take up space to become beacons of joy. Amen.

Prayer Points

United Church of Zambia

Gender-based violence

- ▶ Let us pray for those working to end violence against women, that God's protection may be upon them as they execute their duties.
- ▶ Protection from those conspiring against women and girls.
- ▶ Justice to prevail for all those women to whom justice has been denied just because they are poor or uneducated.
- ▶ The safety of women and girls in our society. They too are God's creation and deserve respect and liberty.
- ▶ For the revival of feminine theology. May we pray that it is resuscitated so it speaks for marginalised women.
- ▶ The old women, especially in certain regions where almost every old person with gray hair is looked at as a witch. Many have been lynched.

People living with disabilities

- ▶ Let us remember in our prayers the persons living with disabilities, that God may use them in their disability to bring life to societies that have lost hope.
- ▶ Let us pray against the spirit of segregation against persons living with disabilities, because disability is not inability.
- ▶ Let us pray that God raises persons with disabilities to positions of influence and decision-making.



Source: <https://www.cwmission.org/member-church-feature-united-church-of-zambia-ucz/>

A Litany for CWM Sunday

Psalm 23

**Creation is hurting
 People are dying
 The powerful are profiting
 God is crying, God is calling!**

On this Sunday, we reflect on CWM's life and witness and offer each other up for God's blessing and empowerment. We are committing the next ten years to a theme of Rising to Life from beneath Babylon. This is a statement of our determination to witness to God's life-flourishing presence amongst the crises of our day. With Christ risen amongst us, we see a new heaven and earth is coming, breaking out from beneath Babylon. Even as we walk through the valley of death, Christ's wounded hands are laying a table for the celebration of the coming kin-dom. CWM has heard God speak in the testimonies of African and African descendent people unmasking racism in our life, history and work.

CWM repents of its legacies of slavery and its role in the history of colonialism, racism and oppression. In so doing we break the silence which has surrounded this sin and seek the Spirit, the courage and the time to change.

Lord,
 In word and world we hear you cry: **ARISE!**
 The light of the world has come: **so let us shine**
 We lift up our eyes: **to see your new world coming**
 And in doing justice: **proclaim the praise of the Lord**
 And so, we pray,
 counter in CWM, and through us,
 racist systems of despair and dread
With signs of love and peace
 And so, we pray,
 counter in CWM, and through us,
 colonising systems of hatred and death
With lives filled with love and defiance
 And so, we pray,
 counter in CWM, and through us,
 supremacist systems of division and oblivion
With moments and movements of joy and transformation
 Convert us anew
to fullness of life for all.

Peter Cruchley, Council for World Mission



Five Loaves and Two Fish

2 Kings 4:42-44; John 6:1-21; Ephesians 3:14-21

How do you feed 5000 mouths? Six months' worth of minimum wage would not be enough! Then Andrew found a little boy with his small snack. He could have disregarded the boy, but he brought his desperate question to Jesus, "But what are they among so many?!"

"There is a little boy here," said Andrew. John the gospel writer uses the Greek *pайдарion* to emphasise that it is not just a boy but a *little* one. "He has five barley loaves." Unlike the other synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke), John uses the Greek *krithinous*, which refers to the poorest, coarsest kind of bread. "And two small fish." Again, a different Greek word is used for fish, *opsaria*, meaning tiny fish.

Jesus answered that desperate cry. In his hands, all had as much as they wanted, with 12 baskets leftover. This is like what Elisha did in 2 Kings 4:42-44, though on a grander scale. Elisha's many miracles in the Old Testament demonstrated that God is the giver of life, and people should seek Him, not other gods. He is the God who provided manna in a desert for refugees from slavery.

But what can a child do? "13-year-old girl raises over S\$164,000 for e-scooter accident victim"— said the headline of an article in Singapore's newspaper *The Straits Times* on Oct 14, 2020. A 57-year old lady was hit by an electric scooter. As a result, she is no longer able to speak and needs help with eating, dressing and using the bathroom. The rider was sued but refused to pay.

A little girl, with the help of her parents, started a crowdfunding campaign to raise funds for the victim. Despite being shy, she reached out to her school and to strangers.

Don't just look at the needs and your inability. Look to God. Ephesians 3:14-21 extols God as the Creator of everything in heaven and on earth. God's power is at work within you to accomplish far more than all you can ask or imagine. What one small thing is God calling you to do?

Maggie Low, Presbyterian Church in Singapore

Prayer

Tell God a problem that you or your community are facing: _____. We can do nothing but come to you, for you are the giver of life, provider of all we need.

Help me do any small thing you call me to do, and multiply it to accomplish your will. Help me to: _____.

Prayer Points

Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

Lord Jesus Christ, we lift to you our praise, thanks and intercessions:

- ▶ Humbly we thank you for protecting our people and sustaining Taiwan's president, government, CDC and health workers to lead the nation with wisdom and transparency in the unprecedented battle against COVID-19
- ▶ We thank you for resources to support other countries and partners in small ways during the global pandemic

Hear our cry for the:

- ▶ Health challenges of Rev. Lyim Hong-Tiong, the outgoing General Secretary
- ▶ PCT General Secretary elect, Rev. Tan Sin-Liong and the programme secretariat – give them clear vision, wisdom and unity to accompany the church in her mission tasks
- ▶ Smooth transition of PCT General Assembly office staff and ministries (July 2021)
- ▶ Renewal of the mission commitment of our congregations to honour you and serve others
- ▶ Taiwan's preparations for the 2023 World Day of Prayer
- ▶ Ongoing bible translations into Taiwan's indigenous languages
- ▶ Theological and spiritual formation of students in three PCT seminaries

In your powerful name we pray, Amen.



Source: Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

Notes

August



**Without a sense of caring,
there can be no sense of
community.**

—Anthony J. D'Angelo

Jesus is the Bread of Life

John 6:24-35

Jesus fed thousands of people with five loaves of bread and two fish. The people were astonished and wanted to make him king. For them, Jesus would be the problem-solver.

However, Jesus refused. He was and is more than a mere problem-solver. The good news of Jesus Christ is much more than a solution. It is about new people, a new heaven and new earth, the new par excellence. God is preparing things no eyes have seen and no ears have heard for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

Life is problem-ridden. Jesus does solve problems. However, happy is the person and blessed are the communities who live out their lives beyond the problem-solving mindset. A good-news-affirming mindset should take precedence over a problem-solving one. This mentality prevents many problems and helps us solve them. In this perspective, though some problems do not get solved, they do not function negatively.

In fact, we are losers because we cannot solve the most important problem: death. However, we are winners in Christ because we start from his victory over death and evil.

Jesus is alive. Let us not live out our lives as if he were dead.

Laurent Ramambason, Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar

Prayer

May the Spirit of Jesus, O God, renew our minds to have courage, thankfulness and true happiness in our problem-ridden world.

Thank you for the good news of Jesus Christ, the bread of life. Amen.

Prayer Points

Etaretia Porotetani Maohi

Oh Creator God,
Like that little seed that is so insignificant
So coveted by large birds
So fragile to arid lands and a bad climate
Allow us to reach the earth where the welcome is fertile soil
Thanks for your presence

Like this little grain
I surrender to you Lord
In the hope of being born again
Under the warmth of your light.
Where each root will seize its strength in your vivifying word
Where it will germinate the life you intended for us
Unfurling branches and foliage to your glory alone
For all to welcome your fruits
That are the image of your promise to life

May you help every tree damaged by disease
Fear, poverty, violence and mass death
Teach us to take the example of this seed
To rebuild the world we are destroying.
We hope for healing. Amen.



Source: Etaretia Porotetani Maohi

Bread of Life for the Life of the World

John 6:35, 41-51

When we hear Jesus referring to Himself as the “Bread of Life”, it is tempting to quickly move toward a spiritual interpretation. But those who are hungry and thirsty who come to Christ are not detached from actual physical needs resulting from an unjust economic system in the world. The current global pandemic reveals how the poor are easily left behind in high-level decisions of financial institutions and governments. Economic uncertainties further challenge us to re-examine our core ethical values and our vision of God, fellow human beings, and the whole of creation.

Jesus — the bread of life — taught us to pray: “Give us today our daily bread”. We can taste and eat this bread. When we share in holy communion, we receive bread and the wine and are strengthened by the presence of the living Christ to live out the Christian life. This goes beyond feeling good during our corporate worship remotely or in-person. The promise of eternal life does help some to cope with personal anxieties and insecurities. But it must be more: our beliefs about eternal life should impact on what happens in our daily lives. Jesus, “the living bread that came down from heaven” is concerned with “the life of the world” (John 6:51). With this in mind, Paul warns the church in Ephesus, “Thieves must give up stealing; rather, let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy” (Ephesians 5:28). These words not only speak to individuals and churches; they are also relevant to financial institutions and governments who often find themselves preoccupied with profit rather than people.

A faithful spiritual response to the bread of life invites us to move beyond ourselves to re-engage the rich theological and ethical resources in our faith tradition for an economy of life. Indeed, we can become part of the answer to our prayer that promotes a life-flourishing economy: “Your kingdom come... Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.

Sivin Kit, Lutheran World Federation

Prayer

Bread of life,
you taught us to put away bitterness and anger,
and with tender-hearted kindness
to share the fruit of our labour with the needy.
Strengthen us by your grace,
that in communion with you,
we may forgive one another
and live in love as Christ loved us. Amen.

Prayer Points

Partner in Mission

- ▶ We pray for the leaders of all member churches, that God will grant them vision and wisdom.
- ▶ We pray for the growth of churches as they serve the people of the communities in which they are planted.
- ▶ We pray for the young people of member churches to be active and involved in leadership.

Ayana McCalman, CWM Partner in MIssion (Africa)



Source: Ayana McCalman

August 9 - International Day of the World's Indigenous People
August 12 - International Youth Day

Walk the talk!

Ephesians 5:15-20

Today is the 12th Sunday after Pentecost according to the church calendar. The work of the Holy Spirit propels us to be missional in our outlook, lifestyle and practice. Hence, the theme of our reflection today is, "Life-Flourishing Evangelism".

The postmodern society with its challenges and ideologies leaves little or no room for traditional understanding of evangelism. Believers are confronted with overwhelming pluralism and concepts such as freedom of religion, tolerance, right to privacy, regulations on movements and public speech. This current context may remind us of first century believers who had to spread the good news under difficult circumstances.

The epistle gives us hope and a new paradigm in evangelism. This text from Ephesians calls believers to a lifestyle of holiness in a world full of evil and impurity. A "life-flourishing evangelism" can be realised as believers begin to embody fullness-of-life values. The gospel should live in us. As we walk and live within our communities, our lifestyle and conduct must witness to the Jesus way of full life for all. As the gospel reading reminds us, when we partake in Holy Communion, we are in union with our Lord Jesus. Faith affirms and scripture declares, "the one who eats my flesh and drinks my blood will remain in me and I in her (or him)".

It is now a 'kairos' moment for Christian communities to seek God's will and usher alternative moral values in the context of so much evil around. These are evil days; greed and corruption have become a norm in and across many nations. Many have failed to be good stewards of God's creation leading to devastating impact upon creation, groaning under the weight of human abuse. Paul urges the Ephesians to be wise in such times. Our lifestyle must reflect and witness to full life in Christ so that all turn to ways that will bring delight to God. Life-Flourishing Evangelism begins with you!

Tshepiso Gregory Moreosele,
The United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

Prayer

God-always-faithful-and-steadfast, give us eyes to perceive, minds to engage, ears to listen deeply, feet to tread adventurously, hands to share and embrace, and hearts to ache with compassion. Continue to draw us into life beyond our knowing to experience and witness to the breadth and delight of your grace.

(Michael Jagessar, Council for World Mission)

Prayer Points

Young People

- ▶ Sovereign Lord, please hear the fervent prayers of young people across the world.
- ▶ We pray for young people that suffer from mental health issues. We pray especially for those who suffer in silence and those who face stigma because of these issues. God of compassion, hear our prayer.
- ▶ We pray for our planet and we pray that we, as young people, may be better stewards of the earth than the generations who have gone before. God of creation, hear our prayer.
- ▶ We pray for an end to chauvinistic nationalism and racism, and the regimes and systems that encourage them. We pray for a world where bridges are built instead of walls. God of justice and equality, hear our prayer.

Markel Virgo, CWM Board of Directors



Source: CWM 2020 Asia Youth Initiatives

August 19 - World Humanitarian Day

Fullness of Life for God's Human Creation

Genesis 2:15-16; John 10:10b

The opening narratives of Genesis chapters 1 and 2, depict and affirm a creation which is good and in harmony, ideal for life to flourish for all God's creatures, especially humankind. Humankind is offered life in abundance or fullness. From the beginning, the offer is for all human beings. For this reason, God charged Adam and Eve, and by implication humankind of every age and culture, to tend and care for God's creation so that it would provide life-flourishing conditions and spaces.

Sadly, fullness of life has been denied to countless human beings down through the ages through systems bent on stripping people of their humanity, such as slavery and apartheid designed to strip them of their humanity and so relegate them to a "less-than" human status. This rendering them 'less than' humans has allowed for the rationalisation of denying them full human status, and the right to share in the abundance or fullness God desires and made possible for all. This sad situation is very much alive and still with us today.

Humankind's selfishness and insatiable materialistic desire for more have caused so much brokenness and pain that a perception may have been created that fullness of life for all is neither possible nor achievable. Notwithstanding the images of brokenness, pain and systemic injustice constantly before us, I believe and encourage us to also believe that we are not alone. With God's help, we can participate in renewing God's creation towards a life-flourishing vision so as to ensure fullness of life for all human beings. Let us hold fast to pray constantly, make advocacy and work boldly, believing in the enabling grace of the Holy Spirit.

Leander Warren, Guyana Congregational Union

Prayer

Creator God, loving, gracious and giving, source of all that is good and perfect, we thank you for your life-flourishing creation. We pray that you will help all your children to have and enjoy life in fullness, in the name of Jesus Christ.

Prayer Points

Churches of Christ in Malawi

- ▶ Currently our nation is experiencing lots of calamities, famine, flooding and diseases such as COVID-19, HIV and tuberculosis just to mention a few, bringing misery and hopelessness. This is a worrying and difficult situation.
- ▶ Together in Christ we experience love, joy, confidence and hope. The bible attests that God gave each one of us unique gifts that bring positive change and provide hope.
- ▶ May the Mighty Lord continue blessing and holding us together with a variety of gifts. Let us work together so as to achieve the intended goals. Amen.



Source: <https://www.cwmission.org/member-church-feature-churches-of-christ-in-malawi-ccm/>

Obedience

Deuteronomy 4:1-2, 6-9

How do we read the Deuteronomy texts in the context of more than one year of suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic and in the regeneration of the world's ecosystem? The Deuteronomy texts speak of life rather than perfection (4:1). Statutes and ordinances are intended to be the wisdom of the years to come so that we may learn and benefit from the experiences of previous experiences to enable flourishing life.

Moses' address presumes the helplessness of the people and their need for a more secure future. The "statutes and ordinances" of God call for a different way of living. Walking the path of obedience will result in flourishing in the land that God offers them. But this way requires radical change since it calls for a way of life that differs from the dominant culture bent on denying full life for all. Greed is never presented as a motivation for obedience. Rather a willingness to participate in formation, to be God's people, to live by God's standards, and to express the radical difference of identity that comes with belonging to the community of God's people serve as the desire to obedience.

Obedience is not simply a pious individual concern. Obedience serves a public function of witnessing to the worth of the way of God. In this passage, other nations will take notice of the different choices, values, and character of God's people, seen here as "wisdom and discernment" (v. 6). Obedience is not merely self-serving. Instead obedience enables restoration to perform the vital work of witness and the creation of community built upon "statutes and ordinances" that are good for the world. This passage encourages us to take advantage of the new opportunity that God gives us to become an ideal community and to actively participate in sustaining that ideal community.

Ramthanga, CWM Board of Directors

Prayer

Let us pray for the world and the people who live in it that all may catch God's vision of full life-flourishing for all.

Let us pray for PCM's missionaries and deportees in Rakhine State and Paletwa Township.
(Vanlahmingsangj)

Prayer Points

Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

- ▶ Students: All secular schools, colleges and theological colleges are closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Students have lost one year of studying time since they could not study online.
- ▶ All local church members: Worship services and other activities could not take place due to restrictions on social gatherings. Church income for mission work is decreasing since these services are restricted.
- ▶ The poor: Many church members depend on their daily wages for survival. Some could not support their family since there is a lack of job opportunities for them.
- ▶ The mission field: PCM is doing her mission work primarily in conflict zones by sending missionaries to Rakhine, Ann and Paletwah where the local and government armies are always at tension with each other.



Source: Presbyterian Church of Myanmar

Notes

A painting of a woman's face, rendered in a style that uses a palette knife or heavy impasto technique. The colors are rich and varied, with visible brushstrokes and texture. The woman has dark hair and is looking slightly to the left. The background is a dense, colorful composition of blues, yellows, and greens.

September

**Speak, this brief time is ample.
Before the dying of the body
and tongue.
Speak, for truth still lives.
Speak, to say what
needs to be said.**

— Faiz Ahmed Faiz

Transforming Structures of Power

Proverbs 22:1-2, 8-9, 22-23; Psalm 125; Isaiah 35:4-7a
 Psalm 146; James 2:1-10, (11-13), 14-17; Mark 7:24-37

"The sceptre of wickedness shall not rest on the land allotted to the righteous, lest the righteous stretch out their hands to do wrong" (Psalm 125:3, ESV)

There is no clearer statement in scripture about the pervasive power of evil. We see it in the pitiful excuses offered in the face of ancient wrongs. "Those slave traders – they lived in different times. They didn't realise they were doing wrong." ... "Those sexual predators, corrupting children and destroying lives - of course, things were different then." Corrupt power permeates through the whole of society, and shifts the blame from the systemic power of the abusers to the victims.

The pandemic has had devastating economic effects globally. In the UK, churches worked with others on a campaign to 'Reset the debt' (<https://www.church-poverty.org.uk/resetthedebt/>), using the Jubilee principle to help people who found themselves in unrecoverable debt, because of COVID-19. And often the first reaction of people unaffected by poverty is not compassion, but blame. Despite the overwhelming effects of the crisis, somehow, they said people had "got themselves into debt, and why should we help?"

But look at the scripture at the start of this reflection. It is clear where God's compassion and justice lies: "Do not rob the poor... for the Lord pleads their cause" (Proverbs 22:22-3). God's will is for the flourishing of all, and that means that it is the corruption that flows from the 'sceptre of wickedness', which must be blamed, judged and overthrown. In a beautiful vision of flourishing, Isaiah describes streams flowing in the desert, the wilderness inundated with life-giving water (Isaiah 35:6), when damaged lives are transformed through healing and joy.

Jesus brings that transformation. Where His touch is felt, ears are unstopped and tongues untied, and people can hear and speak to each other again. Then the sceptre of corruption, the crown and orb of greed and exploitation can be lifted from the land so that all creation may flourish. All it takes is for us to learn again to listen, and to speak, and act on the truth.

Janet Wootton, Congregational Federation

Prayer

God of compassion,
 Where the sceptre of wickedness is grasped
 by corrupt hands – one race,
 one gender, one heritage of power
 Let freedom flourish again,
 like springs of fresh water in the desert;
 Give us ears to hear earth's many voices
 and the courage to speak the truth.

Prayer Points

United Church in Papua New Guinea

- ▶ Pray for the church leadership of UCPNG.
- ▶ Pray for efforts in eradicating violence against women.
- ▶ Pray for Papua New Guinea as the Coronavirus has begun to hit the country.



Source: United Church in Papua New Guinea

Speak Life. Speak the Bible

Proverbs 1:20-33; Psalm 19

Have you ever felt that anything you say won't matter? Did you ever feel powerless in a situation due to a loss of words or thoughts? Unable to speak a word in season to a weary soul? Fear of not being heard? Fear of being mocked? Fear of being turned away and refused? One can only imagine God's frustration in the questions: How long? How long shall I be refused when I call? How long will you neglect my stretched-out hand?

We are living in a world of evil, life-denying, and death. Many are faced with trials and tribulations across this world that God loves so much. Many are eager and waiting to hear God's good news of abundant life for all.

Safety and the antidote from fear of evil may lie in our willingness to be obedient to God's ways of flourishing life for all. Are we able to heed to your calling as people of the Jesus Way and speak life to someone in despair, and lost? When we do, may this be our prayer: "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

Our calling to be faithful witnesses to all that deny full life for all means we must be bold to speak. So, whenever we face the fear of speaking, fear not. God has blessed us with speech and knowledge (Psalm 19:3). And we are not alone. God is with us.

Let your voice witness to the way of Jesus – flourishing life for all. Speak life drawing the Bible. Proclaim the good news of our Lord Jesus Christ, witnessing to it in our lives.

You may find that some of the sharpest berry vines and thorns will bear the sweetest fruits. In life, we will find the sweetest and satisfying fruits of the gospel on the most painful afflictions. We may fall and be defeated at times, but do not be silenced because of fear. Speak life. That is the gospel we need to speak of. There is life in Jesus Christ.

Mina Tupu Saifoloi,
Congregational Christian Church in American Samoa

Prayer

God of love and compassion, let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in thy sight. Please allow me to speak life and be a blessing to anyone in need. Help me release the fears that may hinder my walk with you, Lord. In the name of the risen one, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Prayer Points

God of life, look out for those who drown in climate injustice
— so that they may breathe;

God of justice, look upon those who live in fear

— so that they may stand up for one another;

God of hope, receive those who have no protection

— so that they may live or die with dignity. Amen

God of life, heal the wounds of the lands and of the seas

— so that they continue to sustain and deliver life;

God of justice, calm down the energies of the deep

— so that Earth takes its course according to its rhythms;

God of hope, light up the skies with wisdom and purpose

— so that all creatures receive recognition and endure. Amen

God of life, be with the peoples whose lands are under occupation

— so that they might find courage to resist;

God of justice, be with the peoples of West Papua, Kanaky, Bougainville, Ma'ohi Nui, Rapa Nui, Guam, Tutuila, Hawai'i and the Marianas

— so that they might soon experience liberation;

God of hope, be with all your peoples

— so that we realize, that one is free only when all are free. Amen

Jione Havea, CWM Partner in Mission (Pacific)



Source: Jione Havea

September 15 - International Day of Democracy

An Innovative & Industrious Society

Proverbs 31:10-31; Psalm 1

Proverbs 31 is an ode to the virtues of a spouse and mother who shapes her home with integrity, discipline, and creativity. All the virtues she is practicing aims at making the life of her family flourishing and towards serving God. What would our societies be without spouses, mothers, sisters and daughters?

What is said here of her is larger than family: revealed are virtues (generosity – resilience – care – attentiveness – wisdom – ingenuity) that build a village, grow a community and feed a nation. So, the ode and descriptors offer a picture of how a life-flourishing society ought to be and the role of women. She embodies a picture of industry and creativity so critical to thrive-ability in our life together. The text also suggests that this woman is innovative and motivates all sorts of people. She spends time in life-giving activities rather than wasting her time in the company of scoffers (Psalm 1).

Here are values to emulate that may bring forth life and hope even in situations where hope seems to be hopeless. This text calls us to a life deploying gifts of creativity and innovation. It is about more than hard work: it is also about good work, rest, leisure and a focus on the common good. It is not work for selfish gain. Life will not flourish around greed. This text with its rich imagery challenges all of us. As long as our societies are not as innovative as the woman in Proverbs 31, they will remain poor and laughing stalks. Here is a text that offers an opportunity to allow good news to speak into some of the most log-reaching and painful inequalities of our common life. The text also evokes inspired portrayals of what faithful living is about.

Collins Bulaya, The United Church of Zambia

Prayer

Generous God, you created us to develop this world and ourselves. You gave us all the resources we need. We pray that you help us realise the potential of being innovative and industrious. Help us to remember that we have a duty to keep our world clean and green. Through Jesus we pray, Amen.

Prayer Points

Fiangonan'i Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara

The FJKM set a vision to fill Madagascar with the Lord's gospels and the first four-year goal was to establish churches in more than 400 boroughs. The four-year plan ended in 2020. Thank God, this goal has been reached. 400 boroughs spread all over the island have at least one FJKM community each, who meet and pray together. Local missionaries recruited in 2016 helped in fulfilling the goal.

The newly-converted people need to be accompanied in their faith and to be encouraged to grow spiritually. One of the strategies is to enlarge the FJKM media, especially the Radio Fahazavana which can reach people of all social strata.

Prayer requests:

- ▶ Thanksgiving to God for the numerous people who accepted Jesus Christ as their only Saviour.
- ▶ Pray for the FJKM radio, that many helping hands will make a difference.



Source: Fiangonan'i Jesoa Kristy eto Madagasikara

September 21 - International Day of Peace

Created for Life

Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29; Psalm 19:7-14; James 5:13-20; Mark 9:38-50

The creation stories suggest that God's purpose for creating the universe, all that exists therein and humankind was to bring beautiful life in its various forms into the world. God also created an ecosystem to sustain this life and entrusted us with the responsibility of taking care of all God created.

Regrettably, through disobedience, sin entered into the hearts of humankind resulting in destructive habits. Humankind's destructive behaviour has not ceased to cause pain and suffering and death among God's creatures and the environment. God's love, though, for all of creation has not ceased!

Through Jesus, God made the ultimate sacrifice to restore us to God's intention of goodness, fullness and flourishing life. Even though we continue to persist in rebellion, God is not giving up on us. But we need to turn, to repent, to change our ways that rob the fullness that God desires. God is life and all God's creation is imaged in that way – for life. The death and rising up of God's beloved, Jesus, affirms and signifies the restoring to life with God.

For us to experience this new life, God desires of us to walk in faith and faithfulness in God's way of fullness of life. Habits like trust, obedience and praying are very important. With a spirituality of praying there are no electricity outages, no internet inaccessibility nor device failure. "The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective" (James 5:16, NIV).

Around us it may seem that the more things change the more they remain the same. Let not our hearts be troubled. We cannot lose hope. We must stand firm as the salt of the earth (Mark 9:50), articulating full and flourishing life for all through God in Christ.

Faithlyn Stephens, CWM Partner in Mission (Caribbean)

Prayer

God who is always with us, help us to emulate the way of love as Jesus taught us, replacing indifference with compassion, strife with peace, greed with contentment, and hurt with healing. Forgive our trespasses and through your Spirit lead us in your way of righteousness so that our actions reflect your love for all. Amen!

Prayer Points

Presbyterian Church of Korea

- ▶ The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerable reality of gender-based discrimination in South Korea, particularly in the labour system. Female-majority industries like nurseries, aged care, and call centres have been weakened due to the virus. In the face of this catastrophe, the aspect of inequality underlying the hierarchical labour system worsens gender discrimination. We genuinely value the works of women for society and the ecosystem. Please pray for the recovery and building of a new inclusive society concerned with the improvement of the Korean labour system.
- ▶ Pray for the Presbyterian Church of Korea's migrant ministry: With the rapid increase of migrants since the 1990s, 2.5 million migrants currently reside in South Korea for various reasons. Korean society has been undergoing demographical changes over the past 30 years and the migrant ministry of the Korean church is experiencing new challenges as a generation passes. As groups of migrants diversify, new approaches are needed. In particular, it is necessary to recognise that there are many vulnerable people among them, including women and the aged.
- ▶ Pray for the people of the world experiencing natural disasters:
- ▶ Prayers for the people suffering from loss of family, friends, living and working places due to severe natural disasters. May God's mercy, comfort, healing, and guidance be with them to stand up again for their life.
- ▶ Prayers for realising humankind's humility towards nature, the creation of God.
- ▶ Prayers for encouragement and wisdom to build a new space of life from the ruins after natural disasters.



October 2 - International Day of Non-Violence

Notes

October



The dignity of the poor is
being stolen.

— Harsh Mander

Revivifying Proclamation of Peace

1 Samuel 1:4-20, 2:1-10

Eli's proclamation of peace (1 Samuel 1:17) revivified Hannah, the household of Elkanah and the society. It was a priestly task that is explained in Malachi 2:7, "For the lips of a priest ought to preserve knowledge, because he is the messenger of the Lord Almighty and people seek instruction from his mouth." That proclamation changed the narrative of inequalities and denigration of human dignity and promoted the sacrosanctity of life. Eli realised that with unhappy Hannah, the family and the society were unhappy.

The story of Hannah connotes that in societies, each person is and ought to be part of the whole society. In Africa, this is known as Ubuntu, with its maxim, umuntu ngumntu ngabantu (a person is a person because of other persons). Ubuntu is about interdependence and interconnectedness, contributing to the conviviality of life. The pain of one person becomes a pain of the whole society. The discrimination, oppression, and dehumanisation of one person implies the same for the societies. The abuse, the rape, and the killing of one woman unsettles all of humanity. The socioeconomic deprivations that are inflicted on the marginalised and impoverished are an affront to all of God's people.

In her prayer in 1 Samuel 2:4-10, Hannah testified that God brings about life and death, the grave and resurrection, poverty and wealth, and humiliation and exaltation. She declared (verse 8) that God "raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap." A similar claim is expressed in Mary's song that the Lord brings down the rulers and lifts the humble, fills the hungry with good things and sends the rich away empty (Luke 1:52-53), thus promoting life-flourishing societies.

It is the church's priestly role to speak life and pronounce peace, like Eli, to the situations of hopelessness, inequality, oppression, and abuse, and reinvigorate the downtrodden. The peace that Eli pronounced goes with justice and righteousness, underscoring our prophetic role. It is the liberating gospel that promulgates a just socioeconomic order, which Jesus Christ alluded to in Mark 13. The church must liberate and be liberating.

Lungile Mpetsheni, CWM Board of Directors

Prayer

In the name of Jesus Christ, the liberator, we pray for just socio-economic world order;

Peace, justice, and righteousness in every society;

End to corruption and greed;

Eradication of poverty and end to all inequalities;

Respect for human dignity;

God's reign to come and God's will to be done.

Prayer Points

Political Leadership

► Please pray for servant leadership in the church

The gospel calls humanity to submit to the divine ordinance. Failure to submit to God is rebellion. God calls us to servanthood, and leaders are servants of God and God's people. God in Christ is the pivot and fulcrum of servant leadership.

► Just ethics

We pray for political leadership that promotes and protects gender, climate, economic, social and technological justice by upholding human rights and human security.

► Peace and reconciliation of God's creation

The legacy of slavery and effects of wars and violence have left the world groaning and broken. We pray for leaders who will bring healing and reconciliation to God's creation.

Sikhalo Cele, UCCSA Zimbabwe Synod



Source: AP Photo/Tsvangirayi Mukwazhi)/XTM102/19324363775679//1911201109



Source: AFP/J. Njikisana

Be Glad All Our Days

Psalm 90:12-17

2020 was a harsh year as the world battled the mutating COVID-19 virus and rushed to get a cure by a vaccine. The coronavirus may still be around us and may break out again to resurface another pandemic! This psalm reminds us to “number our days” and be wise in the mind and heart!

In March 2020, Clay Bentley from Rome, Georgia, USA was down with this coronavirus whereby doctors were giving him a deteriorating diagnosis. He and his wife, Suzy and their church never gave up on prayers. After 12 days of hospitalisation, he felt he was dying when God intervened; he “felt God’s breath blow into my lungs.” He was totally restored back to health. Such is the Lord’s compassion and unfailing love in the midst of troubles. God is still present – yesterday, today and tomorrow!

As we love Him and keep His commandments, He will be faithful. (Deuteronomy 7:9). So, let us not relent in our prayers. The psalmist continues to request God to replace all the days and years of their affliction with joy and gladness. Are we in a state of celebration whereby we are “glad all our days”? As we approach our daily routine and tasks in our places of work or homes, are we having joy and peace in our hearts? Are we anxious and depressed? Downtrodden by people in authority and power? Obnoxious in our workplaces? These negativities in life will dull our five senses of taste, touch, feel, sight and smell which will ultimately deprive us of joy and gladness of life – a flourishing life!

Philippians 4:4 resonates together with Psalm 90 the need to rejoice in the Lord always by prayers and petitions to God who will transcend all understanding and guard our hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Joy is inner contentment and satisfaction even in difficult situations. Lastly, the psalmist asks God to appreciate the “work of our hands” in resting favor upon them, making them successful in all their undertakings. Any appreciation will bring joy to the heart, that we can “be glad all our days.”

Leong Yim Fong, Gereja Presbyterian Malaysia

Prayer

Generous God, grant us your favour through your grace and mercy. Lift us out of our misery, anxiety, unhappiness, discontentment, and selfish tendencies. Teach us humility and true agape that we can love others as you have loved us. May we find joy and gladness as we walk your way of full and abundant life for all. Amen!

Prayer Points

United Church in Solomon Islands

The United Church in Solomon Islands is a youthful church. Young people make up a significant percentage of the church's population. The church has derived its mission strategies with children and youth based on its theme, "Investing in Children and Youth", for more than two decades. It is our sincere desire and prayer to help children and youth understand that God has created them to be equal partners with us in transforming lives in the world.

- ▶ Pray that the opportunity will serve to encourage and empower our young generation to be true worshippers as God desired them to be.
- ▶ Pray and declare God's wisdom bestowed in them that they are not to live a careless life but live wisely to help fight against COVID-19.
- ▶ Pray for more opportunities that will empower our young generation to fully realise their talents, skills and potentials to drive the church's mission forward, creating a saved, safe church for all.



Source: United Church in Solomon Islands

October 11 - International Day of the Girl Child

Life-Flourishing Societies

Isaiah 53:4 – 12

The Isaiah 53 text is normally treated and interpreted as a Messianic text by Christian exegetes and preachers alike. But that is how Christians have chosen to read the Old Testament text, as a forerunner or pretext to the New Testament.

Isaiah 53 brings out a clear picture of an oppressed society. At the same time, it exhibits a bold willingness to stand up against oppression. In this juxtaposition lies the hopes of the many lives that suffer in silence. Hopes from within the fieriness of brutal systems that held captive the freedom of many.

The Council for World Mission's 2020-2029 strategic plan has as its overarching theme "Rising to Life with Jesus: Rising from within Babylon". It is this rising from within Babylon one can see in Isaiah 53. The sufferers standing up against their oppressors. Although the text is dimmed with oppressive language, light is shone through the unyielding spirit of those who are ready to take on Babylon.

The message is clear. Never be silent in the light of oppression. Be the hope that encourages the resisting spirit of many a soul who cannot find the courage to rise above their down-pressure. We who can raise a voice must speak up and cry out now. We need more than just heralding the news of deliverance and hope. We must become active and embodied participants of the message. Our solidarity must mean feeling people's pain and wearing their suffering. Only when we do this will we find our defiance an encouragement for the many hopes waiting to surface above the oppressive tides.

There are many suffering servants around the world and in our own societies. They are not heard of and some may even go to the grave unrecognised. But recognition is not an agenda in their minds. All they want to do is to free the bodies and souls of fellow human beings who are held under chains by sinful systemic violence and greed.

Nikotemo Sopepa, Council for World Mission

Prayer

Arise O you servants of the living God, and fight the battle till the victory is sounded in the realisation of the many hopes buried by Babylon. Amen.

Prayer Points

Nauru Congregational Church

NCC is continually praying for God's intervention in CWM and its works.

- ▶ NCC staff to live by God's truth in executing their duties as faithful servants of church members.
- ▶ CWM's mission and vision of resisting the influences of Empire and not conforming to it.
- ▶ Lastly, God has heard the cry of NCC for over a period of 10 years. We give thanks to God that the rebuilding of Anabar Church has finally been completed.



Source: Nauru Congregational Church

Life-Flourishing Creation

Mark 10:46-52

There is a disturbing element in this Markan story that portrays the reality of our world; that is, the intimidating tactics of the 'normal' trend and the dispelling voice of a dejected life. Bartimaeus, a perfect guise of so many poverty-ridden communities, cries out for help, and was forced to keep quiet.

From the outset, we already see that Bartimaeus is not part of the 'normal' community. He is outside the wall of Jericho. The area outside the wall is dubbed the 'abnormal' space. A space where the unwanted and rejected are forced to live. Hope exists outside the wall. Within the 'normal' space of the wall of Jericho exists the oppression that has forced people like Bartimaeus to depend on the crumbs by the roadside.

How many Bartimaeuses do we know who live off the left-overs of capitalistic highways? How much more do we know of the intimidating tactics that forcefully cemented Bartimaeus to such a despondent state? Even when Bartimaeus cried out for mercy, he was forced to be silent. Silencing of the destitute has come in many forms. The structuring of the 'normal' space is a silencing tactic that not only creates the 'abnormal' space(s) but also constrains it.

The most hopeful portion of the reading is not Bartimaeus calling out for mercy, but Jesus' asking the imperative question, "What can I do for you?" I leave you with this question: what can I/WE do for you? In this instant I am posting this as a rhetoric question. We ask not to get an answer, but we ask as to reaffirm our duty and calling to bring life to 'abnormal' spaces, and challenge the structure of the 'normal' spaces.

The need for Bartimaeus is simple and straightforward – "Rabbi, I want to see." That is all that is needed by those whose lives are constrained by power structures of the 'normal' spaces. Basic necessities to living. Seeing, hearing, eating, drinking and just living. We are reminded, in this narrative, that we are sojourners on the highways between cities, and in doing so, remember our calling to ask in affirmation of that calling, "What can I/WE do for you?

Nikotemo Sopepa, Council for World Mission

Prayer

God of life, beauty and love, we beseech you this hour to look upon us with favour. You see our need to rise above the many systems and structures that keep us from experiencing life in full. Encourage us Lord. Empower us to raise our voices and be the hope that is needed when it is needed.

Prayer Points

Partner in Mission

- ▶ Pray for Wayne and Helen Harray, CWM Partners in Mission who are administering two developmental projects in the Chin region of Myanmar, based at Tahan Theological College. Helen is the HOD of the English department and Wayne is involved in land cultivation and development.
- ▶ Pray for the 'on the job' training of a pool of teachers, in order to upgrade competency and expand the English programme in the college. Pray also for wisdom in choosing what crops to grow, and for the rapid healing of the soil, reliable workers and a great harvest.

Helen Harray, Partner in Mission (East Asia)



Source: Helen Harray

Prosper in God's Love

Mark 12:28-34

God breathed life into humankind. It is a breath of life with a purpose. A purpose that has a service of hope and love. Life here is meant to flourish like creation in its diversity. This is a spiritual nourishing of the mind, heart and soul that is gifted to each and every one of us. It reflects God's economy of life for all. Such life can be seen in the conversation between Jesus and the scribe. An opportunity to seek Jesus' advice for a life-flourishing economy for the Jews and gentiles together. Also, an opportunity for spiritual renewal, and understanding of which of God's commandments should be foremost and embodied in the hearts of people and the wider community. The scribe was satisfied with Jesus' answer. Loving our neighbours is loving God also.

We should not doubt our purpose in life - that is to serve God with all our heart, mind and soul, as we live out love for each other. This is what creates a life-flourishing economy, the Jesus way. Working together, encouraging each other, are some of the ways to boost the economy of God. If we know God in our hearts, it shows through our actions towards our neighbours. It will show in our working for reconciliation, peace and justice in our societies.

The grace of God is for all: each and every one of us created in God's own image. This grace calls to live lives that are free of hate in our relationships with other people. If laws imposed by the government for the protection of our society are implemented out of love and not hate, we are therefore prospering in God's love with one another. All works must be done out of love.

A life-flourishing economy can be seen by the fruits of our labour in caring for one another. Once we get into this habit in our everyday lives, we will taste the sweetness of God's love in Christ Jesus. God would be delighted.

Faletua Tekimatang Uilelea, Congregational Christian Church in Samoa

Prayer

Pray for God's Spirit to renew our hearts, mind and soul

Pray that we may serve God by catering to the needs of others.

Pray for understanding and forgiveness

Pray to share the love of Christ to one another

Pray that God may give us strength to witness to full and flourishing life for all.

Prayer Points

Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

► Prayer for funerals and bereavements

From the rising of the sun to its setting, may your holy name be praised, O God. You are the God of our ancestors, of history, and the future. The mysterious God of life, death and eternity. Today, we face a difficult situation. This pandemic COVID-19 has changed our landscape, forcing new normalities upon us.

Death, O Lord, has always been our most painful experience in life. The finality and ending of life rocks everyone to their core. Today, many cannot attend or be present at the funerals of loved ones. We cannot gather to comfort and support one another. We grieve alone, mourning for our beloved and also for our families and friends.

Lord God, cover us with your love, your comfort, your Holy Spirit.

► Prayer for lost income and jobs

Holy, holy, holy God, heaven and earth are full of your glory. We draw closer to you this day in humility and trust.

The whole world has been shaken due to COVID-19. Every nation is suffering the loss of lives. Waves after waves of struggles and hardships pound our lives to helplessness.

Near the heart of communities, churches and families is its finances. Many have lost jobs, incomes and homes. Tension, uncertainty and hopelessness is the new normal many are experiencing. Brokenness, shame, and disillusion are a new situation for many. Holy God, hear the cries of your people.

We pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

► Prayer concerning the lack of face-to-face interaction

Praise the Lord, O my soul. Praise your holy name. Lord God almighty, there is none like you.

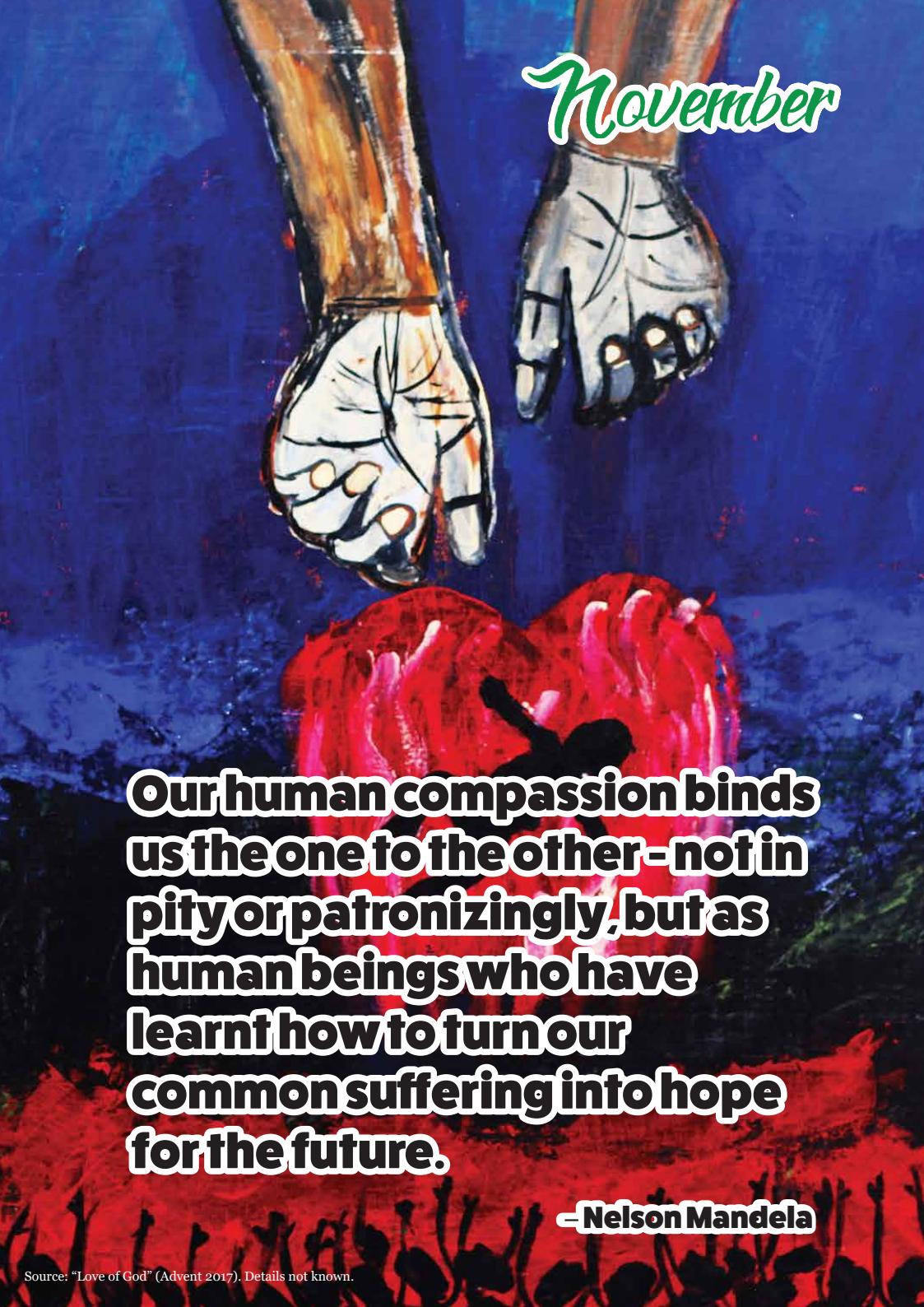
We pray as people of faith nurtured and raised in Christianity. Our existence, hopes and dreams are founded and centred on Jesus Christ our Lord and saviour. Look upon our situation, O God, and please give us understanding. Today, all over the world, many miss face-to-face interaction in daily living. We do not congregate and gather. We miss this way of life and we pray that we make the most of every opportunity to be grateful and thankful.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.



Source: Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Notes



November

Our human compassion binds us the one to the other - not in pity or patronizingly, but as human beings who have learnt how to turn our common suffering into hope for the future.

– Nelson Mandela

To Share, Even If I Have Nothing Left

1 Kings 17:8-16

At the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, there were rumours spreading around. Many places started to lockdown in order to halt the spread of coronavirus. People were then afraid of the failure of the supply chain. Therefore, the craziest thing happened all over the world: people tried to stock up (hoard) basic groceries. Different kinds of disinfectants and cleaners were all gone. The good news during the pandemic for many may have been that one could finally get several rolls of toilet paper and a box of surgical masks!

Currently we are advised to keep social distance to avoid physical contact, and therefore WFH (which can stand for "work from home" and "worship from home") becomes the 'new normal' in our daily lives. In this case, we may feel we have nothing left to share and we may be reluctant to give a helping hand to others.

The familiar story of the widow of Zarephath who had given out all she could to host the stranger, the prophet Elijah, offers a great challenge today. The unnamed widow and her son were struggling in the midst of a drought. The only thing they had left was "a handful of meal in a jar, and a little oil in a jug" (17:12) and it was to be their last supper. It was reasonable enough for the widow to reject helping a total stranger. Surprisingly, the widow did as Elijah predicted: she made Elijah a little cake and then prepared food for herself and her son. And the result? "The jar of meal was not emptied, neither did the jug of oil fail" (17:16) for many days.

Miracles happen! When we are willing to share and show loving kindness to others, God will bless us way beyond our imagination. The widow of Zarephath was a testimony to this. The small boy who had offered five loaves and two fish, made it possible for Jesus to feed 5,000 people. This is the Good News in the time of difficulties and selfishness. We have to share even if it seems that we have nothing left and let the Good News be seen!

Wong Ka Fai, Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China

Prayer

Our dear Lord, you are our shepherd and we shall not want. In times of difficulties, we tend to focus on ourselves and have forgotten our neighbours and those in need. Please forgive our selfishness. May your love urge us to take care of the least among us, bringing hope to the anxiety and despair around and within us.

Prayer Points

Church Of Bangladesh

- ▶ Pray for the children and youth who are at home for long time since March 2020 for shut down of the educational institutions due to Novel Corona, that they may cope with the situation.
- ▶ Beg for the sick, that they will get access to the care and treatment they need.
Ask for peace and stubbornness amidst suffering.
- ▶ Pray for those in isolation who are cut off from their normal routines and support systems, that they would seek their strength in Jesus.
- ▶ God is our shelter and strength, a very present help in distress.
Pray for the people who have lost their job of livelihoods, they may find the means to live on depending on God.
- ▶ Pray for the new Synod Executive Committee along with different standing committees so that we can follow the words of God to achieve the vision of the Church of Bangladesh.



Source: Church of Bangladesh

Humans are Created to Save Creation

Samuel 2:1-10; Hebrews 10:11-25; Mark 13:1-8

Hannah did not have children. She prayed and God heard her prayer and gave her a son. Remembering God's mercies, Hannah offered a prayer of thanks as follows:

My heart rejoices in the Lord; In the Lord, my horn is lifted high.
 Those who were full hire themselves out for food;
 But those who were hungry are hungry no more.
 She who was barren has borne seven children;
 but she who has had many sons pines away.
 The Lord brings death and makes alive;
 He brings down to the grave and raises up.
 The Lord sends poverty and wealth; He humbles and he exalts.
 He raises the poor from the dust; and lifts the needy from the ash heap.

Here, we see that Hannah speaks of a God who does not differentiate between rich-poor, men-women, strong-weak, and wise-foolish. All are equal in the eyes of God. Humankind creates misunderstandings through their selfishness, hatred, jealousy, egoism and power. God's vision is that of welcome for all: humans create divisions along lines of class, caste, race, creed and gender.

In Hebrew 10:11-25, we see the covenant between humankind and God. God says, "I will put my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds". We are liberated and saved by God to lead and live flourishing lives in the society characterised by goodness. We may not always live up to this vision, hence the need to know God's renewal, forgiveness and trust. In Mark 13:1-8, while the disciples of Jesus may have been absorbed in appreciating the splendour of the temple, Jesus points to the destruction of the temple. Followers of the Jesus way are 'living stones' with the stone rejected as worthless turning out to be the most important stone chosen by God.

Life-flourishing societies is about a life of equality and justice. It means to walk with God, to lead a simple life filled with love, compassion, forgiveness, righteous living and working for full life for all. Flourishing Societies means to follow Jesus in all our ways and deeds. This is the real kingdom of God.

Prema Sarojini, CWM Board of Directors

Prayer

Creator God, your good work for the whole creation has been destroyed by injustice and pollution. People are suffering from floods, famines and cyclones in many parts of the world. We are facing problems of racism and casteism. God who saves, strengthen the hands of those who work for justice, peace and reconciliation in society. Help us to renew and transform creation in the name of Jesus through whom you offer full and abundant life for all.

Prayer Points

Solidarity and Advocacy

- ▶ We may be able to see the injustices happening around us. That we may see how the existing system is only just and fair to those in power. May we be able to see through the guise of pseudo-nationalism the prejudice, hate, and discrimination against the “other”.
- ▶ We may be able to hear the cries of the indigenous peoples who lost their lands and their lives; of the women and children, of the LGBTQI+ community and people of colour repeatedly abused by circumstances and the system.
- ▶ We may be able to smell the stench of the blood of the victims of the extra-judicial killings and of the Desaparecidos (those who have “disappeared”).
- ▶ We may be able to be sensitive to our neighbours’ needs. That through our own way, we may provide a reassuring and healing touch to one another. You, Lord will use our voice to form one voice in unity and solidarity with them. Praying that in doing so, we will give a deafening cry and that maybe, finally, the world will listen.

Ang lahat hang ito ay itinataas namin sa iyong Dakilang Pangalan Panginoon, kasama ang iyong Banal na Inang si Maria. Amen.

(We lift these prayers in your Mighty name, Our Lord and God, with our Blessed Mother, Mary. Amen.)

Maria Fe (Peachy) Labayo, Council for World Mission

November 16 - International Day for Tolerance

Thy Kingdom Come

Samuel 23:1-7; Psalm 132:1-12, (13-18); Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14; Psalm 93; Revelation 1:4b-8; John 18:33-37

Today, the faith that tomorrow will be better than yesterday is not widely shared anymore in many parts of the world. We live in an age of division, disillusionment, and anxiety. As we worry about the state of the world and our lives, and while we seem to move from one crisis to another, yet we continue to pray, "Thy kingdom come."

Where is that kingdom of peace and justice, the kingdom of God that Jesus proclaimed to be near? What hope that we will experience the world as it would be if God and not Caesar sat on the throne? When Jesus says, "my kingdom is not from this world," he points out the difference between God's kingdom and the kingdom of Caesar (the political and economic powers-that-be) in which domination, violence and greed are all too common. The kingdom of God is countercultural, subverting the dominant notion of authority and power. Even today, while we recognise that "kingdom" as a political reality may seem archaic (sexist and empire-inclined) to many of us, we can well understand the metaphor as used by Jesus to challenge the conventional idea of power and dominion.

As we hear the words that the kingdom of God is near, and as we pray for God's kingdom to come, we are put on the spot. We are challenged to uphold "kingdom" values of love, mercy, peace and justice. How do we uphold them? Do we have to resist the powers-that-be? If so, would we have to suffer rejection, just as the One we follow suffered and ended up being nailed for it? In whom do we really put our trust? Who reigns in our lives? If Christ is "king" in our lives, it means that no one and nothing else is. We pray "Thy kingdom come" as hopeful people, trusting the good news of God's kingdom, and recognising that even today, amidst all the bad news, the power of love, mercy, peace and justice is loose in the world and in our lives. Yes, the kingdom is near... Can you see it? Are you part of it?

Leonora Jagessar-Visser 't Hooft, United Reformed Church

Prayer

Your kingdom come, O God, here and now, in our midst, in acts of kindness, words of hope, works of justice, signs of peace. Your kingdom come, O God, in the joys and challenges we face in our lives and in the world.

Prayer Points

Presbyterian Church in Singapore

- ▶ Wisdom for the local churches facing challenges such as loss of membership arising from the loss of fellowship and on-site worship services.
- ▶ Direction for pastors and church leaders to rethink church and lead the congregation to recover from the challenges brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, and also for adequate resources and wisdom for them to navigate and minister to their congregations in this age of new media.
- ▶ For all members in the family of Christ that have been negatively affected by the pandemic to heal and recover, and also for the community, especially for the migrant workers to be taken care of in their physical, mental and spiritual well-being.



Source: Presbyterian Church in Singapore

Life-Flourishing Economy

Jeremiah 33:14-16; Psalm 25:1-10; 1 Thessalonians 3:9-13; Luke 21:25-36

Today's gospel text describes the need for our readiness to comprehend the "signs of the second coming of Jesus Christ". Similarly, the theme of our meditation presupposes a concern to read the signs and patterns of economic growth and its impact on life in general.

The rise in the stock market may usually indicate a growth in the economy. But this may not be true. During the first six months of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020, while the Indian economy was shrinking the stock market was surging high. Likewise, when the economy of a state flourishes, it may not necessarily mean that all its citizens are experiencing economic growth. It is likely that the benefits of a flourishing economy are confined to the rich and powerful, whereas the people in the margins remain deprived of the above benefits. Adam Smith, the 18th century Scottish social philosopher and political economist opined that no society can be flourishing and happy, of which a far greater part of members are poor and miserable. Thus, if the economy is flourishing but its benefits are restricted to few, then how can such an economy be life-flourishing? In fact, such an economy would only be life-crippling.

The Old Testament prophesied of the Messianic age where justice will rule the land (Jeremiah 33:15). In the spirit of justice, the economy must begin with equal opportunity to all and must flourish with proportionate sharing by all. Edmund Phelps, the 2006 Nobel Laureate in Economics suggests that when economic growth and economic opportunity for the workers on the margin declines, the roaring stock market and high level of economic growth will not result in mass flourishing. In such a context, we are challenged by the words of Paul, "and may the Lord make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all" (1 Thessalonians 3:12). Our abounding love for each other and for all must find expression in equal opportunity of engagement in the economy by those at the periphery, where instead of focusing on a 'flourishing' economy, we should strive for an economy which is 'life-flourishing.'

Shailesh Dennis Lall, Church of North India

Prayer

Giver God, let your love so inspire us that instead of desiring our personal gain, we would be considerate to promote and work for an economic system which would benefit all, especially the downtrodden. Amen.

Prayer Points

People Living with Disabilities

- ▶ Lord, we pray for a world and societies with reduced prejudice and discrimination so that all people with disabilities can claim their full rights and experience human dignity.
- ▶ Lord, during this period of climate change and the unprecedented threat of COVID-19 we pray for the spiritual, physical and mental protection of all who are already vulnerable – let your grace shine in their (our) lives. May God's mercy lead them (us) to understand their (our) potential and recognise each individual's unique self-worth.
- ▶ Lord, we pray for the caregivers, both family members and professionals. May they know God's wisdom, patience, comfort, strength and peace, especially the caregivers of those with intellectual disabilities.
In the name of Jesus Christ we pray, Amen.

Belinda Chen, Peace Foundation/Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

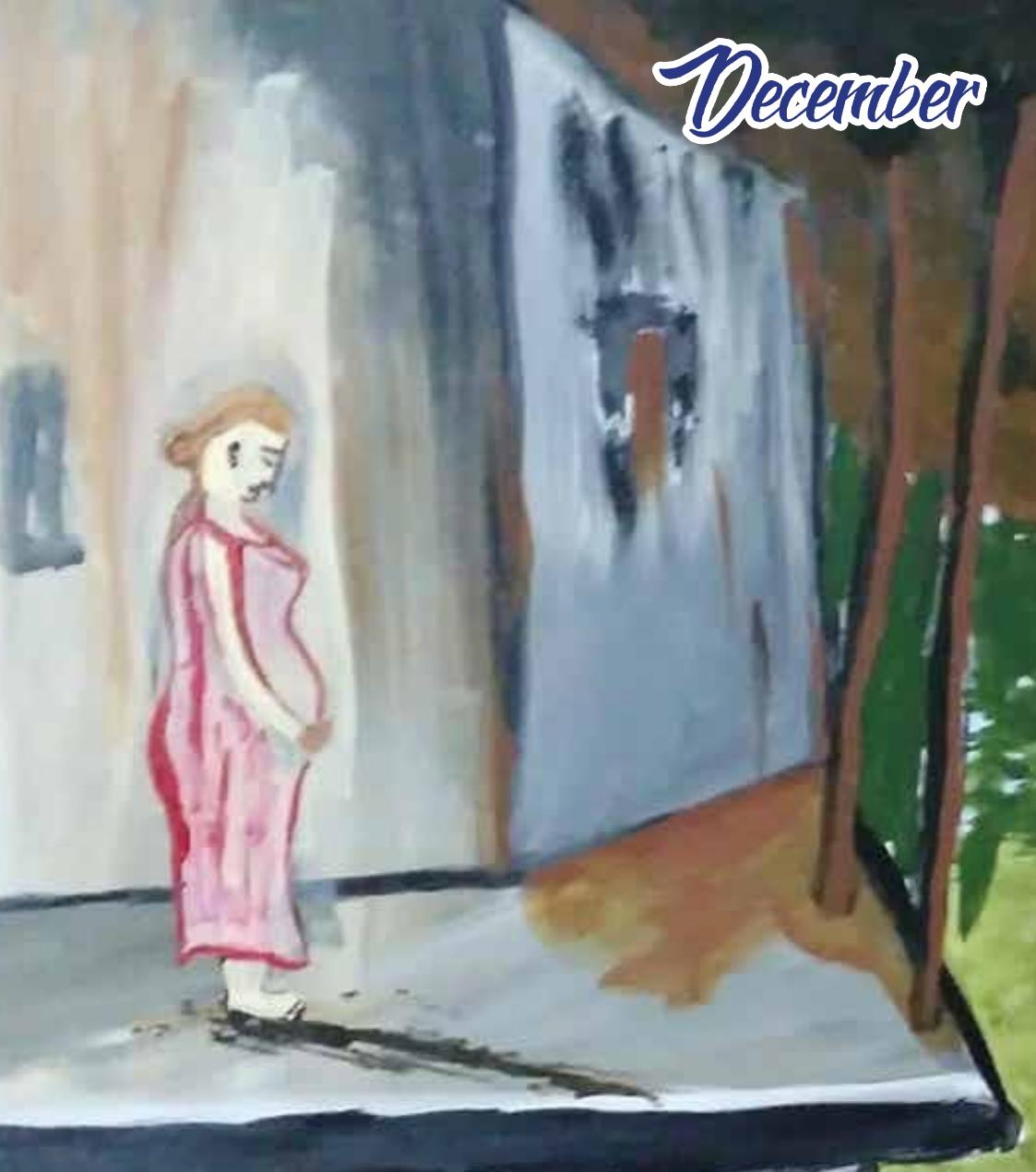


Source: Belinda Chen

December 2 - International Day for the Abolition of Slavery
December 3 - International Day of Persons with Disabilities

Notes

December



One of the best ways to achieve justice is to expose injustice.

- Julian Assange

Life-Flourishing Evangelism

Luke 3:1-6

Evangelism is probably one of the most exciting undertakings in the life of a believer. Simply understood as an invitation to embrace Jesus Christ as Lord and saviour with an inherent hope of discipleship, the primary preoccupation is often to secure that audible confession of faith. Traditionally, there has been a distinct separation of matters of salvation from "things of the world". But in the silence of one's thoughts, one wonders, is that right? What about the lingering sense of fatalism regarding life that makes us speak eloquently of heaven but not earth? But what of life before death? Does evangelism speak to that?

In the Luke 3:1-6 passage, it appears that one cannot see or speak of the kingdom of God without reference to what it is not. John the Baptist certainly understood it that way. His whole life – from his appearance, diet, to his speech – was a protest against the status quo. John's understanding of evangelism suggests that the proclamation of the love, grace and mercy of God in Christ could not be separated from the condemnation of injustice and death-dealing systems that engulf people in this life. John died, not because of what he said regarding the new kingdom, but because of what he could not ignore about the present one.

The prophecy of Isaiah, regarding John, speaks of the work of evangelism in visually dramatic imagery of valleys filled in and mountain and hills levelled low; crooked roads pulled straight, and all rough ways sanded smooth. Evangelism in this manner is the recognition that the kingdom of God is real, active, powerful, present, and incompatible with current systems. Life-flourishing evangelism is rooted in love and solidarity in the affirmation of life so that all may see God's salvation. It dispels fatalism and despair. It brings hope and visions of broken chains and liberation. It awakens the spirit of resistance in us and calls for repentance and transformation, not only of individuals, but also of systems that dominate all of creation. Evangelism stems from a profound love of the world (John 3:3).

Fiskani Nyirenda, Council for World Mission

Prayer

May the Spirit of God stir up the church to preach good news to the poor - liberty to the captives, justice to the nations, freedom for the oppressed. May the presence of the church of God anywhere signify restoration of dignity and rights for all creation. Amen.

Prayer Points

Protestantse Kerk in Nederland

- ▶ We pray for the unity and communion between christians from different backgrounds in our villages and cities. That they will find each other in the unity of Christ and will serve and enrich each other. So they will be a blessing for the society they are part of.
- ▶ We pray that the Protestant Church will be a church that exists of inclusive and safe communities. Where people who became victims of loneliness, exclusion and abuse can find comfort and meaningful relationships. We ask for forgiveness for the times our church became a place of disgrace and unsafety.
- ▶ We pray for the grace we need to let go of the anxiety about the decrease of our churches. We pray for creativity and openness to join people in their search for God.



Source: Protestantse Kerk in Nederland

December 10 - Human Rights Day

Life-Flourishing Societies

Luke 3:7-18

'Flourishing' brings images of life, growth, vibrancy, doing well, thriving, and so forth. From the text, we find a community of people who came to John to be baptised. Why did they want to be baptised? We can't really tell. But I guess they sought something better and real for their spiritual life. Therefore, they came to John. Even though John addressed them as a 'brood of vipers,' that didn't discourage them. They weren't put off. For John also said to 'bear fruits that befit repentance', which I believe they did in the end, for they enquired about it. The multitudes, the tax collectors, and the soldiers all asked the same question, "what shall we do? Teacher, what must we do?"

These questions echoed Simon Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2), when, after hearing it, the people were 'cut to the heart.' The people were so moved and touched that the only reply they could utter was a question (like above) – 'what shall we do?' The crowd was so convicted in their hearts and left with no choice but to ask what they needed to do. In reply, Simon Peter said that they needed "to repent and be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins." And verse 41 says that those who believed were baptised and about three thousand souls were added that day. How about that for a 'life-flourishing society!'

This reflection is being written during the time COVID-19 is spreading across most parts of the world. Thus, speaking about 'life-flourishing societies' in the context of COVID-19 comes with many challenges and requires courage to believe it to be so. Christians are encouraged by Jesus' words, "in the world you will have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world" (John 16:33). An implication here may be that whatever we face in this world, like this present time, we need to be spiritually life-flourishing societies. For Jesus' sake.

Moegaquila Lasei, Congregational Union of New Zealand

Prayer

God our heavenly Father, we acknowledge your mercy and grace upon our lives. For all that we see and hear, all that we face and experience in life, your word teaches us to trust in you. Help us to be life-flourishing people. We give you thanks. Amen.

Prayer Points

Presbyterian Church of Wales

► Hiraeth

Hiraeth is a Welsh word meaning, "the longing of the heart".

We are longing once again to be able to join with our congregations, nationally as a denomination and internationally as a wider church, for worship and to spend time in fellowship together.

Please pray for the lonely in our midst, and for the frustration we as church feel in not being able to comfort those in need.

Pray for people who live in unhappy circumstances and who feel trapped in their own homes.

Pray for people of all ages whose mental health is affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and for all those who are comforting them.

'For God is my witness, how I yearn for you all with the affection of Christ Jesus.'
Phillipians 1:8 (ESV)

► Lighthouse

We ask you to pray for us as a nation that we may draw closer to God.

That our hearts will be warmed by his love.

Please pray that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ may dispel the darkness of ignorance and unbelief in our midst. We ask for God's light to shine in our hearts, through the church and by word and deed into our communities.

'Though the fig tree should not blossom, nor fruit be on the vines, the produce of the olive fail and the fields yield no food, the flock be cut off from the fold and there be no herd in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord; I will take joy in the God of my salvation'
Habakkuk 3:17-18 (ESV)

► Bridge

Please pray for new ministry initiatives in our church. Pray for new leaders who respond to God's calling upon their lives, to help the church to journey with them in defining and refining their calling.

Pray for our new MSP-4 programme called 'Golud' – a programme to develop churches that are dementia-friendly. The aim is to develop a scheme that will offer a person-centred response to dementia, and hopefully will encourage church communities in all parts of Wales to respond appropriately.

Pray for our children and youth work, especially as we try and continue to reach them remotely with the Good News.

'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth' 2 Timothy 2:15 (ESV)

Life-Flourishing Creation

Micah 5:2-5a; Luke 1:39-55

The Fourth Sunday of Advent is very often skipped and combined with Christmas celebration in cultures that are not predominantly Christian. Here in Taiwan, Christmas is not a national holiday, so people need to work on and around Christmas days as usual. There is also no break for Mary. She is pregnant and bearing a child. There's no holiday for her in nurturing a life which is already leaping, bouncing, and forming in her womb, causing her all the changes and discomfort in her whole body's various systems.

Bearing a child in the body is such a miraculous experience of human flourishing and participation in God's creation. It is also an experience that is very special yet very common to the female gender. Nevertheless, it is not just a personal effort. Mary visited Elizabeth just as pregnant women need all kinds of help from family members as well as friends and neighbours. Joseph participated silently in the upbringing of Jesus.

Being able to bring up and nourish Jesus is very special for Mary and Joseph. Christians today can also participate in the continuing creation of God by responding to Jesus' call to nourish and bring up a vision which takes much effort without breaks and will bring changes and discomfort to our bodies. For such participation to work: we must be willing to give up control; we have to work in partnership with others for a life-flourishing world and must stop and like Mary praise God for all the wonders we on our own cannot do.

And lest we forget, it is not in central Jerusalem, but in small town Bethlehem; not in imperial houses, but in mangers on the peripheries, where God is at work creating and nourishing a new world order. God is continuing to turn the world upside down to create a world of justice and peace.

Lian Chin-Siong, Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

Prayer

Lord, in our mundane and everyday lives, you come to us and create within us something new. Lord, as Mary and Joseph bear Jesus, may you also use us to bring about your kingdom. May you help us to glorify you even if glorifying you causes discomfort to our bodies. Amen.

Prayer Points

Partner in Mission

- ▶ Dear almighty God, We commend to you all the theological students in our member churches and in the wider ecumenical fellowship. Let them be rooted in their faith and spirituality but at the same time be open and respectful towards other traditions, theologies and also religious faiths. Help us to accept the diversity of the Christian faith and see it as a gift, which shows us the beauty of your creation. Let us recognise this diversity as a blessing which enriches us and unites us. Dear creator of all, we ask you to forgive us whenever we have thought a great deal of ourselves and looked down on others by not addressing them respectfully and humbly. Forgive us, Lord. Amen.
- ▶ May you free the Christian churches from attempts at demarcation and open them to an ecumenism in which the common core truths are witnessed to and lived out together. Give the Christian churches the spirit of brotherhood, so that they may be a mouthpiece for charity, justice and peace. May you encourage church decision-makers to actively seek unity in ecumenism. Please gather the Christian churches together in one house of ecumenism and give new impulses in cooperation which will advance the path of reconciliation. Move the various Christian churches to deal with each other in a spirit of love and to grow towards a reconciled diversity, for which many people long for. We ask that you lead your church, which exists in so many forms in your world, on the path to unity. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.
- ▶ Hundreds of refugees have died in the Mediterranean and in the middle of Europe in recent days. These people died not only because their boats were too old, but also because they were denied a safe route to Europe. We ask for forgiveness for the people and institutions who close their doors to refugees. We remember all the dead - including those we do not yet know about who are "disappearing" unnoticed. May you stand by their relatives and friends who now have to cope with this heavy loss. Accompany those who are waiting in their home countries with uncertainty for news of their refugee relatives. Lord, your son Jesus Christ was himself a refugee after his birth. You know the situation of the millions of people who are fleeing. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Benjamin Simon, Partner in Mission (Ecumenical - World Council of Churches)



Source: Benjamin Simon



Christmas and the Resistance to Empire

Luke 1:46-55, 2:10-12

The Magnificat in Luke 1:46-55 is a song of revolution – political, social, spiritual revolution. The song of Mary is powerful and prophetic. It is a declaration of liberation and emancipation, a construction of a new social order for all people to live with hope.

The angelic proclamation in Luke 2:10-22 contains the subversive aspect of Christmas. The language of the angel is political, "Today in the town of David a saviour has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord." This child is the anti-Caesar. What is being proclaimed is not a new religion, but the birth of a child who will later radically oppose the designs of the Empire. It declares how Jesus' kin-dom and the Roman kingdom begin to clash. Under the reign of a descendant of David, people will be liberated from Rome and from Herod. The proclamation expresses the longing for liberation of people who are oppressed by a system put in place by the Empire of the day. At each step in the nativity story, 'the family' experiences the political, social and spiritual consequences of being chosen to bring the Messiah into the world.

Nothing fundamental has changed. Empires follow one another. They are all the same, manifesting themselves in domination, arrogance, highest culture, highest civilisation, etc. If there is any difference from previous empires, it lies in the effects. Today, we see an ever-increasing rate of destruction and damage to the environment and humans in the world.

A new discernment on the subversiveness of Christmas demands a new understanding of the world system—who is in charge and where it is going? Do we pledge our allegiance to those who achieve power by violence and economic or political exploitation? Or do we pledge our allegiance to values that promote life-flourishing communities, identifying with those in need and working for peace and justice in the world? The bottom line: which 'lord' does our loyalty lie with: Christ or Caesar?

Julie Sim, Council for World Mission

Prayer

O God, we come to you this Christmas with thankful hearts. We praise you for the gift of Jesus, our saviour. We are deeply grateful that Jesus can change our stories of hardship into testimonies of hope. We rejoice in all the great things you have done for us. Guide us, O God, so we can bear witness to your love, grace and justice.



Source: The Holy Family by Emmanuel Garibay. Courtesy of the artist.

Life-Flourishing Economy

Isaiah 9:2-7

We end this year with a promise, a hope and a dream. Many of us may feel like we are walking around in darkness, in a world filled with war, despair and disappointments. However, yesterday we celebrated Christmas, the day the light of the world was born and the true ruler of the world became a human being. Isaiah 9 paints a picture of what Christ's reign looks like: a reign characterised by joy, peace, justice and righteousness. Those are characteristics that promote a life-flourishing economy.

In our world today we all seem to be fighting for our own rights, our own possessions and our own wealth, as individuals and as nations. There is no peace in our economy, there is no righteousness, justice or joy either. There is just a feeling of not enough, never enough. Nations wage war over scarce resources, individuals try to beat out their competitors by any means necessary. Is this really how we want to live our lives?

As Christ-followers we are called to reflect the reign of our prince of peace, our mighty God. In the year to come I want to encourage you to think about the way you live your life, does the way you earn and spend your money reflect the reign of Christ? Do you support companies who have unjust labour practices? Do you support companies that place profits first, not caring about the impact they have on the environment or their staff? Do you support businesses that have underhand dealings, take bribes, cut corners or ruthlessly deal with their competitors? Does your company or the company you work for promote peace, justice and righteousness in their business practices? How can you begin to change this? May the zeal of the Lord Almighty help you to accomplish this.

May you find joy in this next year as you reflect Christ's reign in your life and may you live a life that reflects the themes of this year's devotions: Life-flourishing Creation, Economy, Evangelism and Societies.

Kim Brown, Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

Prayer

Mighty God, you are the giver of life. Help us as individuals and communities to reflect your reign in this dark world. Help us to reflect your light through our actions of peace, justice and righteousness in all aspects of our lives but especially through our economics. Amen.

Prayer Points

Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

- ▶ Almighty God, we thank you for your gift to us this day - love, hope, peace and joy wrapped up in a manger. Our great and awesome God come to us in the form of a helpless baby, to change the world as we know it. We thank you that through your life here on earth you showed us how to live and through your great sacrifice of love on the cross we have the gifts of forgiveness and eternal life.
- ▶ Holy Spirit, this day and every day, help us to live out your love in all our relationships, to be bringers of your joy especially when the world is a dark and fear-filled place, to be peacemakers bringing reconciliation to a broken world and to cling to the hope of your promises that have already begun to be fulfilled.

In your precious name Lord Jesus we pray, Amen.



Source: Uniting Presbyterian Church in Southern Africa

Sharing God's Love

Isaiah 60:1-6

This is a season in which we are invited to come and see, come and follow, go and share with others. As followers of Christ we are reminded to share Christ's love so that all will experience the freedom and hope Christ's message brings. This is also a season to widen our horizon to encourage ourselves of the many ways in which Christ is at work in our troubled and wounded world, inviting us to look and listen for God's voice amongst the oppressed, the broken and the ignored.

How are we responding to God's invitation in this season and how do we desire to remind ourselves of this invitation as sharers of God's love?

May we go and share God's love with our **wounded** world:

In times of pain and suffering may we see your healing

In places of alienation may we follow your compassion

In a world at war may we show your reconciliation

Guide all who search and journey towards *Life-Flourishing Creation*

May we go and share God's love with our **hate-filled** world:

In times of violence may we see your peace

In places of bitterness may we follow your forgiveness

In a world full of hatred may we show your love

Guide all who search and journey towards *Life-Flourishing Societies*

May we go and share God's love with our **broken** world:

In times of oppression may we see your comfort

In places of scarcity may we follow your generosity

In a world of bondage may we show your freedom

Guide all who search and journey towards *Life-Flourishing Economy*

May we go and share God's love with our **anxious** world:

In times of despair and sorrow may we see your hope

In places of corruption may we follow your justice

In a world of deception may we show your truth

Guide all who search and journey towards *Life-Flourishing Evangelism*

Amen

Julie Sim, Council for World Mission



Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes

Notes



a partnership
of churches
in mission

Council for World Mission Ltd

114 Lavender Street,
#12-01, CT Hub 2,
Singapore 338729

T (65) 6887 3400 **F** (65) 6235 7760
E council@cwmission.org **W** www.cwmission.org

Council for World Mission Ltd (Africa)

Suite 21 & 27 1st Floor,
Block B Metropolitan Park 8 Hillside Road Park Town,
Johannesburg 2193, South Africa

T +27 0114804850 Ext. 4850

Council for World Mission Ltd (UK)

11 St Georges Circus,
London SE1 8EH,
United Kingdom

T +44 (0) 20 7222 4214 **F** +44 (0) 20 7222 3510
E council.uk@cwmission.org

Company Limited By Guarantee
Registered in Singapore
Unique Entity Number 201206146Z

Copyright. © 2021 Council for World Mission Ltd. All Rights Reserved. Content may not be reproduced, downloaded, disseminated, published or transferred in any form or by any means, except with the prior written permission of Council for World Mission Ltd.

