



**1977-2017**

Celebrating 40 years of Partnership  
of 32 Churches in Mission

# Sundays

*with*  
**CWM**



**JOURNEYING TOGETHER**  
**2017**



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**2017**

## OUR VISION

*Fullness of life through Christ,  
for all creation.*

## OUR MISSION

*Called to partnership in Christ to  
mutually challenge, encourage,  
and equip member churches to  
share in God's mission*



The Council for World Mission (CWM) is a worldwide partnership of 32 churches, committed to sharing their resources of people, skills, insights and money to carry out God's mission.

### AFRICA

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

### CARIBBEAN

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

### EAST ASIA

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

### EUROPE

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

### PACIFIC

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

### SOUTH ASIA

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

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## INTRODUCTION



**Rev Dr Collin I. Cowan**  
CWM General Secretary

Council for World Mission is delighted to present to you Sundays with CWM, the 2017 edition, with a special focus on CWM's values in the month of July, marking the launch of its 40th anniversary. This prayer book is a collective witness of CWM directors, member churches, programme participants and staff, sharing our experience of God's presence among us and how we have come to know the value of prayer and biblical reflection.

At the June 2016 Assembly, held in Jeju Island, South Korea, we launched the theme *Healing, Hope in Action*, which is intended to inform our engagement over the next four years. We envision the outworking of this theme to be an act of discipleship that is anchored in the discipline of personal and corporate prayer and reflection on God's word. This discipline awakens us to listen to God so that our perspectives on the world are clarified and our courage to share in God's healing mission is invigorated by hope, God's gift to us.

The prayer book is woven around common issues that CWM has identified as major threats to life, and requiring urgent attention by God's people who have responded to the cry of God for healing. Each section has a Bible reading, around which the reflection is based. The reflections aim to connect the words of scripture with the issues of life and show where God is at work and where God is calling us to go with the message of hope and the mission of healing. Each reflection concludes with a prayer.

In Mark 10:46-52, we have the account of Blind Bartimaeus, calling out to Jesus to give him sight. The longing of his heart was to be given the ability to see the world, to be part of the seeing community in a world where blindness is interpreted as a curse. He resisted the boundaries established by society and the discouragement from those around him, who lost hope in him realising his quest for sight. His prayer for freedom from blindness was met by the healing power of God, mediated through Jesus; and that sight-giving experience made him an active participant in the community of life. Jesus healed and energised Bartimaeus to become a healer in his own right as a disciple, 'following Jesus along the way' (v.52).

Our prayer is that as we meditate on the reflections in this prayer book, we will come closer to Jesus who is ready to open our eyes so that we may see more clearly and engage more fully with the broken world in which we live. Our prayer is that each of us would reach out to God in prayer and present ourselves to be released from blindness into freedom. We pray that amid the numerous challenges that we face and see in our world, our eyes of faith will be opened so that we may see the possibilities for a new paradigm, mirroring the teachings and lifestyle of Jesus, who commits himself to affirming life and giving hope; and who calls us to join him in that mission.

We commend Sundays with CWM to you and pray that you will be blessed in your reading and reflection.

Shalom!

**Sunday, 1 January 2017**

Bible Readings: Mark 8:22-26

**Healing: Hope In Action**



*Reflection:*

By God's grace we have come to see and experience another new day and New Year. We rejoice in the wonderful way God has been guiding us and leading us till this very day. Now we look forward with the hope for the journey throughout this year; looking ahead of a brighter future. It is true that the God whom we worship is the God who is more concern of our future than of the past. Many times we prefer to talk and ponder on the past achievement, the past glory and even the past failure than to really live out the salvation that God had offer and deal with its demand in the present day life situation of the people. Here Jesus heals the man with physical disabilities but the healing took place in a progressive way. Jesus spat, touched then asked, "Could you see?" the man answered, "I could but not clear." Then Jesus touches again and in this time he looks intently. He was completely healed. It was the man honesty that heals him completely. Yes an honest confession to God is important in order to experience healing touch in ourselves, in our society and in our land.

Modern Church advocacy for Justice, Peace and Freedom to all the creations require action. Healing is central to Jesus' earthly ministry. Christ dedicated his ministry to healing the wounded world, healing all kinds of people and has even raised the dead. Church Mission is Christos-centric as such the goal of mission is to bring healing to all creations. Healing is putting hope in action, it has to do with strengthening the weak hands and the feeble knees in the world where people build up prison for themselves or for others. In such a time as this we live a life where healing is essential to restore hope from the hopelessness. Restoring good health, restoring hope, restoring peace, etc. is empowering a person to live a life in all its fullness. Too often as we seek physical healing, we also need to seek emotional and spiritual healing as Jesus offer complete healing. He healed because he cared and the Missional Church should be a caring and sharing church. It should always demonstrate the same as Jesus offered for which the Church exist in order to glorify God alone.

*Prayer:*

It is time to pray to God to give us sight and vision to discern his abiding presence, his unfailing promise and his unstoppable generosity here and now. Pray that God give us courage and strong commitment to bring healing bonded by love.

*Rev. Darchonhaia Darnei, Moderator, Council for World Mission*



### What Are We Leaving Behind?

*Reflection:*

The International Energy Agency estimates that it will be impossible to attain safe levels of global warming within 5 years. The Intergovernmental Panel for Climate Change (IPCC) cautions that within 10 years, fresh water will become even scarcer than it is now and will be the impetus for global conflict. The World Bank estimates that within 15 years, more than 100 million people will face climate-change-induced poverty. What are we leaving behind for the next generation?

The effects of climate change are far reaching and will multiply in the future. Heat waves, storms and air pollution are not features of the fullness of life God intends for creation. The earth God created is intended to be a plentiful land to enjoy. Its fruits and bounty have been undermined by our actions. We have mistreated the land and our children and their children will inherit the effects.

Why should we care about the environment? Cecil Alexander's poem is instructive

All things bright and beautiful,  
All creatures great and small,  
All things wise and wonderful,  
The Lord God made them all.

Cecil reminds us that those things in creation that we love and cherish but often misuse and abuse are gifts of God. In that hymn we declare creation as God's gift for which we are stewards. It is that deeper understanding that fuels our earth-keeping actions like offering words of wisdom to those who carelessly cut trees, improperly dispose of garbage and set fires on agricultural land.

Climate change has varying impact across the world but as the IPCC puts it, 'nobody on this planet will be untouched by the impacts of climate change'. Consider a world without the natural things we cherish. What are we leaving behind?

*Prayer:*

God of all creation, we have defiled your land and made your heritage an abomination. Help us to realize that our actions today will have great effects on the next generation.. Give us wisdom to find creative ways to undo human-driven ecological destruction in our world. Help us to be faithful stewards so that future generations will experience life in all its fullness.

Vickeisha King Burke, Programme Associate, CWM Caribbean

Image Source: Earth Under Fire. Digital image. Delaware Family Magazine. Delaware Family. Retrieved from <http://www.delawarefamily.net/page-32>. 2 September 2016.



### What Can We Do Together?

*Reflection:*

The question of interfaith and ecumenism being brought together must not be taken to suggest that they are the same. But they bring to the communities of faith(s) two basic challenges. Firstly, interfaith challenges the community as the created being to be tolerant, to embrace each other as neighbours. It challenges the mentality of cultural, racial and religious superiority that has given birth to ideologies of religious radicalism. This has divided the world to the advantage of the Empire.

Secondly, ecumenism in most cases is used in reference to church denominations that come together for different reasons. Ecumenism challenges the Christian community to look at two things; What brings and binds us together? and, particularly relevant to mission, What can we do together (partnership)? Both of these are mission questions that test the mission obedience for any community of faith.

Practical ecumenism, at least from the African perspective, is more than different churches taking turn to comfort the bereaved family or the Women's Fellowship coming together for prayers and solidarity.

Jesus Christ told his disciples to love one another. It is through such acceptance, appreciation and tolerance that the world will know that they are disciples of Christ. Paul advises the Colossians on how they must speak to people of differing opinions. Don't fight, don't scorn, but use the language that will bring them to the Lord. To give love and share the spirit of tolerance, one must internalize acceptance and tolerance. One can't give what one does not have.

*Prayer:*

Dear Lord we pray that you make us one, and ambassadors of unity and peace. We pray that you give us the spirit of appreciation and tolerance as we fight the mentality of cultural, racial and religious superiority that has divided your people and benefitted the empire which feeds on the divided world. Amen

Sindiso Jele, Mission Secretary, CWM Africa.



**Christ Has Paid The Price**

*Reflection:*

Today, we live in a world where we sometimes have little or no respect for our fellow men. We are reminded that Christ came that we may have life, life in all its fullness. The life that Christ intended for us is taken away once we become victims of human trafficking. Romans 5: 8 state "But God demonstrates his love for us by the fact that the Messiah died for us while we were still sinners."

Christ has and continues to exhibit his undying love for us through his works, similarly, we are encouraged to show love through our interactions and advocacy.

In that period, the ultimate price was paid. We are no longer for sale.

Today we are all encouraged to take a firm stance against this issue that continues to separate families and destroy our world. Today we must understand that we are worth far more than diamonds and rubies

*Prayer:*

Mighty and everlasting father, we acknowledge today that you are King of Kings and Lord of Lords. We understand that there is none like you; none can be compared to you.

We thank you for life in all its fullness, we thank you for freedom.

Today we remember all the victims of human trafficking; we pray that you will touch them. We pray that you will make away for them to be reunited with their families. We remember their families and pray that you will send to them a spirit that comforts. Dear God, make us agents of change, equip us with the requisite skills and knowledge so that we may be able to recognize the signs of human trafficking and provide us with the strength that we may fight for the freedom of those trafficked.

Be with them, comfort them, and sustain them. Amen.

*Delon Grandison, Training in Mission participant from the Caribbean region, 2014*



**Let Everything That Has Breath...**

*Reflection:*

It is timely for CWM to develop a new focus on "Worship and Discipleship" as important and related aspects of our partnership of churches in mission. Worship and discipleship provide the space where we can worship and praise God and also give expression to our discipleship.

The transliteration of the Hebrew word Hallelujah highlights God in relationship with creation and creation in relationship with God. Hence the phrases "Praise the Lord" and "God be praised" allow us to connect to and acknowledge God in a very special way. As disciples we are tasked not only to encourage ourselves to develop a stronger relationship with God, but to develop stronger relationships with all God's people irrespective of their differences.

To worship in spirit and in truth is to bring something of heaven into our worship and to make the distance between heaven and earth thinner, in those moments we are compelled to invite others to discover and meet with God. One thing that should be very clear in our minds is that we participate in God's mission, while at the same time we are committed to engage others in discovering life in all its fullness, which is God's loving purpose for all creation.

Together let us struggle to make peace our watch word, as we engage in God's mission, worship and discipleship; as we focus on the writings of the psalmist David Ps 150:6 "Let everything that has breath, praise the Lord." This verse has echoes of Gen 2, verse 7 where God breathes life into the first humans, speaking of God's tenderness and care over creation. As such all creation is invited to bring praise and thanks to God who gives us life.

*Prayer:*

Almighty God, as we seek to give you praise and thanks for our season here on earth, help us to walk in the light of your Son Jesus Christ, to acquaint ourselves with his love and be at peace to receive his words of life so our hearts can be tuned and delighted towards you. And thus are the secrets of his heart made known. Falling down on our face we will worship you always. Amen

*Noel Holder, Guyana Congregational Union*

Sunday, 29 January 2017



### Presbyterian Church of Korea

“Becoming Holy Church Again”: The theme of the 101st General Assembly of the PCK is “Becoming Holy Church Again”(Rome 1:17, Lev. 19:2) . The theme was chosen to celebrate the 500 anniversary of the Luther’s Reformation. PCK launched a series of events for the celebration and is encouraging her congregations to participate in the events. The events will be continued until November 2017.

Political instability: South Korean president Park Guen-hye made tearful apologies for her role in a political scandal of friend’s influence that has engulfed her administration. She allowed Choi Soon-sil, a friend of 40 years, to influence government policies on everything from the economy to North Korea. So-called Soon-sil Gate gives rise to serious impacts on South Korean society including corruption of the government and enterprises. South Korean president Park Guen-hye is facing pressure of resignation from her presidency.

Peace in North East Asia: Countries in North East Asia are facing rising geopolitical tension, especially South Korea which is suffering from the geopolitical situation as a divided country. Reunification of the Korean Peninsula is always a top priority for South Korean Christians.

*My prayers and reflections for February 2017*

**Kiribati Uniting Church**

*Pray For:*

- Reconciliation and healing among the leaders, in particular the church pastors so they will work together with common understanding in doing God's mission as it fulfils its role as a Church of Christ for all.
- Understanding of ecumenical unity among the churches to work for the common good of all Kiribati citizens, in the midst of turmoil and issues of global warming and rising of sea water level; to put life first before doctrinal differences.
- Successful capacity development for all personnel in all areas of KUC mission as they reenergise for the future of God's mission through KUC.

**Presbyterian Church of Myanmar**

*Pray For:*

- Full time doctors and nurses. In Agape Hospital, current doctors and some nurses are government employees, and work on a part-time basis. Therefore the hospital is badly in need of full-time doctors and nurses who can fully work in the Hospital.
- For a building for the women centre for which the women's ministry has been praying
- PCM leadership of General Assembly, Synods, Boards and Departments

Bible Reading: 1 Timothy 4:12



**The Present and Future of Church**

*Reflection:*

The CWM Assembly took inspiration from the Youth Pre-Assembly presentation, saying that they had been 'ministered to', describing it as 'challenging', 'moving' and 'prophetic'. This is how our churches should be - affirming the participation and ministries of young people and being open to be challenged and inspired by them.

Young people and children are the present and future of God's church. They face the same challenges as all of us: poverty, conflict, access to education, mental health issues, and un-employment can often disproportionately affect them. In contrast to older people, youth and children may offer energy, hope, clarity of vision, talent and inspiration in God's mission.

Churches have a duty to recognise this reality. The presence of young people in our churches should not be taken for granted. Opportunities for faith and personal development must be offered to them even when finances and priorities are stretched or could be re-directed elsewhere. They must be treated with love and care, whilst allowing them space to grow and flourish.

Young people must not maintain the status quo of the church for church's sake. It is the responsibility of all of us who follow Christ, young and older, to bring God's kingdom on Earth for God's sake. Young people and children are as much a part of this mission as any of us. We are called to recognise and respond to the young, listening to and learning from them as we journey together.

*Prayer:*

God of all of us, young and old alike, Your children are growing up in an unsteady and confusing world, Show them that Your ways give more life than the ways of the world. Help them to take failure, not as a measure of their worth, but as a chance for a new start. Give them strength to hold their faith in You, and to keep alive their joy in Your creation; Give those around them hearts that care and ears that listen. Amplify their voices in our communities. Help us live-out the love that Jesus showed towards each other, regardless of age, Sure and steadfast in the knowledge of Your faithful guidance through Your Spirit. Amen.

*David Cruchley, Programme Associate, CWM Europe*



**The Call of The Vulnerable – Hosanna!**

*Reflection:*

If you once lived in a good home, but suddenly you became homeless – because of war or natural disaster, how would you feel especially if you become a refugee in an unwelcoming land? This is happening today. Millions of people have been fleeing from death in their homeland, with nowhere to go. Without a sure destination, they feel unprotected and vulnerable.

Climate change is causing homelessness. For the first time in history of Kiribati, in 2016—four men were reported drowned when a strong wave hit Kiritimati Island. Seeking for safety, people are starting to leave their home-country because that is the only option for them to survive for who can live in the land without fresh water – a land flooded with seawater? Evidence indicates that the Kiribati islands, may not survive this century. People living on the islands today are like people travelling in a sinking boat, with nowhere to go.

However the One they trust for their life once entered that same situation. Jesus and his family were forced to leave their home at midnight to escape a massacre of Herod the Great. They travelled all the way to Africa, and ended up as refugees in Egypt. Where would the people of Kiribati end up when they escape the massacre of sea level rise?

Our Psalm is a prayer of desperation! It is the prayer of people who were once used to having God’s presence and power protecting and supporting them – but that power has been long absent. Three times the Psalm says, “Restore us, O LORD God Almighty; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved.” The people of Kiribati are also praying the same prayer, calling out for help and waiting upon the Lord to save their lives and their islands. Hosanna – save us now!

*Prayer:*

Sustaining God, we pray for people in lands which are feeling the effects of climate change. We pray that as they cry out for help they will find willing hands, hearts of compassion and viable solutions to their plight. We pray for churches, governments and civil organisations that they will pool resources to help the vulnerable. May all human beings work in cooperation with you in caring this earth you have made. Amen

*Tioti Timon, Kiribati Uniting Church, student at University of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa*

<sup>1</sup>Nunn, P.D., 2013. The end of the Pacific? Effect of the sea level rise on Pacific islands livelihood, in Wiley Library Online, p. 157



**Give Them Something To Eat**

*Reflection:*

When Jesus and the disciples were with the crowd in the solitary place, they were all hungry and the disciples suggested sending the people away to buy food. But Jesus told them to give them something to eat. I imagine it was a hard thing for the disciples to do as it was a big crowd and there was nothing available. Then along came a little boy who had five loaves of bread and two fish. I am impressed by this boy who willingly shared his packed lunch with others, although it was a very small quantity for everyone. Jesus blessed the food and everyone had enough - more than enough so much so that they had plenty of leftovers!

Llanfair Uniting Church in Penrhys runs different projects to help people of all ages in the community. One of the projects, the Café, serves food. It is very much a focal point right in the centre of the community. Serving behind the counter is one way in which we serve Christ. Staff and volunteers come with what they can offer. At the end of the day, they often feel that they have received more than they have given. Café is part of the church and “Christ is represented in the café coffee cup as well as in the chapel communion cup”.

As followers of Jesus, we are encouraged to give “something to eat” to others. What we have may not be big, but if we willingly give, God will bless and people will have plenty from what we have. Our talents, our abilities are not the same. We may think what we have is worthless, but remember it can be a blessing for others. It may just be a simple word, a prayer or it may be an action of love, understanding and support. So let us be encouraged today to give out of what we have to create the Kingdom of God here on earth.

*Prayer:*

Loving God, we thank you for accepting us the way we are. We offer you ourselves and what we have to do your work in this world. We pray that you will bless what we have and help us to show your love to others around us. Amen.

*Rebecca Ralte, Partner in Mission, Europe*



**True Worship**

*Reflection:*

Ashes are a powerful reminder of inescapable sin and of the remains of a previously valuable thing which has perished.

For Christians, ashes are a symbol of human mortality. Ash

Wednesday, at the beginning of Lent, speaks of Christ's passion and death upon the cross.

Isaiah addresses passionate and devoted people whose observance of religious festivals and practices fill their schedules as they worship, fast and pray. Yet God takes no notice of their devotion and prayers and they have become despondent.

God doesn't want religious observance that does not advance justice for the weak and vulnerable. Without that, all the worship and devotion is phony and worthless. God chooses fasting as an act of self-denial and a fast is only true when it challenges injustice.

"Yokes" in the Bible speak of power in economic and political arrangements that oppress people. Yokes make people dependent and helpless, robbing them of dignity and joy. Worship of God defies and resists Empire and declares that there is no other God. To worship "in spirit and in truth" is not an escape from the world. It is to challenge and break down all that exploits and oppresses.

*Prayer:*

God of beginnings and endings,  
As we begin this time of Lent  
We look at ourselves and our world  
And see what we have made of it.

We come to you  
Looking for forgiveness and renewal.  
We come to you  
Looking for strength to release the  
oppressed.

We come to you  
Looking for sincerity and devotion  
that is true.

God of beginnings and endings,  
As we begin this time of Lent  
Look on us and all you create  
With love and mercy;  
Make us new  
And set us free.

*Wayne Hawkins, Mission Secretary, CWM Europe*

image source: <http://christianity.about.com/od/holidaytips/qt/whatisashwednes.htm>



### “Daughter” – A Life-Changing Word

*Reflection:*

The story begins with an unnamed woman with a physical illness, ‘a flow of blood’. Although her illness debilitates her, she refuses to let it define her. She has endured the chronic condition for twelve years, suffered greatly under the care of many doctors with her savings depleted. Instead of getting better, her condition has worsened. According to the Law of Moses, she is unclean; her condition excludes her from worship in a synagogue and community life, she is a social outcast. The religious leaders taught that a disease was punishment for sin; she only got what she deserved. Maybe like Job in the Old Testament, she doubted what had gone wrong in her relationship with God. Obviously she longed for a merciful God, but the society’s reaction must have convinced her that she was condemned. In a culture dominated by shame-and-honour, this woman experiences great embarrassment and exclusion; she was lonely, isolated, rejected, impoverished, and possibly dying.

Nonetheless, Mark interjects hope! It is reasonable to assume that the woman has heard the healing stories that present Jesus favourably. She convinces herself that if she touches Jesus’ clothes, she will be healed. So she joins the crowd, awaiting Jesus’ return with the intention of getting close enough to touch his garment. Her action displays determination and perseverance. Although she thinks it will be a quick and unnoticed encounter, she soon learns that Jesus engages those who encounter him, especially one who draws power from him.

Jesus commends her for her faith. The woman receives honour and restoration. Jesus frees her from any form of self-condemnation. Her determination in Jesus leads to a change in her circumstances and to her re-acceptance and restoration to the covenant community. Instead of dying, she lives. Instead of her life-force wasting away, she receives new energy and new life. Jesus used the life-changing word “**daughter**” – an expression of love and an identification of covenant community. Jesus gave this unnamed woman value and rewarded her for her faith with public praise, what a life-changing day! She was on her way back to life. Fully healed and restored.

*Prayer:*

O Lord, we give thanks for the witness of women, most of them unnamed and unsung, who have refused to be shamed or silenced, who have stood up and stood out for justice and truth. Blessed are You, gracious God, who has created women in Your image.

*Rev. Julie Sim, Mission Secretary, CWM East Asia*

### Community Mission – Finding Lost Sheep

*Reflection:*

Jesus in his ministry on earth talked about ‘how we ought to love our neighbour’ (1 John 3:16). Jesus directs us in Luke 15 and Matthew 18 that we ought to care for everyone no matter what, and like the lost sheep we must be concerned if they should be lost from God.

The scribes and Pharisees took great offence at Jesus because he associated with sinners and treated them graciously. The Pharisees had strict regulations about how they were to keep away from sinners, lest they incur defilement. They were not to entrust money to them or have any business dealings with them, nor trust them with a secret, nor entrust orphans to their care, nor accompany them on a journey, nor give their daughter in marriage to any sons, nor invite them as guests or be their guests. They were shocked with the way in which Jesus freely received sinners and ate with them. Sinners nonetheless, were drawn to Jesus to hear him speak about the mercy of God. Jesus characteristically answered the Pharisees’ charge with a parable, a lesson drawn from everyday life experiences.



*Prayer:*

**Kia inoi tatou**

‘Lord, let your light dispel the darkness that what is lost may be found and restored. Let your light shine through me that others may see your truth and love and find hope and peace in you. May I never doubt your love nor take for granted your mercy you have shown to me. Fill me with your transforming love that I may be merciful as you are merciful.’ Through Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Saviour. Amen

*Rev Hone Te Rire, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand*

**Sunday, 19 March 2017**

Bible Readings: Matthew 16:25-26

**Inclusive Communities  
(Racial Justice)**



### What Are You Willing To Lose For A Just World?

*Reflection:*

Some claim that we live in a post-racial society and world. The reality suggests that if there is anything 'post,' it is the loss of 'heart' and 'compassion'. Because humankind 'cannot bear much reality' (T.S. Eliot), we tend to find ingenious ways of reasoning the 'injustices' away. Every week I receive a mailing that tracks racist attacks, xenophobia and discrimination of all sorts in Britain. That list can easily shatter hope. Consider how migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and others fleeing from war, the destruction of their country, terror, and displacement are represented in our media and treated at our gates. Can we honestly say that we live in a post-racial world?

I honestly wish we never had the need to 'bang on' about racial justice. But we do. So we continue to dream of and work towards building a community of love and respect. However, this is costly: for to follow Jesus is to live our lives for others. It is to become vulnerable. It is to live by the sage principle, that to gain is to lose and to lose is to gain. It is not about control and domination.

Every time we make ourselves vulnerable to the needs of those around us: give ourselves in love to another; and get out of our own way and seek not what we want but what needs to be changed around us, we come alive and catch a glimpse of abundant living, the way Jesus intends. This may mean more protest and spontaneous activism that put the well-being of the most vulnerable around us, first. And lest we forget: walking the Jesus way is for 'losers' – 'fools' for Christ. So consider this: what are you willing to lose for the stranger at our gate or the marginalised in our midst?

*Prayer:*

God-of-righteous-dreaming, give us an enlarged imagination to dream new possibilities, to imagine a world where transformation will happen, where creation is mended and restored, and where all can find a home and live justly in peace. Give us overflowing and extravagant hearts so that our whole lives may be full of, and mirror, your dream and promise of goodness and abundance. Amen

*Michael Jagessar, Global & Intercultural Ministries (Mission) United Reformed Church*

<http://globalcomment.com/migrants-in-britain-are-fighting-back-against-xenophobia-and-its-inspired-onedaywithoutus/>

**Sunday, 26 March 2017**

Bible Readings: Genesis 4: 8-12

**Human Trafficking**



### You Are Your Brother's/ Sister's Keeper

*Reflection:*

All over the world communities are condemning human trafficking, slavery, abuse and the like. However, there are people who 'nicodemusly' harbour such activities. Such people are cunning, deceptive and slippery. This is the character of Cain that is evident through the above reading.

Cain lures his brother to the field in order to achieve his objective. Then the Lord puts a question to Cain and the answer is, "I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?" Cain's response ends with a rhetorical question.

It is in Cain's answer that we ask many questions concerning human consciousness, where is human morality? Where are the responsible ethical values? How would I feel if I were the one treated as a commodity in the human trafficking transactions? At that moment Cain was dead in his conscience and only realised after the deed.

This is what happens with those involved in human trafficking and slavery; their participation in this is only meant to meet their selfish ends, probably to gain money and other riches. Our concern is their 'feelings' when they engage in this business, what do they feel and see when they start a conversation with a person, whom to them, is a prospective commodity/property? When they look into the eyes of that human being do they not see the image of God? How would they ignore God's presence in a human being? If they cannot see God, can't they see their own images in that human being?

Our mission as churches is, therefore, to plant a seed of sanctity in all humanity. That is a very important missing link. There is something that has to do with their make-up that makes them behave this way. Once a human being grasps the meaning of humanity and the values thereof then such acts as Human Trafficking, slavery and many others related to this will naturally and logically die out.

*Prayer:*

God our creator and Father, we pray for all humanity to live as per your plan and purpose. Our daily lives and destinies are yours. Teach us to respect each other in life and to know that you created us in your own image, we do not live for ourselves but for you. Reign over us Lord. Amen.

*Dingidlela Sibanda United Congregational Church of Southern Africa*

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### Maohi Protestant Church

Pray for the liberation of the Maohi people from existing abuses and divisions.

The Maohi people are the original people of this land, the land which taught the Maohi their language, customs, identity and belief. Today, on this Maohi land, different ethnic children are living, and, as parents, their heart and their hands are open to accommodate them. We recognize that the Maohi people today are all the children that the Fenua of Maohi Nui hosts: the Maohi, the Chinese, the Westerners, and many others, who recognize and accept the love and compassion of this Fenua. The one who knows love, also knows how to respect and honour the love of parents.

Please pray for the whole Church to listen to this teaching of love and compassion from God as the Fenua reminds us constantly. And that our faith in God will help the Maohi Protestant Church to build up the Maohi people so that we rediscover its freedom from existing abuses and divisions, and that its dignity and life may return.

### Uniting Presbyterian Church In Southern Africa



Guided by the theme: "A Spirit Driven Church" and under the leadership of Moderator of the General Assembly, the Rt. Rev Dr Robert Munthali, UPCSA continues the quest to exercise a prophetic witness to Christ.

*Pray For:*

- Successful implementation of the 5-year strategic plan.
- Reconciliation and cohesion in the church.
- UPCSA to be a missional church.

## Disturbing the Status Quo

### *Reflection:*

CWM is seeking to articulate the justice challenge posed by a radical faith agenda and to challenge churches to disturb the status quo where it is unjust and prevents the life in fullness which Jesus brings. CWM calls these unjust systems and death dealing structures "Empire" and recognises that the church is called to "Mission in the context of Empire." DARE is developing a faith perspective recognising the challenge of Jesus to give to God what is God's and to wonder what or who belongs to the Emperor.

We are children of God, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of all that is and is to come, who is calling all creation into new relationship with each other and with God. To this God we owe love and honour above all other and to whom we offer our lives and will as a gift in which God rejoices.

We are disciples of One who was condemned by Empire because he confronted injustice, hatred and hurt and counter-created justice, love and liberation. This counter-creation is at work amongst and beyond us through God's liberating Spirit.

We are citizens of a land that exists as a counter-reality in the many contexts we inhabit day by day. We seek to live as signs of this counter-reality through all we do in mission and witness. We are a people whose chains have been broken by Christ, and live under a call to liberating life, empowered by the Spirit, sharing in a mission that proclaims only one Lord to all powers, forces and systems.

### *Prayer:*

- Identify issues of injustice in your community and country.
- Pray for those who seek to bring about change and hope to these justice issues, including those in your own church and pray especially for the people most affected by injustice.
- Pray for CWM's DARE programme as it deepens our understanding of mission in the context of Empire

*Peter Cruchley, Mission Secretary, Mission Development*

## Deeds of Love and Words of Witness

### *Reflection:*

We live in an age where we should not expect people to respect the church automatically and to respond easily to the Christian faith. Whilst our faith may be of the greatest importance to us, we should not simply expect people to come and join us in the life of the local church and attend Sunday services. In many cases we have people who are third generation unchurched so they have no idea what goes on inside these large, and generally old and strange shaped buildings. They are seen as historic buildings rather than places that house living and vibrant faith communities.

For this reason it is vital that the faith we hold is shared in real and meaningful ways with the communities in which our churches are set. James offers us an insight into how the early church set about being both a community of faith and one that was involved in and meeting the needs of its local community. The bible verses show how faith and action go together. Whilst over the generations meeting needs may have been sufficient, we also need to be ready to talk about why we do what we do. If we take Jesus as our example, our actions will be followed by explanation. Talking about our faith will be natural to us as we reflect the love, care, compassion and hope that Christ freely gives to us day by day.

Our faith is holistic so it should affect the way we live our lives seven days a week. Faith and action naturally belong together. Evangelism should be as natural as breathing. As we live our lives each day we do so as people of faith and our faith should make a difference to how we relate to others – our deeds of love as well as our words of witness. The rest we may leave with God and the power of the Holy Spirit

### *Prayer:*

Loving God, take our lives and let them be used to offer signs of your love, peace, justice and hope. That in a darkened world your light may break through and people may come to know you as Christ and Saviour of the world. Amen

*Peter Ball, United Reformed Church*



### Love Won

#### *Reflection:*

What is so good about Good Friday? The disciples had left everything to follow him as someone who had given them hope. He had healed the sick and welcomed the outsider. He had made the blind see and the lame walk. The kingdom had come and love was alive – then the sky went black and he was dead. “Good” Friday?

Shattered dreams and dashed hopes looks like all he could deliver. What did they expect? One person armed with love against the power of the Roman Empire? One man’s welcome pitted against the religious leader’s zealous rule keeping. The disciples and friends of Jesus had a dream too and it had ended in tears.

And we know about the business of “Good Friday” and crucifixion because we crucify creation every day. In sweat shops where children work in deathly conditions. Where sea levels rise and the disappearing ozone layer yearns for change. Wherever people are unjustly imprisoned and exiled just for expressing their ideas. In the streets of towns and cities where we bomb, destroy and kill. Where global corporations avoid paying the taxes that pay nurses and teacher’s salaries. Whenever terrorists maim and kill in God’s name. We know about “Good Friday” and this day of crucifixion.

But whilst they nail his hands to the cross, spit in his face and plunge a spear in his side. As they put a crown of thorns on his head what does he do? “Father forgive them,” he says. “Today you will be with me in paradise,” “Woman here is your son,” he declares. Love is not defeated. Love wins.

“Come down from the cross and save yourself.” If he does then fear and hate win. The legions of Rome’s Empire and the clever words of the religious would win.

But Good Friday is good because love won.

#### *Prayer:*

Living God, whose Son Jesus Christ died on the cross for all creation;  
Show us, by his dying, how the place of defeat and despair can become the place of victory;  
And help us to bear our own cross,  
that we may see in it the victory of love.

Wayne Hawkins, Mission Secretary Europe

### New Life from the Ashes of Despair

#### *Reflection:*

14 November 1940 the bombers of the Luftwaffe bomb the city of Coventry (UK) with devastating effect. Great swathes of the city were destroyed by incendiary bombs including the largely wooden Coventry Cathedral church of St Michael. The day after the destruction the decision was taken to rebuild the cathedral as an act of faith and hope, despite the hopelessness and destruction of the world war raging all around.

Today Coventry Cathedral made up of two buildings, the charred ruins of the destroyed cathedral and, coming to life from these ruins, the new and modern Cathedral building, a lively and vibrant place of worship and reconciliation. Two charred roof timbers form a cross on the altar of the Cathedral ruins with the words “Father forgive” alongside. The new cathedral, opened in 1963, with the ruins and new building forming one Cathedral as a sign of new life rising from the ashes of despair.

In the gospel we read that the disciples “saw and believed”. But believed what? Not that Jesus was alive since we are told they did not understand the scripture and they returned home. No they believed Mary’s report that the tomb was empty. Beginning to discover the joy and mystery of the resurrection would come later that same Easter day.

Mary’s world is turned upside down when Jesus speaks her name. It is illogical, impossible and overthrows established patterns and expectations. Easter day is a new day. Jesus calling Mary’s name shatters her world and opens up a new future. Her language of status quo and how things usually happen is replaced by the language of new possibilities and a brand-new future. From the ruins of Coventry Cathedral springs a new modern Cathedral building and it’s now international “Ministry of Reconciliation” which works in war-torn places of conflict to bring about reconciliation and hope. Not the business of revenge and the cycle of hate and violence. Even in the midst of the sorrow of Good Friday we can discover resurrection life.

#### *Prayer:*

Living Jesus, You first made yourself known at Easter to those who loved and missed you most. Make yourself known today to those cut off from you; those burdened by guilt or who do not feel loved, any for whom joy has disappeared from living.

As you dealt kindly with those who questioned, deal kindly with our closed mindedness and where we feel resurrection is too good to be true. Make yourself known to us and set us free. Amen.

Wayne Hawkins, Mission Secretary Europe



### Tackling The Root Cause

*Reflection:*

Development has become the norm of our contemporary world, and the symbol of developments includes massive infrastructures.

To be developed a country needs to adhere to the demands of a global system that dictates the norms of today. Norms which align with the principles of the system, and if we look closer and carefully at this system, it works only for a very few in the world, it benefits the rich and the powerful leaving the whole of creation at their disposal to ravish and exploit. This includes the poor, the marginalized, the unfortunate, women, children as well as the whole of creation.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus, in response to the disciples' admiration of the beauty of the structures, responded by saying that there will come a time when that beauty will no longer be there. Jesus' response goes beyond the structure, and he sees what is behind that beautiful Temple. Jesus saw that the Temple has become the centre of a suppressive system that enslaves and exploits the people. It was a system that focuses on making profits for a few, who tends to dictate to the people what they should, and saying that it is the Will of God. It is false endorsement of beliefs and laws as if it was the Will of God that gave the system total control and power over the people and creation as a whole. Jesus in His statement made it clear to his disciples' that the core of his mission is to fight against such unjust systems and to liberate God's people including God's creation

Climate Change is not the problem; rather it is the outcome of the problem. The problem we are dealing with here is the economic system that prioritizes making more and more profit at the cost of the lives of the poor and the vulnerable, and the cost of destroying mother Earth. It is a system of oppression and destruction which favours only the rich and the powerful. Jesus calls all believers to stand up and undo this well-structured system no matter how tempting and beautiful it may look. To tackle the issue of Climate Change, we need to destroy the root cause of the problem, which is pulling down and the destruction of the dominant economic system that is based on greed and avaricious attitudes of a few.

*Prayer:*

Lord, we ask that you fill us with courage and wisdom to be active in dismantling structures which perpetuate injustice in all creation. Amen

Tafue M Lusama, Ekalesia Kelisiano Tuvalu



### Presbyterian Church in Taiwan

*Pray:*

- That the PCT will continue to be a voice of conscience for a nation that has a new leadership in President Tsai Ing-Wen and the Democratic Progressive Party.
- That the transitional justice process for the Indigenous Peoples and the era of "White Terror" will be smoothly implemented for the sake of justice and reconciliation.
- That the 2017 International Forum about the Mission of the PCT Today will be successfully held with a positive outcome.



### Congregational Christian Church Samoa

*Pray For:*

- **Our land and heritage**  
There is an influx of foreign investors, contractors and business people into our country taking over a lot of businesses and our people can't compete with them.
- **Violence**  
Violence in our land is growing dramatically. Respect, which was valued by Samoans, is fading. The government and churches can't even solve the problem of school kids fighting in the town area.
- **Relationship between members of different Christian denominations**  
Things that should unite us (like the Holy Communion and baptism) are the very things that divides us and become subjects of heated debates among the members of different denominations.

A P R

A P R

### The Power of Prayer and Fasting

*Reflection:*

Prayer and fasting are linked in scripture. "Fasting is not a legalistic requirement but a spontaneous reaction under special circumstances. Some, like Luther, Whitefield, Edwards, Brainerd, and Martyn, found it a spiritually rewarding practice." (Sanders, 1977 p.131)

In Matthew 17:14-21, a father in distress came to Jesus to request healing for his son. He complained that Jesus' disciples had failed to set his son free. Jesus rebuked all present for their lack of faith. The boy was then set free by Jesus Christ.

The disciples asked Jesus privately why they failed to heal the boy, Jesus answered: "Because of your unbelief...if you have faith as little as a grain of mustard seed, you shall say to this mountain, remove hence to yonder place; and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible unto you. Howbeit this kind goeth not out but by **prayer and fasting.**"

Just like this father's desperate need for help, many persons with needs look to the church for help. In some cases the church has failed them, yet in other cases support is rendered.

After the son was healed, Jesus' disciples came to him to ask him why they failed to help the desperate father. Jesus gave two reasons for the disciples' failure, namely, their lack of faith and prayerlessness. We need to pray and fast and have faith that God will work through us.

As Partners in Mission the power of public ministry is dependent on how much time we spend in private communion with God praying, fasting and waiting for instructions.

William and I have had similar situations like the disciples, wondering why the ministry seemed stagnant at times and our efforts seemingly insignificant. With prayer and fasting we have realised that God's work, be it small or great, cannot be done in our strength. Prayer and fasting must always accompany our human skills.

*Prayer:*

Lord, we humbly come to you, confessing our prayerlessness as we have engaged in many activities of ministry. We thank you for your grace and mercy in working through us despite our failure to seek your face consistently. We pray this in Jesus name, Amen.

*Elizabeth Chirwa, Partner in Mission from United Church in Zambia serving in Jamaica*

## The Workplace – Arena For Ministry

### *Reflection:*

This is Labour Day weekend in Malawi and it is an ideal time to focus on the issue of work and labour as God delineated it for us in the word. As the world of work is very broad, this text helps us to look at hospitals and health centres as workplaces where God could be glorified. The healing of the royal official's son is one of the overlooked texts in John's Gospel despite being the second miracle performed by Jesus soon after the event at Cana of Galilee (John 2:1-12). In the narrative we come across a high ranking official who approached Jesus seeking healing for his son. Being a high ranking official the majority of Galileans would not have been comfortable to associate with such a man. The heart of the story is the assertion that even a royal official in Galilee, a man with high reputation could respond to Jesus' healing ministry and his request was granted.

The lesson to those working in health professions and to us all is that Jesus and the life he gives, knows no borders. Members of congregations affiliated to CWM and beyond working in the health sector ought to respond positively to Jesus' powerful message in the story. They need to understand that they are called to serve the Lord in and through their work, to be ambassadors of another way of life and work. It is too easy to slip back into an attitude that my work doesn't really matter except maybe for my paycheck and the tithes to God's real work it enables. But this is unbiblical. What we do in the workplace does matter to God. The workplace is our arena of service to demonstrate love to God, and our neighbours. It is not just about money. Therefore, in our workplaces let us break social, economic, religious and political barriers in order to give life as Jesus did in this narrative.

### *Prayer:*

We pray for the health care givers in all our CWM congregations and beyond. We remember medical doctors, nurses, chiropractors, physio-therapists, dentists, dietitians, hospital administrators and managers, pharmaceutical researchers and students preparing for such vocations, and all working in any capacity in health care. May the Almighty God use them in the healing ministry in our troubled world through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Amen.

*Goodwin Zainga, Churches of Christ in Malawi*



## Life in Fullness

### *Reflection:*

The gospel of Jesus Christ promises fullness of life to all (John 10:10). This promise is imperative in a world that experiences despair. The Church carries with her the claims and promises of the gospel.

Our churches in the Gordonia Region of the United Congregational Church of Southern Africa are mostly in rural communities and provide a sense of hope for those trying to make a living on the edge of the Kgalagadi dessert. In this region we have communities that are not much different from the 1st century Palestine where Jesus participated in the suffering and struggles of those who were under Imperial occupation.

Whilst people in the Gordonia and other regions may not be under political occupation, they nevertheless are under economic imperialism. Almost all the crops and goods that are produced in this region are under the control of multi-national corporations. After they are harvested they are exported. One effect on the livelihood of communities, is that the poor never have anything they can call their own. The only "benefit" they have from this Empire economy is selling their labour whereas the produce is intended for overseas markets.

This is the context under which our church and the other churches in this area have to exercise ministry.

What are the narratives of life in our communities and how do the people survive in spite of Empire? In order for us to be able to live and promote justice we need to acknowledge and empower those people in our countries and communities who work for justice.

CWM's mission and vision statements call us to an ecclesiological transformation. As we re-position ourselves as a movement for justice and empowerment of communities, let us consider how we can affirm the village life concept and deepen the capacities of survival and resistance as we work towards life in fullness.

### *Prayer:*

Loving God, may your presence shake us to make your words of promise become flesh. Assist those suffering because of unfair trade, those developing new ways of trading and those making choices about what they sell or buy. Help us to share the good news of Christ who says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it in its fullness." Amen

*Wellington Mthobisi Sibanda, United Congregational Church of Southern Africa*

### Congregational Federation



*Pray For:*

- **Bible study**  
Feedback from summer camp 2016 indicates that the young people wanted to learn more about their bible, to be diligent in reading the bible and prayer. Pray that they will receive the encouragement and resources to do so.
- **People in churches**  
After a recent consultation it was noted that churches need more people. Churches talked about loneliness, poverty, a declining interest in 'church' and the need for more prayer.
- **Discipleship of persons with learning difficulties**  
Our learning and development department is developing a programme and ask for prayer.

### Church of North India



*Pray For:*

- Mission Evangelism in the Church of North India: Evangelism as an ongoing mission of the Church is also addressed in CNI mission proprieties for the decade 2010-2020 under the heading "Evangelism and Spiritual Revival".
- Theological Education, particularly amongst women.
- Various programmes for the dalit and tribal communities.

### Disability Advocacy Project

*Reflection:*

Paul speaks of the body as a metaphor for the church. It's meant to be a vision of mutuality and community. The church gathers together its many parts and peoples into a whole that honours our belonging in diversity. This metaphor reminds us of our actual bodies, our individual selves, how varied we are, and sometimes how vulnerable and strong we are too.

CWM seeks to build life-affirming missional congregations. Missional congregations work towards the fullness of life that Christ brings from and with the full range of persons and resources in its midst. When the church embodies and works for life in fullness, abundant life flows and can be shared with the communities our congregations serve. As part of this vision, CWM is seeking to inspire new work within the member churches to advocate the life and leadership of people with disabilities within the mission of the churches.

People living with disabilities represent more than 15% of the world's population. Many experience exclusion, preventing their creative contributions to church and society. This exclusion arises from daily prejudice, which is prevalent in the society. Sadly, this is true within the church too, where attitudes, biases and physical premises and theological (mis) understanding, create barriers that exclude. It is also clear that disability, marginalisation and poverty often go together. The World Bank estimates that approximately 20% of the poorest people in the world have some kind of disability.

This means that the 'one body', the church, often discriminates against others based on their bodies, minds or abilities. And this divides the body and prevents us being one in wholeness.

Focus in prayer on your own body. What feels well or unwell? What makes up each part of you? Yet, what is the whole of you?

*Prayer:*

Pray for all who experience discrimination because they are seen to be disabled. Pray for the church to find new ways to live and work that honour the contributions, insight and leadership of people with disabilities.

*Peter Cruchley, Mission Secretary, Mission and Development*

**A Missional Response**

*Reflection:*

Too often we fail to hear our children and youth. Even when we say we are listening to them we are not really hearing what they have to say. "You're too young & inexperienced to know what's best," we tell them. "You don't know what you're talking about." We refuse to believe that we can learn anything from them or that they have anything worthwhile to share. After all, we think, God only uses older people with experience to do God's work.

On the day of Pentecost Peter reminded those present of those words of God spoken through the prophet Joel: "I will pour out my Spirit on ALL people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your YOUNG men will see vision..." Many years later, we, too, need to be reminded of those words. God often uses young people to bring a message of hope and healing to this world. We must be willing to hear that message and to recognize the presence of the Holy Spirit in the lives of our children and youth.

The church is called upon to provide places and spaces where young people and children feel safe and secure enough to discover and to express themselves. We must recognize and celebrate our children so that they will be empowered to bring God's message to the world.

During a mission weekend in our congregation, a child who was celebrating her 7th birthday requested that, instead of gifts, her guests bring food for the church's food pantry. Although only 5 guests were invited, the response was so great that she was able to donate 6 grocery bags full. Parents were so moved by the selflessness of this young child that they were more than generous with donations. Through the actions of a child, adults were made aware of the plight of the hungry in our community and other children were led to do the same. Surely this child followed the prompting of the Holy Spirit?

*Prayer:*

Nurturing God,  
give us the wisdom and the understanding to nurture our children and youth so that they will be empowered to prophesy to the world. Fill them with the courage to share your vision - your message - with all who need to hear it. In Jesus' name. Amen.

*Laura Ebanks, Cayman region of The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands*

**Go And Tell That Fox**

*Reflection:*

This scripture comes after Jesus made some definition or explanation on what the Kingdom of God is like (v18). He also gave an explanation of who can enter and how. The reaction of the Pharisees suggests that they were listening attentively and didn't like what they heard or did not agree with it.

The scripture is not clear regarding the reason Herod wanted to kill Jesus. Let us use deductive reasoning. The first possibility is that Herod didn't want to kill Jesus but it was the desire of the Pharisees that he be killed. But why would they create such stories? Jesus was preaching the Kingdom of God which was the opposite of that of the Roman Empire of which Herod was a governor and the Pharisees were beneficiaries politically and economically. Any statement that may suggest an alternative to Roman Empire would make them lose their privileged status.

The second possibility is that indeed Herod wanted to kill Jesus. This would mean that Jesus was considered a political threat. Herod was the governor of the Northern Province appointed by the Emperor. One of his duties was to make sure that the province remains loyal to the Emperor. To allow Jesus to preach alternative kingdom and economy would have meant that he loses the governorship.

The scripture suggests to the reader that as we fight empire there are some who are benefiting from its existence. Those who benefit from empire are not concerned about the people entering the kingdom of God (religious, economic and political liberation); they would rather kill the very content of mission.

The CWM DARE program is designed to equip the people of God to go and tell that 'fox' (empire), as an institution or ideology, that the mission of God is still around to 'disturb' empire by providing radical hope, healing and assurance through the presentation of the alternative kingdom.

*Prayer:*

Lord, we have need of courage, we have need of confidence, we have need of assurance of your presence and strength us as we confront the systems and people who protect privilege and enforce empire. May we be faithful followers of Christ. Amen.

*Sindiso Jele, Mission Secretary, Africa*



**Walking in The Footsteps of Jesus**

*Reflection:*

While most of the world seemed busy catering to many other issues and concerns, human trafficking became a worldwide epidemic.

According to the Global Slavery Index (GSI) there are nearly 36 million victims of human trafficking worldwide, out of which nearly two-thirds, are from Asian countries. Amongst the Asian Countries, India tops the list with 14 million victims of trafficking. Men, women and children are illegally trafficked within Indian states and to different countries from India. In India, economic factors do contribute to the increase of such cases and a significant number of trafficked women are subjected to prostitution and children to forced labour as factory workers, domestic servants, beggars, and agriculture workers, and have even been used as armed combatants by some terrorist and insurgent groups.

After his struggle with temptation without yielding to compromise Jesus began his work in the power of the Holy Spirit in Galilee where he taught in the synagogues. In His message, Jesus focussed on four things, firstly, the proclamation of the good news of the Gospel, secondly, to heal the broken hearted, thirdly, to set the captives free and fourthly, to give sight to the blind.

When He ascended into heaven, God chose the Church, empowered by the Holy Spirit, to be His representative on earth. It is a fact that the Church is specifically charged with showing love to others.

It is time for us to join hands in reaching out to the vulnerable and victims of trafficking and help them experience the God of all comfort who comforted us. This is truly walking in the footsteps of Jesus.

*Prayer:*

God of life, truth and freedom, we come into your presence while we pray for and work for those who are at risk. We are determined to contribute our very best to wipe this deadly menace of human trafficking from the face of earth. Our Heavenly Father, give us the wisdom and courage to stand in solidarity with such, so that together we will find ways to the freedom that is your gift to all of us. Amen.

*Alwan Masih, Church of North India*

Over the next four weeks we will be focusing on CWM Values culminating in a celebration of CWM Sunday on 16 July.

### CWM VALUES



**Sunday, 25 June 2017**

Bible Readings: Genesis 29: 1-35

**CWM Values...  
Justice in relationships**

#### The Gift Of One Another

*Reflection:*

Laban had two daughters; the one was called Leah and she was the older one. The younger was Rachel. Rachel had great physical beauty which contrasted Leah's who had 'weak' eyes. Her eye condition diminished her physical beauty to the extent that she was coerced into a marriage triangle with her own sister.

Leah's physical were an obstacle to being completely accepted, even in her marriage. Her unhappiness was therefore not a short term, temporary discomfort. It was a life-long struggle that trapped in the social conventions of her society which left little room for women and even less room for women with deformities. Leah's four children demonstrate her yearning for the unconditional acceptance and love. Her ability to birth boy children, which in her culture elevated women's social status, did not fill the void she felt and the injustice she endured. Her desire for love and acceptance became her main focus in life.

Leah's story is the story of many who are socially, economically and culturally marginalised. Injustice in relationships deprives a person of dignity and their God-given worth. When people are deprived of their worth, they can become so completely immobilised they fail to realise their potential to experience fullness of life. That is true of individuals and communities who are subjected to injustice. The world and communities are the poorer for not welcoming the particular gifts of the marginalised.

A missional church opens up to the stories and experiences of the socially marginalised out of a conviction that all are created in God's image. Leah's story shows that injustice in relationships begins in families. Unjust social conventions that prevent them from making their own choices, to discover their gifts and to contribute to the community need to be deconstructed. The church has a mandate to promote justice in all relationships – family, across gender, age, social and cultural lines. God-given worth is not culturally, socially or economically determined. It cannot, therefore, be determined that way. It is a gift of God that the Church must uphold.

*Prayer:*

Lord God, you created us with worth and as partners in your mission. Lord Jesus, friend of all, lead us to affirming ways in relationships. Spirit of God, inspire just actions in us towards others. Forgive us when we diminish and objectify others.

*Kuzipa Nalwamba, Mission Secretary, Communications*

### **An Alternative Understanding of Family**

*Reflection:*

The violence of Empire under which Jesus lived wreaked havoc on community. Common people were witness to how the violence of Empire destroyed community, and broke up family. In this text we see Empire rip apart mother and child.

Empire destroys families and communities but Jesus rebuilds them by creating fresh and sometimes unexpected relationships. Jesus' vision of community and family is not inward looking. In this third word on the cross Jesus expands our understanding of family and community. By calling his mother Mary and the disciple into being mother and son he re-creates the meaning of family and community. Family and community are then not based on kinship or blood ties but rather on a culture of caring for each other, especially in the face of Empire's cruelty.

When Jesus called his mother and disciple into a community and family based on love and care it was not just an act of sentiment, it is also an act of resistance. It was not just about making a grieving mother feel a little better. It was about creating relationships that could weather and overcome the pain Empire inflicts.

This means something for us today. We are often caring towards our own families, protective of our own blood, our own norms. By his death on the cross and the words that he spoke there, Jesus is calling us into an alternative understanding of community and family – that we will look beyond our kinship ties, our caste based communities to build communities that are based on an inclusive care and love. As a church we exclude ourselves from full communion with others on the basis of blood, caste or because of the way Empire teaches us to despise certain groups. Jesus calls us to discover new relationships of mutuality and interdependence that go beyond our traditional understanding of how relationships are formed. This calls us into forging new partnerships of mutuality and dependence that turn Empire upside down and let fullness of life flourish because they are based on equality and justice.

*Prayer:*

Heavenly God, Adopted Mother, enable us to understand that in naming you as parent we are also naming each other as siblings. Enable us to move beyond the narrow confines of family towards being a radical community of equals. Amen

*Sudipta Singh, Mission Secretary, Research and Capacity Development*

**A Hopeful Alternative**

*Reflection:*

Paul addresses those living in Rome, at the heart of the Empire, who put Jesus to death and were persecuting the early church. In the midst of the conflict and struggle of that context Paul's vision of life in God's service there is founded upon a deep generosity of Spirit. This spirit shows itself in hopefulness, generosity and empathy, not despair, intolerance or vindictiveness. Thus God's people hold on to their dignity whatever Empire does to them. This prevents them from becoming bitter or discouraged. They can be hopeful, even if the Empire seems unstoppable. They can be generous even in the little Empire allows them. They can feel and act like human beings, even if Empire wants to dehumanise them. The early Church's generosity of Spirit was a form of resistance and a way of evangelism. Through their care for the vulnerable and their commitment to Jesus the early church began to offer the people of Empire an alternative to Caesar, and moved by their generosity of spirit these people began to convert.

CWM sees mission now like mission then, in Rome. We too are carrying out mission in the context of Empire and need a spirituality that can resist and convert, that is a hopeful alternative to the forces oppressing us and our planet. Our life in God's service needs an empathy with each other and the earth that converts us to live in sustainable ways. It needs a generosity that builds fresh understanding between peoples, especially where there is hurt and hostility. This requires hope, a hope that heals our wounds and our disappointments. This flows from sharing our stories together in mission, encouraging and inspiring us on anew in our service to God's vision of fullness of life through Christ.

*Prayer:*

Pray for God's people experiencing persecution, that they might have courage and grace.

Pray for God's people who have become judgemental that they might discover Jesus' radical love afresh.

Pray for God's people to keep hope in God's transforming power.

*Peter Cruchley - Mission Secretary, Mission and Development*

**CWM Sunday - Celebrating Our Common Humanity**

*Reflection:*

Today is being observed as CWM Sunday throughout all our member churches; and it is a good time to remind ourselves that CWM is a partnership of 32 churches in 42 countries around the world. We are diverse in cultures, economies, politics and convictions, among other things. And yet we claim to be a partnership in which everyone gives and receives as circumstances dictate. This partnership is grounded in our claim that we are all called by Jesus Christ to be his disciples.

Unity in Diversity, is one of the four values of CWM to which we have been paying attention during this month of July. Consider these hypothetical questions:

- What if The Democratic People's Republic of Korea were right? They claim that in order for North and South Korea, now divided, to be reunited they should agree to exist as one country with two separate political administrations as the starting point for peaceful reunification? Behind this claim may very well be the thought that it is not so simple and easy to 'kiss and say goodbye' to decades of entrenched hostility and polarisation. However, if foreign military presence were withdrawn and all Koreans, of the North, South and abroad, were to embrace one another, borders could be opened up, walls broken down and the path cleared for a new future to emerge. What if...?
- And what if the Israeli-Palestinian conflict were to cease, with Israel putting an end to occupation of the Gaza strip, dismantle refugee camps and agree to putting decades of peace talks into peace-making actions? What if...?
- And what if the United States Congress were to lift the economic embargo on Cuba without demanding conformity to its political ideology? And what if attitudes that trigger talks about building a 'Mexican wall' were to be confronted and conversations about welcoming hospitality across borders emerge? What if...?
- And what if people of different faith, traditions and persuasions could unite around the essentials, to do with human dignity, the integrity of creation and the economy of life? In so doing we would affirm our common humanity, acknowledge the view that 'there are more things that unite us than they are that divide us', and attest to the world that 'United, we are strong'. What if...?

*To be continued next page*

**CWM Sunday - Celebrating Our Common Humanity  
(Continued)**

All of these are hypothetical questions but they all relate to real situations in which human lives are at stake. Can we imagine for a moment what life would be like if we were to rise above our differences and start to claim and celebrate the things that unite us – our common humanity, our common need for love and attention, our common fears and insecurities and our common passion for a better world?

In his 1st letter to the Corinthians, St Paul asserts that in Christ, all are one; and on that basis appeals to the divided and fragmented community to agree with one another - in other words, learn to live in peace with one another (1 Cor 1:10-17). Without perpetuating the notion that unity means uniformity, Paul pleads with the community to affirm their diversity as a necessary gift to support the effectiveness of the body (1 Cor 12: 12-27).

CWM is a good example of what is possible when diverse peoples come together to pursue common interests, share common goals, affirm our common humanity and celebrate our oneness in Christ. And yet we have a long way to go in living out our mission – “Called to partnership in Christ to mutually challenge, encourage and equip churches to share in God’s mission”.

*Prayer:*

As Jesus prayed for the unity of the community, so we pray:

- That we may all be enriched by our diversity rather than divided by our differences
- That peoples divided by race, gender, religion or creed, may embrace our common humanity and therein find unity of purpose
- That the God of grace may meet us at the point of our need and bring us together as one united people

*Rev Dr Collin I. Cowan, CWM General Secretary*



**Wonderful Creation**

*Reflection:*

God created everything of this world and every time He looked at His creation He found it all so wonderful. God did not create our world by chance but with love and purpose and as expression of His love.

God started with nothing. But as stewards and coworkers with God we can’t create anything without any part of God’s original creation. Each new day affords us ever more increasing revelation of God’s person and glory.

He has handed over this wonderful creation into the hands of humankind (Genesis 1: 28-29) not only to enjoy, but to protect and preserve as stewards. Stewardship is a great responsibility to love and care for the whole creation as God does. When we go away from or abuse our responsibility it is as if we disfigure that image. Everything was made for the glory of God. When we destroy any part of creation we disrupt God’s glory and rebel against God’s will.

Today because of human greed, negligence and ignorance God’s wonderful creation is under threat. We harm creation to fulfill our desires. This is sinful. Human beings are a unique part of this creation made to live in harmony with all creation.

As long as there is creation there is a testimony to the person and glory of God through general revelation! The ‘word became flesh’ to express God’s love for the world and to save the world from its bondage to sin.

Through our overwhelming exploitation we are destroying creation, disobeying our Lord and creating problems for ourselves and for generations to come. The time has come to cap our greed and misuse of natural resources. As disciples of Christ and new creation in Christ we are to be responsible stewards of God’s creation.

*Prayer:*

Almighty loving God, we praise you and thank you for your creation. You have created us in your image and given us the responsibility of stewardship to preserve and protect our universe so that we may able to glorify your name. Forgive us O God because through our greed and misbehaviour we are destroying your wonderful creation. Help us and guide us to understand our responsibility to this creation through your son Jesus Christ who has come to this world to save it and save us. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

*Bishop Paul Sarker, Church of Bangladesh*



**Doing What Love Requires**

*Reflection:*

Human trafficking – the “use of force, fraud, or coercion to obtain some type of labour or commercial sex act”<sup>1</sup> – has been around for millennia. The account of Joseph being sold into slavery by his brothers is one recorded instance of human trafficking in the Bible. Here, in a story of intrigue, rivalry and betrayal, Joseph’s brothers decide to get rid of him by selling him to a band of Midianites on their way to Egypt. They took advantage of a thriving slave trade between Egypt and Canaan, Joseph’s homeland. From that moment, Joseph’s life became a nightmare, beginning with a thirty-day journey through the desert during which he would have been handled like merchandise and eventually sold like property. His brothers must have felt they had succeeded getting rid of the “dreamer.” That’s the horrid story, not just of Joseph, but it is likely of all who have been caught in the vice-grip of human trafficking.

For Joseph the story has a happy ending (see Genesis 50:20). Joseph emerged safe and sound from the dehumanization of being trafficked, because of God’s sovereignty and grace. But what about the many others who have been trafficked into degrading and brutalizing conditions? Many of them will, unfortunately, end up on life’s rubbish heap as “damaged goods.” Are these victims not candidates of God’s redeeming love and grace too?

Our Scripture passage does not explicitly give us a solution to the problem of human trafficking, but it reminds us that all manifestations of human suffering caused by injustice, dehumanization and oppression are also opportunities for us to demonstrate what God’s love requires to alleviate such suffering. We must become involved in the struggle against exploitation as the instruments of God’s love and grace so that we may help make the end of Joseph’s story a reality for many more persons.

*Prayer:*

Sovereign Lord, we confess that we have not taken seriously your call to identify with the vulnerable and oppressed who suffer daily, many of whom we don’t notice. We pray, not only for your forgiveness, but also for your empowerment and wisdom that we may find ways of subverting the powers that continue to perpetuate human suffering, and so become instruments of your peace. Amen.

*Norman Francis, United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands*

<sup>1</sup>US Department of Homeland Security.



**United Reformed Church**



Pray with the URC against the background of the Referendum on Britain's relationship with the European Union which has unsettled and challenged our society. Our church abhors and resists racism, and finds that it has been given new oxygen by the decision.

- Pray with us for our hopes for the future. A society
- which welcomes the stranger
  - where the poor are at the centre
  - which values young people
  - which shares the planet fairly and works for global peace
  - which participates fully in democracy

Pray in our centenary year that we will rejoice in the past, drawing on its faith and shape the future with confidence and courage. Join us in solidarity and prayer as we make our Church House building more acceptable and more flexible in use.



**The United Church in Jamaica and the Cayman Islands**

*Pray about:*

- **Crime and violence in Jamaica** – escalating violence is impacting lives leaving many grieving and worried.
- **Economic challenges in Jamaica and Cayman** – there are political and economic goals for growth. Pray for wisdom in decision making and a commitment to just and effective business practices.
- **UCJCI Renewal and Transformation Agenda** – efforts to be relevant and responsive to the needs of the community while challenging membership towards active discipleship.
- **UCJCI Child Care & Protection emphasis** – making congregational spaces safe for children and those who work with them is a priority for UCJCI. Pray for the successful implementation of measures to accomplish this goal.

Bible Readings: John 6: 1-14



**So Much To Offer**

*Reflection:*

I think Andrew's response to the child who offered his lunch that day was not only typical of his era, but often persists today: "There's a little boy here with five loaves and two fish, but what good is that with all these people?"

But what good is that with all these people?

How often do we, in our churches, underestimate the potential of children to share? Children have so much to contribute – they can pray for others, serve, sing, dance, act, play instruments, share their testimonies and more - but we, like Andrew, too often dismiss children or completely ignore their offerings.

I wonder if when people saw the example of the little boy giving Jesus his five loaves of bread and two fish, they too were inspired to look inside their coats and share the food that they brought with them, food they were coveting for themselves. Maybe the real transformation inspired by a child, was not of the loaves, but of five thousand selfish hearts. The Bible says: "A little child shall lead them."

I wonder....do we create opportunities for children and young people in our faith communities to show us the way of Jesus? Are we willing to learn from the young people in our midst? "Unless you become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven." (Matthew 13:8)

*Prayer:*

Lord help us to open our hearts to the young people in our midst and encourage them to share your love and transform your world. Amen

*Jill Kayser, Kids Friendly, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand*

AUG

AUG



### Harmony and Unity

*Reflection:*

Two beautiful scenarios emerge in this scripture to show the excellence of brotherly and sisterly love. There is blessing in loving each other in friendship, companionship, and fellowship as an expression of the Kingdom of Heaven. The first image is of poured precious oil on the whole body from head to toes. The oil used in this gesture was precious, expensive and for special occasions and used as a blessing to a person, as in the case of Aaron, the priest-to-be. Oil signified grace from Lord and God's plan for cohesion in the community.

Oil had many uses, in those days. It was used for baking, as a fuel, a gift and spread on bread. It was also used for ritual anointing, offering, sacrifice and for healing. Oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. Oil has healing properties used for treatment of wounds, pain relief and to moisturize skin. Anointing was used to consecrate and sanctify priests, making them acceptable before God.

In the context of Christian fellowship, brothers and sisters are called to live together, bless each other, heal broken hearts and relieve grief by listening to and accompanying one another. Are our brothers and sisters special enough for us to care enough to listen to them and accompany them?

The second image is that of the dew (clouds) of Hermon which make the hills with dry fields moist wherever they are carried. Hermon was a high mountain from which running streams and rivers began. The wet and moist climate around Hermon did not spread to lower parts of central of Zion. Hermon and Zion are depicted as brothers. Even though, they each inhabited different conditions they are called to live in unity, each offering the other what they lack as a symbol of unity in God's Kingdom.

Such harmony of existence requires kindness, offering support, healing wounds and relieving pain. Living happily together in mutual service to one another as brothers and sisters is a blessing of God. A missional congregation needs to demonstrate such consecrated mutual service as a model for community life.

*Prayer:*

Dear Lord, help us to consecrate ourselves to You today.  
Please bestow upon our brothers and sisters each one, each day. Amen

*Pastor Janet Ng, CWM Director, Hong Kong Council of the Church of Christ in China*



### Fullness of Life in Jesus

*Reflection:*

There is no denying that the purpose of God sending God's only son into the world is for the salvation of humankind – a salvation which implies not only eternal life after death but fullness of life for human beings on earth irrespective of gender, class, race, colour and creed.

However, we spend each day facing challenges. We are being denied the life which God has planned for us. Empire is working in and within us till today, and this is a challenge. Economic injustice, robbing people of their opportunities, unequal participation in the life and ministry of the church, oppression, violence, irresponsible stewardship over creation are not what God has designed for us.

If we ask who or what is to be blamed, the answer is you and me. We are given clear conscience to do right and wrong. God doesn't force us. Instead God gave us the ability to resist evil but we deny God's work within us and develop attitudes of selfishness, pride, greed, arrogance; all of which is life-denying.

Jesus came to earth so that human beings may have life, life in abundance. Through his ministry, death and resurrection, Jesus promises both salvation and sustenance for human beings; in short, fullness of life. Jesus brings life. His ministry was wholly directed towards bringing physical and spiritual salvation to human beings. Under his protection and by his gift Jesus wants us to experience the best life can offer. He was crucified because he challenged the Empire. Even though he died, his resurrection brings hope and fullness of life. Therefore, our experience of God, faith in God, and our theological reflection should be stimulated to develop sensitivity to people around us, become motivated to get involved in mission and develop mission strategies. Jesus can give a whole new meaning to living because he provides full satisfaction and perfect guidance; and this is the life which we should aspire to live.

*Prayer:*

Dear Lord, in solitude we pray for:  
A better nation; better society;  
better community, better church;  
better family, better world;  
Where we become what you made us to be;  
and everyone finds complete fullness of life!

*Hmar Lalmuanpuii, Presbyterian Church of India, Face to Face Zambia 2013.*

**Sunday, 3 September 2017**



### **Maohi Protestant Church**

Pray about nuclear contamination.

50 years after the French government decided to conduct nuclear testing in Maohi Nui, 193 bombs were exploded in our air and land environment. We will have to wait for 240 000 years before all traces of radioactivity disappear. The land, the sea and the sky have been contaminated. The islands of Mururoa and Fangataufa are stained and cracked and they may collapse in the future, and cause a tidal wave that could wipe out Tureia and its neighbouring islands.

According to the Social Insurance Fund, 7400 Maohi nationals are suffering from cancer related to nuclear testing. Judicial approaches led by 7 affected cases gained favourable issue, but only 2 were compensated. Today, infants are suffering from leukaemia and thyroidal affections, and it seems that the consecutive medical disorders from internal or external exposure to ionizing radiation are genetically transferable.

The Maohi Protestant Church is extremely concerned at the attitude of the French State which pays no real attention to the woes of the people. The Maohi Superior Council hopes that "July 2" will be retained as the Memorial Date for the people to remember the doomed destiny that the French State gave them since that day, but also in memory of the ongoing struggle of the Church for the victory of truth and justice.

### The Great Gathering

*Reflection:*

I once was asked "Have you already evangelized your family, Pastor?"

I grew up in a Catholic family. I was in my second year in college when I came to know Jesus Christ and started to follow him. I started to go to the United Methodist Church; years have passed since God called me in the ministry. My family, my two mothers and my siblings supported me all the way. My decision to become a pastor is a continuous journey for us as a family and it is not an easy journey. There were struggles and challenges but we hold each other in prayer and love.

In church I was told that bringing your family in church is an act of love. It is the first step of showing your love for your family, sharing Jesus, they said. I love my family so much and believe me I would like to worship with them on Sundays, I like the idea of praying and singing with them in worship services. But I also respect their faith and I see them growing in faith and love as they respect mine.

Isaiah 56 is not about a return of the Israelite exiles. It promises that every person who calls on the name of the Lord will be gathered and this vision was extended to the foreigners, to the eunuchs and the outcasts of Israel. Israel's vision about this great gathering invites the outsiders to come in.

Sharing Jesus Christ, his love and salvation is not just about reciting the magical prayer "I accept you, Jesus as my Lord and Saviour." Sharing Jesus Christ is also about radical inclusivity.

Evangelizing is also sitting with the strangers, with the outcasts, with the LGBTQI's, with the poor and eats with them and looking at them as special as you.

*Prayer:*

Loving Parent God,  
Thank you for giving us courage to love, thank you for giving us strength to hope. Continue to walk with us as we keep on trying to love others as ourselves. Help us to work in building safe places and spaces for all. Amen.

*Carleen Namorosa, Face to Face in India 2015.*

### Where There's A Word, There's A Way

*Reflection:*

What does doing God's mission look like in the Netherlands in the 21st century? One of the main challenges in a context of a declining church is to go back to basics and transform to be a light-footed church for the future. We know that where the Word is, there is a way forward for our church. What does that way look like?

In Luke 10: 1-16 we hear about the appointment of 72 people who are sent, as missionaries you could say, each and every town. They go in pairs and can take no money, no travel bags and no shoes and can't waste time on the road. It reminds positively of Franciscan monks walking on the road in Italy, travelling without money, bags or shoes and living off what people offered them, on the pilgrimage to Assisi, where Francis started with 12 disciples in 1215. They are the hands and feet of Gods mission. It also reminds negatively of how in previous times strict calvinist elders might visit people, proclaiming to these people in their need the wrath of God instead of his kingdom. If the first thing people see of God is his disciples, then we should do better.

The text aims to show us a positively extravert church, the movement of 'church-people' to people outside the church that we all can make, if we feel called to do so. What inspires here is that mission takes place in the daily context of people, where they are: where they have their sorrows or questions and also joy. In this context we should go as lambs among wolves in a world that can be without mercy or peace, yet the first thing we proclaim is Sjalom- not criticizing but mercifully accepting people. Mission takes place during meals: excellent places for a good conversation, in which all can learn from eachother. This is the church being there not for itself but for the world (starting close by) giving shape to the peace of God here and now.

The Protestant church in the Netherlands works on 100 new congregations that against all odds try to be a contextual church in the spirit of Luke 10.

*Prayer:*

Please pray for the future of our church, the people who are part of this on local or higher level.

*Douwe de Roest, Protestant Church in the Netherlands*

**Listening: A Quiet Resolution to Conflict**

*Reflection:*

There are two stories in today's text. The first is the story of Jesus' disciples picking heads of grain, rubbing them in their hands and eating them on the Sabbath, which the Pharisees questioned. In the second story Jesus healed a man whose right hand was shrivelled. The Pharisees and the teachers found fault with Jesus' action. Jesus asked them, "I ask you, which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to destroy it?" Jesus did what was not lawful on the Sabbath, resulting in the religious authorities plotting to kill him.

When we are comfortable in a particular space we will defend it and resist any unwanted intrusion. This is what happened to the Pharisees and the teachers of the law in their encounter with Jesus. The relationship between the Pharisees, teachers of the law and the people was like the relationship between the government and citizens in some places. The government is supposed to take care of the welfare of the citizens and communicate with its people. However, when the people start to raise issues and appeal to the government, the government may feel threatened. Their initial reaction may be to use power to cover up the issues for which the people demand answers.

The Pharisees could choose to understand what Jesus did on the Sabbath, but they refused to put aside their pride and prejudice in order to understand Jesus' action. Jesus performed a miracle that helped someone, but the Pharisees were furious. Their focus was on what was forbidden on the Sabbath. For that reason, the Pharisees and the teachers of the law came to Jesus, solely to find a reason to accuse Him.

Citizens are not enemies of government, just as Jesus was not the enemy of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Our ability to listen to what others have to say is an important action to avoid conflict. Those who hold power must give space to the people to speak their minds and be open to change in order to promote justice and peace.

*Prayer:*

God of justice and peace, open our ears to listen to each other sincerely and carefully. Help us to dare to change. Let your justice and peace fill this world.

*Wei-Chung Tseng, Programme Associate for East Asia*

Partners With Each Other and God

Reflection:

Paul is considered by the New Testament scholars and readers as the first missionary while the Old Testament scholars argue that Abraham is the first. The debate goes on each of the side has valid point. But for the purposes of this devotion we will look at Paul's contributions as a missionary. The choice of Paul is based on his teachings to the communities of Corinth and Ephesus.

Firstly, he teaches them that mission is a process, one plants the seed and the other waters, but it is God who will make it germinate and grow. All those who plant and water, are partners with God as the author of mission.

Secondly, he teaches the Corinthians that missionaries are the servants of God.

Thirdly, he teaches them that, and this is of great importance, mission does not belong to lone-rangers but we talk of Partners in Mission as seen in the Trinity community. The partnership is with God first as the one who sees to the germination of the seed and its growth. It is out of this that the missionaries will partner with each other as they appreciate different talents that each one has in accomplishing the mission of God. Paul planted, Apollos watered and it was left to God. Everyone in the community of faith plays and is expected to play a role in the mission of God (1 Corinthians 3:6 and Ephesians 4:11). Some come as teachers, some as apostles, some as evangelists and some as shepherds.

It will be naïve in mission to assume that there are super intellectuals or know all missionaries. We need each other as we partner with God in what God is already doing in the mission field.

Prayer:

Missionary God, help us to have the spirit that appreciates the talents of others as we complement each other in the participation in the Missio Dei. Amen

Sindiso Jele, Mission Secretary, Africa



Economic Justice is in Our Hands

Reflection:

Global leaders have committed to a sustainable development agenda which is intended to improve the lives of people. One of the stated goals of this agenda is Zero Hunger by 2030 i.e. comprehensive efforts to ensure that every human being enjoys the right to adequate food and that all forms of malnutrition are eliminated. World Food Day, recognised on October 16, is a day of action against hunger and brings into focus the fact that one in nine people worldwide lives with chronic hunger, that 5 million children under five die of malnutrition and 60% of the hungry are women. All of this in a world of plenty; where enough food is produced to feed everyone. Yet according to OXFAM, 62 people own the same amount of money as half the population of the world. That is economic injustice.

Luke 16 records a story of an encounter between the rich and the poor. The self-indulgent rich man is contrasted with Lazarus, a poor man who could neither feed himself nor maintain good health. He further suffers the indignity of dogs licking his sores.

As we consider the matter of economic justice, two points are instructive.

Firstly, the rich man chose to ignore the poor man's situation which would have been evident; it was on his doorstep. He would have been reminded of it every day as he entered and exited his home. How many of us see hunger and deprivation and choose to turn away? I refer not to the millions far from us, but to those on our own doorsteps.

Secondly, justice for the poor man came after his death, not in his lifetime. How many of us would make the decision to act now to end hunger for even one family in our own neighbourhood?

This is the challenge before us. Zero hunger is possible. It is certainly possible for the poor family next door to us. Working for economic justice is not a future activity, it must be present action. It is not a delegated responsibility. It is ours.

Prayer:

Lord, we ask forgiveness for closing our eyes to the hungry among us. Help us to reach out and help someone in need and stir us to do it now. Amen.

Karen Francis, Mission Secretary, Caribbean

### Church of South India



#### *Pray For:*

- The leaders of the church and the ongoing programs.
- God's strength and guidance to be a vibrant witness through proclamation and service.
- The transformative efforts of the church to form missional congregations and Christ Communities.



### Congregational Union of New Zealand



#### *Pray For:*

- God's enabling and guidance for the new Congregational Union Chairman, Reverend Tale Hakeagaiki, as he leads the churches of CUNZ.
- The ministers/pastors and all those with responsibilities of leadership within the CUNZ to be granted godly wisdom, and for leaders and members of the churches to grow more like our Lord Jesus Christ, know Him more intimately, and bring others into His kingdom.
- The New Zealand Prime Minister John Key and members of the NZ Parliament to have wisdom and strength to make laws that are in keeping with the instructions in God's word.

### Staying Focused

#### *Reflection:*

In this passage, Paul advised Timothy not to get sidetracked by what is going on around him. Previously, he told him about what is going to happen in the future when men will not put up with sound doctrine and instead to suit their desire, will gather teachers around them to say what they want to hear. (2 Timothy 4:3-4) Paul advised Timothy to be different.

If we look at our world today, what Paul had prophesied to Timothy has already come to pass. Everywhere people are turning away from God's truth. We live in a world where good is called evil and evil is called good. As children of God, we need to watch out so as to not conform to the ways of the world. But how can we guard ourselves from making compromises with the world? One way would be by remembering Paul's advice to Timothy.

First, let us keep a clear mind in every situation, make sure that our word and our deed reflect God's truth. Let us not get influenced by worldly advice and teachings that do not have the whole truth.

Second, Let us be willing to suffer hardships, be willing to suffer for the cause of the Gospel.

Third, let us tell others about the Good news. *'Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction'. (11 Timothy 4:2)*

Fourth, let us make every effort to fully carry out the ministry God has each given us.

#### *Prayer:*

'Father, help us be willing to be different for you. Help us not to conform to the ways of the world but to live our lives in total obedience to you. Help us to stay focused in our calling; and to complete the task that you put before us each day so that we may spread the knowledge of you in the corner where we are placed. We ask in Jesus name, Amen'

*Rami Fanai, Partner in Mission serving the Congregational Christian Church of American Samoa*



### Responding to The Call to Mission

#### *Reflection:*

The concepts of worship and discipleship are about obeying the mission call. The reading of v18 gives us the desired mission approach which Jesus would like his disciples to use and those who continue to become disciples.

Firstly, the bible says ‘...*he drew them near...*’ The gospel that attracts the people to God and his kingdom makes them listen and pay attention. As the people come closer the disciple is not the centre of attraction but the Triune God. People are drawn closer as they listen to the stories of grace and mercy of God.

Secondly, after drawing them closer he ‘said to them’. The communication takes place when the people are drawn to the disciple or the subject of the disciple’s presentation. This does not depend on people being made to feel ignorant and how well the disciple presents himself or herself as the master. Instead a disciple connects with people and shows them that they have a role to play in the mission of God. They are not the ‘heathens’ to be civilized.

In the reading of the scripture, Jesus teaches the community of faith a mission approach and provides the mission content. He says, and I concur, ‘Go to all the nations, do not discriminate, they are all mine they need my salvation’. What is important is that in participating in the *Missio Dei* there is assurance that God is going to be with you through until the end of time.

Finally, we must note that it is through worship that disciples are drawn closer to God and receive and or renew the mission mandate.

#### *Prayer:*

Heavenly Father, together with Jesus and the Holy Spirit you send the church. Give us today the knowledge that as we participate in this mission, which is indeed yours, we are not alone, you are with us.

*Sindiso Jele, Mission Secretary, Africa*

**Generations of War**

*Reflection:*

There are so many in this world who know no other reality than that of war. Children are born, raised and grow into adulthood having never experienced something recognisable as 'peace'.

In contemporary conflict resolution theory, it is understood that it requires three generations to pass from the end of a conflict before a lasting peace will be a reality. What does this say for the children in Palestine, or Sudan and South Sudan; or Yemen, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan and the Central African Republic? What hope can those children find if it will be their great-grandchildren who know true peace if the conflict they live through were to end today?

It is well known that violence breeds violence. This cycle of violence is fed by lies and mis-truths; gaining traction through the sowing of mistrust between people, dehumanising others and creating enemies in our midst. We see this at work in our societies today. Politicians use language that demeans and popular media is the playground of extremists on all sides of the debate.

How should the people of God respond? What does our faith in the Prince of Peace look like when children fleeing war are treated as criminals or sub-humans in countries that can provide safe harbour? How would Christ respond in a debate over whether to prioritize the construction of new weapons of mass destruction 'for defensive purposes', over the building of schools?

So many Christians are doing all they can working for peace in our communities. Love is shown to refugees, the wounded and abandoned by support agencies, humanitarian response groups and refugee welcome groups. Practical support is provided by those who donate to aid campaigns, food and clothing drops and through community responses that declare that churches and Christians stand for peace and love in the face of hate and conflict. Let us stand with them.

*Prayer:*

We pray for your Kingdom, in which all will know peace, to come on earth, Lord God. We pray for your blessing on those already working to build your Kingdom of peace. Help us to stand with them in courage.

May the reality of peace be known by every child, woman and man, as that is your will for your creation. Amen.

*David Cruchley, Programme Associate, Europe*

**'Missioned' To Mission**

*Reflection:*

Evangelism was core to the commandment and commission of Jesus Christ to the early church. Its success was based on the obedience to the mission call. But it is necessary to understand what evangelism means as we partner with God in God's mission.

Definitions are relative, and so is evangelism. In mission, evangelism can be taken to mean, though not limited to, 'a call for a zealous advocacy for a good cause...spread of the information on the grace of God'. However, its definition and usage are relative to culture and race. Evangelism could relate to socio-economic conditions as it speaks to the 'good news'.

As we participate in the mission of God in evangelism, it is necessary to understand that effective evangelism is dialogue as opposed to monologue. Such understanding will help the evangelist in the Missio Dei, to avoid a situation of winning the argument and losing the soul, which is not the preferred missiological outcome. Evangelism is about sharing the experience of the grace and love of God; sharing the stories that it is by faith and his grace that we are saved despite the brutality of slavery, colonialism, economic robbery and scandals. And through this faith and confession we will face empire and its unjust economic policies and practices.

*Prayer:*

Dear Father, we pray today that you give us the rightl words and mindset as we partner with you Holy Spirit in the mission of evangelization. Give the right gospel content so that the world will see your grace and love and praise you.

*Sindiso Jele, Mission Secretary, Africa*

Sunday, 12 November 2017



### Gereja Presbiterian Malaysia:

*Pray for:*

- All Malaysians particularly the government officers, the Judges, the Cabinet to uphold the Federal Constitution according to the general principles of rule by laws and also ensure that freedom of religion as provided in the Constitution is truly available to all. (Amos 5:24) But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.
- Many more GPM congregations to participate in the "Church Without Walls" 10- year plan and build a transformed reformed church of 20000 by 2020 that is pleasing God in every way. (Mat 28:19-20) Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Col 1:10) so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God.
- The election of the 2017 & 2018 Synod Executive Committee in March 2017 Synod Annual Assembly and for the new EXCO to trust and depend on the Lord in taking GPM to higher ground for God's glory. (Psa 127:1) Unless the LORD builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the watchman stays awake in vain.

### Guyana Congregational Union



*Pray for:*

The success of a Discipleship programme which is being developed and should be launched across the Union by year end;

- That the Lord God may help us to raise up leaders who are more committed to His work through the GCU; and,
- The Union to be able to identify and nurture younger leaders for the ministry of the church.

Sunday, 19 November 2017



### Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FKJM)

Pray for the attainment of the vision of FJKM church for the next 4 years guided by the theme of the FJKM 18th General Synod: "Don't be ashamed of witnessing for our Lord" (2 Timothy 1: 8a)

*Pray For:*

- **The vision of FJKM:**
  - FJKM Schools
  - The workers of the church
  - Addressing Islam
  - The church's role in addressing corruption in society
- **Preparations for the 50th Anniversary** of the FJKM & the 200th anniversary of the arrival of the first Missionaries (LMS) in Madagascar
- **Renewal of the church**

Sunday, 26 November 2017

Bible Reading: Genesis 1:27

Inclusive Communities  
(Persons Living with Disabilities)

## A Trinitarian Ethic of Inclusivity

### *Reflection:*

This reflection is an invitation to ponder a number of questions regarding a Christian response to injustice and exclusion with regard to persons living with disabilities. The Christian faith may well draw from its resources the things that inspire more affirming narratives on disability. The designs of church buildings and Christian pastoral centres are partly indicative of whether or not churches and Christian organisations pay sufficient attention to the various needs of the disabled. Overcoming such architectural barriers in an effort to enhance accessibility to resources of the Christian faith, is a significant step in breaking down barriers which exclude the disabled. However, Christians are called to be an example of how even more deep-seated barriers can be overcome, especially those that stem from attitude, which largely result from a variety of social constructs of disability. In many African societies for instance, there are a variety of myths surrounding disability, many of which suggest different ways in which disabled persons originate. Such myths result in the view that certain disabilities are a curse or punishment from God, or, in many cases, from ancestors. Other challenges pertain to our liturgical language and metaphors. For example, what sort of images of God would affirm experiences of disability? How best could Christians interpret Scriptures in a way that does justice, rather than harm, to those variously disabled?

While pastoral care, in the form of practical support and care of the disabled, may be a crucial response of the church to disability, God's creative Spirit constantly beckons to us, not only to affirm as God's creation our brothers and sisters living with various forms of disability, but also to affirm their dignity.. How could we better live the Christian narrative in ways that do not perpetuate the oppression of the disabled? Today's Scripture reading provides us with one way of engaging such a question.

Reflection on the image of God raises significant challenges to how we understand God. A reflection on the social nature of God as Trinity may well provide a key in transforming our relations with other humans, especially those who are disabled. The focus on relations, invites us to think about the recognition and respect of the different other. Building communities of inclusion may have much to glean from a social view of the Trinity - as Divine-Persons-In-Relation - in which equality and freedom are central hallmarks.

### *Prayer:*

Creator God, who fashioned us after your image we give you thanks. Holy Spirit, help us in our difference - in skills, abilities and disabilities - to grow in the grace we need so that we may contribute towards the realization of inclusive communities. Hear our prayers through Jesus Christ, Amen.

*Teddy Sakupapa, United Church in Zambia*

*My prayers and reflections for December 2017*

Breaking Norms, Not Building Walls

Reflection:

Years ago, while on a business trip in East Asia, I went to a church on Sunday for worship. I was preparing myself for worship when I heard a loud chiding voice near me. I saw a well-dressed woman (a church leader) standing beside the pew in front of me and she was scolding an old woman in tattered clothes sitting in front of me, for coming to church in slippers instead of proper shoes.



How we exclude people from our communities because of traditions and rules! Have we made our church so inaccessible (physically and socially) that we exclude some from our fellowship? This certainly is not following Jesus who healed lepers by touching them (even though he could have healed by just saying one word), thus going against the acceptable norms of His days; eating with a tax collector; forgiving a woman in adultery etc. We see Jesus first loving people and then restoring them to membership of the community. He healed the leper and told him to show himself to the priest so he could be accepted into the Jewish community again. Touching someone with leprosy was unheard of in those days and Jesus knew that the leper needed to experience touch. Recently a sister in church who has been reaching out to the street walkers shared how one of them, after a year of outreach, has turned to God and is now working in a fast food chain, earning much less but now spiritually wealthy. I believe that came about because that sister first showed love and extended her hand of fellowship and acceptance.

Indeed, the state of a person and their actions should not preclude them from receiving God's love and attention. By excluding some from our community, we are also depriving ourselves of the fullness of life that Christ came to give. The challenge for us as people of faith is how to live alongside the vulnerable, underprivileged, the excluded and seemingly unimportant and to help them discover God. How should Christians respond so that all are included? How can we truly build a church without walls?

Prayer:

Dear Lord, we thank you for your love which knows no bounds and reaches to people just like us. Lord, give us wisdom and courage to break away from traditions and customs so that we might extend Your love to all, building a church without walls. Use us as your instrument to bring fullness of life for all.

Veronica Chua, CWM Deputy General Secretary, Administration and Finance

The Call of Christ is Inclusive

Reflection:

When Jesus made this call it was in the context of Judaism. People were burdened by the demands of the Law. No one could say the yoke of the Law is light. On the contrary Jesus says that His yoke is not heavy. This so because his yoke is grace.

There are two things worth noting from this text that is the concept of Rest/Shalom and the nature of His invitation (All)-It is inclusive.

Shalom does not only refer to rest and peace, it also includes salvation. Through the blood of Jesus, we are redeemed and have peace with God. This comes with justification. Knowing that God has saved us from the penalty of sin. What a blessing from the Lord. This is possible through the person and ministry of Jesus.

Now Jesus is inclusive in His invitation. He invites 'all' to come to him. Seeing that the Church is the incarnate body of Christ, how can we ever be exclusive on who should come and access the blessings of Christ's grace in the Church? This says to me the Church must be deliberate in being inclusive to those in society who have previously been excluded. Church and worship must be about Christ meeting the deepest needs of individuals. The church must be about meeting the needs of all in the community. In this way the Church is relevant.

As Christian individuals, what are the prejudices and stereotypes that stand in the way of our being missional - inclusive Christians. Is it evils of patriarchy, is it negative and destructive socializations? One of the aspects that seriously hinders us is misunderstanding inclusiveness for conformity. Let us meditate and pray on this, seek God to be sensitive to others who are disadvantaged.

Prayer:

Heavenly Father, we pray for those things that are making it difficult for your church, the body of your son Jesus Christ, to be inclusive. Make us hear your voices through your as it says 'Come ye all to Christ and we will find Shalom for our Souls. Herein we will find that the yoke of Christ is easy'. Amen.

Xolani Maseko, United Congregational Church of Southern Africa

### Hong Kong Council of The Church of Christ in China



*Pray for:*

- Mutual trust and reconciliation in the Hong Kong community
- The witness of the Church during the transitional period from the election of the Hong Kong Legislative Council in 2016 and the election of the Chief Executive in 2017.
- Commitment of the members of HKCCCC to the proclamation of the Gospel of Christ and unity in carrying out the mission of God.

### Nauru Congregational Church



*Pray for:*

- The spiritual growth of the members of congregations to increase their confidence in utilizing their God-given gifts and talents, addressing the need for Sunday school teachers and capacity building for youth leaders
- The Nauru Congregational Church plan of action to be fully implemented.
- 3rd countries to open their arms to take in and re-settle Refugees.

Bible Readings: Matthew 15:21-28,



### Reconciliation Among Religions

*Reflection:*

A theological foundation that provides the rationale for reconciliation among religions is based on three attributes of God as stated in John 1:1-5—God is *eternal* and cannot be contained by time; God is *omnipresent* and cannot be contained by space; and God is *life-giving*.

The opportunities that Jesus had for encountering people of other faiths were very limited. The Gospels recorded four stories where Jesus had encounters with non-Jews either Samaritans or Gentiles.

In Luke 17:17-18 Jesus affirms the Samaritan leper's expression of gratitude to God as a demonstration of faith. In Luke 7:9 we read of the Roman Centurion's expression of faith leading to the healing of a servant. Jesus commends the faith demonstrated by this Gentile which brings healing greater than what He has seen among the Jews. In the encounter with the Syro-Phoenician woman recorded in Matthew 15:21-28, the woman perseveres in interceding on behalf of her child despite Jesus' initial reluctance to help. This is a quality that leads Jesus to recognize her faith as "great." And finally, the parable of the Good Samaritan in Luke 10:25-37 teaches that being a good neighbour is reciprocal. So to "go and do likewise" simply means to mutually cross the barriers and become neighbours to each other.

What exactly was Jesus doing and saying in these stories? He was taking reconciliatory steps towards other religions. He was bringing down the middle wall of prejudice and stereotype by affirming Kingdom qualities in the other. But much more, He was teaching that the other is well within the grace of God because they possess the very qualities that the people of God are called upon to demonstrate as signs of belief.

*Prayer:*

Eternal God, you are in all places, filling all things and enriching all relationships. Come and dwell with us, cleanse us from every stain of division and separation, that we may all be one and commit ourselves to the non-violent ways of Jesus and transform communities through offering forgiveness and receiving peace. Amen

*Julie Sim, Mission Secretary, East Asia*

## Holding Our Breath

### *Reflection:*

Tonight the world will hold its breath as we wait to celebrate the coming of the Christ child into the world. Waiting and watching eagerly for the coming again of the Christ child, not unlike those in the Hebrew Scriptures who looked forward to the coming of the Messiah who would bring them freedom and hope even in the midst of despair. Waiting and longing expectantly like Mary and Joseph who waited for the arrival of their first-born child.

Many people in our world today are waiting. Countless people hold their breath to see how things will turn out. In November the world held its breath as the United States went to the election booths to elect a new President whose influence is felt around the world. In June Europe held its breath to see how the United Kingdom would vote in the referendum on membership of the European Union. The world held its breath to see whether any ceasefires would last in Syria and bring peace to the people of Aleppo. The people of the Caribbean held their breath to see what devastation Hurricane Matthew would bring. The citizens of Hong Kong held their breath to see how relationships with China develop in the election and following civil unrest.

Many people in our world wait expectantly and hope with faithful resistance that things will change. Holding their breath in the expectation that somehow relief might come, justice be done, "your kingdom come on earth as in heaven..."

We wait in solidarity with the unjustly imprisoned; we hold our breath with the hungry and thirsty; we hope alongside those who despair that together we might greet with joy and relief the peace and fullness of life for all creation which is made possible with the coming of the Christ child.

### *Prayer:*

As we wait with hope and expectation  
 May the joy of the shepherds fill our hearts;  
 May the diligence of the wise ones inspire our thinking;  
 May the faithfulness of Mary and Joseph inspire our living;  
 And above all may the peace of the Christ child  
 Fill our homes and lives  
 This Christmas and always.

*Wayne Hawkins, Mission Secretary, Europe*



## Love Incarnate

### *Reflection:*

What we learn about Jesus from this story comes from the actions and words of others – in Luke we discover shepherds, angels, heavenly choirs, bystanders and Mary; in Matthew we learn from angelic messengers, Joseph, Wise Men, Herod and religious leaders. But perhaps the most important thing we learn – and forget at our peril – is that Jesus was God's love incarnate for the whole world. He is born into poverty not to deliver a set of theological propositions to believe but to demonstrate and practice God's message of unconditional love for all creation. Jesus is not so much to be believed as to be followed. His message was not so much about belief as belonging.

The word become flesh and that flesh brought wisdom for living and a radical freedom that transforms the world, rather than putting the world to a test of theological orthodoxy. The wisdom and truth which Jesus speaks is incarnate – lived among us - not intellectual assent to a set of arguments put forward on behalf of God. Take a look around the world, the challenges and struggles with life are evident. We don't need more arguments made on behalf of God; but we do need people who live out God's unconditional love in the world as we journey with people who struggle with life.

The word was an event between teachers and followers, not a text, theological argument or set of propositions to be believed. The word is lived out in the life of a Jewish peasant whose life is proof of the words of Irenaeus "The glory of God is a human being fully alive."

### *Prayer:*

Lord Jesus Christ,  
 Born coloured and vulnerable,  
 Welcomed by poor shepherds and wealthy kings,  
 Come to our world and heal our divisions,  
 That we may not be white and black, yellow or brown,  
 Neither male nor female, young or old  
 Nor gay or straight but children of God,  
 Seeing you in each one.  
 In the name of the babe  
 Born in Bethlehem for the world.

*Wayne Hawkins, Mission Secretary, Europe*

**Live in Peace**

*Reflection:*

When the days grew closer for Jesus to be taken up to heaven, he was determined to continue his journey to Jerusalem. So he sent messengers on ahead of him. On their way they went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him. But the people didn't welcome him, because he was determined to go to Jerusalem. When his disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them, as Elijah did? But he turned and rebuked them, and they went on to another village.

Jesus knew what the outcome of his choice to go through Samaria would be. The Samaritans were despised by the Jews; the hatred was mutual. The villagers refused to allow Jesus and his followers to enter for refreshments and rest after a hard day's walk. James and John, were incensed at this terrible insult and felt justified to avenge their master by calling for destructive fire from heaven.

Both could justify this violent and vengeful action by quoting from the Old Testament, "as Elijah did" (ISV). The incident to which they referred is documented in 2 Kings 1 when Elijah brought down fire on two occasions killing over a hundred soldiers of Ahaziah, the king of Samaria. The soldiers had demanded Elijah attend the king's presence in an arrogant and rude manner. They were 'punished'.

The tendency to quote scriptures to justify acts of terror and warfare is rebuked by Jesus. Are not nuclear weapons, use of drones and conventional bombs equivalent of the 'fire from heaven' that James and John wished to use to terrorise their 'enemy'?

We need to fill our hearts with God	We need to turn to God
And with his love	Whose peace passes all
If we would ever come	Our understanding.
To live in peace.	It is too deep
We must forgive all wrongs	And wide
Although we find it hard	And all encompassing
To see why evil tries	For our small minds
To crush our innocence.	To understand.

*Guto Prys ap Gwynfor, Union of Welsh Independents*

Lesley K. Steel ; Timeless Prayers for Peace; Geoffrey Duncan; Canterbury; p.249

*My Prayers and Reflections for 2017*



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