The views expressed in the book are those of the authors and the publisher takes no responsibility for any of the statements.
"Jignasa" in Sanskrit is to know - an inquisition to learn. The Bhashyam (commentary) to Upanishads begin with Adato Brahma Jignasa, the beginning of the inquiry of the knowledge about the supreme power, and then the interpretation of Vedas follow. In our context the learning of the scriptures is equally to be understood under this expression Jignasa because we are longing to learn about the ultimate truth who is personified in Jesus the Christ. The learning of that Truth is Kristu Jignasa, which means learning about Jesus who is inherent both in Holy Scriptures and also in the scriptures of our neighbouring faith. The prophetic expressions crept in the Holy Scriptures have indicated the manifestation of power of God through incarnation of Jesus as the Vyaktha or the manifested one of the divine power. In other words Jesus himself contained the kingdom and when he was moving the kingdom itself was moving around with Him by transforming the world and creation by his word and deed.

It is from disciples of Jesus through the ages the pilgrim Church exhibited her humility to learn and understand those precepts from Holy Scriptures which spoke about Jesus the Christ and His exalted state. Further, the scriptures also indicated how Jesus became the fulfilment of all the prophecies towards realizing that kingdom which God has established in and through Jesus not only for the humanity but also for entire creation. Therefore the kingdom that Jesus preached does contain the cosmic element which goes beyond the human understanding. It is in this context the lessons prescribed for every Sunday including the collects, the outlines for thematic sermons do express the longing of the faithful ones to know, feel and experience that kingdom which is realised. Jignasa, a passionate desire and inquiry to learn and know about this truth, the mystery, is hoped to illuminate and enlighten the mind and life of believing communities. Thus, discovering Jesus the Christ is the basis of Jignasa. Hence Kristu Jignasa- the enquiry about Christ.

I take this opportunity to record my appreciation to the Department of Pastoral Concerns and especially to the editor and the contributors for making bringing out this resource. I trust and pray that this would become a useful tool for the clergy as well as laity for personal reflections and even preaching the word of God.

In God’s Service,

Most Rev. Dr. G. Dyvasirvadam
Moderator, Church of South India
Preface

On the occasion of the 70th Formation Day of the Church of South India, the Department of Pastoral Concerns is pleased to publish “Jijñāsā”, a book with Sermon Outlines in three volumes. Jijñāsā is the process of gaining knowledge through understanding and comprehension. Jijñāsā is the desire to explore, inquire, and experience the knowledge of the living Word, who reveals himself in and through the written word, the Scripture. Jijñāsā is a process of self-discovery in light of the One who reveals himself in the Bible. Jijñāsā is also a process of understanding and reclaiming the identity of the believing community. Jijñāsā challenges us to encounter God in the pages of the Bible, in the communities that live among us and around us. Jijñāsā gives us the certainty of the accompanier who is our eternal contemporary.

The book contains a series of sermons prepared based on the texts and themes prescribed in three-cycled Revised Lectionary prepared by the Worship and Mission Commission of the Communion of Churches in India for use among its constituent members, the Church of North India, the Church of South India and the Malankara Mar Thoma Syrian Church.

It is my ardent prayer that the book may become a powerful resource for the ministers who share the Word of God in the congregations. Let the Word of God permeate and penetrate into the hearts and minds of people, who patiently wait upon the Lord to speak to them. Let it begin a process of jijñāsā; of inquisitiveness and curiosity, and enable people to embark on an exploration of the precepts of faith. May this be a spiritually-rewarding and fulfilling journey wherein, each faithful member and the communities of the faithful come to know the One who is being revealed in the scriptures more clearly, love him more dearly and follow him more closely.

I appreciate and congratulate the Director and the Department of Pastoral Concerns for bringing out this most essential resource material for the edification of the Church. I thank all those who, with their readiness to share their ideas, concepts and experiences, have contributed to the volumes. Let all glory be to God alone who enlightens and empowers the Church to move forward on her pilgrimage.

Rev. Dr. D. Rathnakara Sadananda
General Secretary, CSI

Kristu Jignasa
FOREWORD

“As a deer earnestly pants for the water, so my soul pants for you O God” Ps 42:1

Desire to know God is part of one’s spiritual experience that is persistent with the people of God. The more we yearn, the more we understand the love of God that is unfathomable and his grace that is all sufficient. There are many factors which influence our God-experiences and even our quest to know God as the life and the world itself often offer and surprise us with curious endeavors. Besides, the science and technological developments, archeological inventions, the global market economy and globalization ventures also attempt to either change the nature of human desires or put flavor into their desires with different ideological aspects. Hence, while the humanity has begun its journey within these mythical endeavors of life aspirations, the call or reminder to have a desirable search to know Christ more also being offered from our faith convictions and its activities.

As Psalmist says “as a deer earnestly pants for the water, so my soul pants for you (42:1),” in order to be a disciple of Christ, being panted for God or to experience God has to become our day today experience in our spiritual journey. Kristu Jignasa is not like a human longing or aspiration to attain or own the materials, relations and the world, but it is being experience of panting to live with the Lord, or journey with the Lord to become part of Christ’s community. It is true that, “Knowing God is knowing oneself” – the curiosity to understand God more is in turn helps us to understand ourselves. As a result, we begin to have God – centered life, in other words, selflessness persona will beautify all endeavors of our life.

Kristhu Gignasa, the thematic sermons prepared by the Department of Pastoral Concerns is commendable. I would like to congratulate Rev. K. James Cecil Victor, Director of the Department for bring out this book which I believe would enhance the God-experience of the people of God

Rt. Rev. Thomas K Oommen

Deputy Moderator, CSI
INTRODUCTION

The quest to know and understand God is innate to human being. The urge to know God and God’s purposes is often quenched through his word and manifold revelations. St. Paul says, “I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage that I may gain Christ”. Knowing Christ and gaining Christ are integral to Christian living. It is in knowing God that our lives, attitudes and relationships will be shaped. The reason for the greed and related exploitation in the world is due to erroneous notion about God.

Sermon themes and texts prepared by the Lectionary Committee of the Communion of Churches in India (CCI) helps the churches to systematically unfold the knowledge of God and the mysteries of God embedded in the Bible. The Department of Pastoral Concerns makes efforts to bring out the thematic sermon notes to help the pastors / preachers in their effective preaching. Kristu Jignasa is believed to quip the pulpits to become effective servants of the Lord. The inquisition to know Christ should be increased in all through the meditation and reflections on the word of God.

I take this opportunity to express my sincere thanks to all the Officers of the Synod, Resource Persons and the Office Secretary of the Pastoral Concerns Department. Thanks to the printer as well.

I hope and pray that the resources provided in this book will help the pastors in their preparation for the ministry of the word of God.

Rev. K. James Cecil Victor
Director, Pastoral Concerns
God’s Continuing Act of Grace

Zeph. 3:14-20 Psalm 136
E: Joel 2:23-27 Revelation 3:7-13

The New Year ushers in new hopes and possibilities with a fresh outlook of life, faith and service. We praise God for what we could achieve and now seek God’s grace and guidance to accomplish what is expected of us in this New Year. Today we celebrate God’s continued acts of grace in our individual lives and families. It’s a day to pray for God’s wisdom to realize our dreams and aspirations, visions and goals. Unless God sanctifies, we cannot achieve anything. The Bible declares that God is surrounded by his faithfulness and He never ceases to be faithful to his covenant. The word "covenant," is quite commonly used in legal, social (marriage), and religious contexts. The term "covenant" is of Latin origin (con venire), meaning ‘coming together’. It presupposes two or more parties who come together to make a contract, agreeing on promises, stipulations, privileges, and responsibilities. In order to make his covenant to be appropriated by us, Christ became a human and dwelt among us, assuring his continued presence and grace.

The biblical words most often translated "covenant" is berit in the Old Testament (appearing about 280 times) and diatheke in the New Testament (at least 33 times). The origin of the Old Testament word has been debated; some have said it comes from a custom of eating together (Gen 26:30; 31:54); others have emphasized the idea of cutting an animal (Gen.15:18). However, the preferred meaning of the Old Testament word is bond; referring to two or more parties bound together. God has established an all-embracing binding relationship (covenant) with his creation, of which humanity is the central. It can be perceived as the divine intervention in the human history with God as the initiator. He called humans who are the image of God to become partners in the covenant. It always demanded a renewed relationship between God and human beings. God is the source and originator of the entire covenant concept and phenomenon. He included the covenant relationship in his creation activity and handiwork. Covenant is germane to human life; it is God-implanted and –unfolded and established an all-embracing binding relationship The Covenant of Grace is where God promises eternal salvation to humans based upon the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. This is called a Covenant of Grace because it is initiated by God, despite the unworthiness of human beings, to receive an unmerited favor from God. In this covenant Jesus became man (John 1:1, 18; Heb. 2:9), and the mediator of the new covenant (Heb. 8:6). Therefore, the righteousness accomplished by Christ is given to the believer, so that he/she has the righteousness that is not his/her own but that of Christ (Phil. 3:9).

The manifestation of the Covenant of Grace was progressively disclosed. It began in the Garden of Eden after Adam and Eve sinned and God promised a redeemer (Gen. 3:15), then to Noah, to Abraham (Gen. 12:2-3), with the people of Israel at Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:28), and believers in the New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-37) which is fulfilled in Christ (1 Cor. 11:25). People have experienced God’s covenantal relationship throughout the human history. Whenever God renewed his covenant, he assured his presence and deliverance from various bondages. Zeph 3:14-20 is a vivid picture of God’s continuous act of grace. Judging the oppressors and gathering the lame and the outcastes is the true sign of Kingdom of God. The promise of the covenant is for the restoration of the lost and the least. In Psalm 136, the Psalmist extols the steadfast love of God that endures forever. God’s marvelous works are expressed in present continuous tense indicating the continuing of God’s promises for generation. Rom:5:1-11 expiates all that is need to experience God’s continued act of grace is to have unwavering faith in God. It is through faith in Christ that we are justified and it is faith that grants us perseverance in times of suffering and ultimately reveals the true character of an individual.

Kristu Jignasa
In Luke 13:1-9 Jesus emphasizes the need for repentance, renewal and reconciliation that are part and parcel of the covenant relationship. The metaphor of the gardener requesting the owner of the vineyard to spare the fig tree from cutting it down for its barrenness, is a powerful illustration of God’s continuous act of grace. Christ as a gardener wants every tree to bear fruit for it is by our fruit that we are known to whom we belong. He even delays his arrival as a judge, giving us opportunities to mend our ways that are contrary to the will of God. He wants us to be in an intimate relationship with him. And at the same time express our devotion through our service to the entire creation. God’s covenant reminds us of our reciprocal responsibility to live as true followers of Christ. As we experience his already accomplished covenant let us renew ourselves and stand firm to serve him in the midst of several challenges we face in our day today life.

**Rev. K. James Cecil Victor**
**Director, DPC, Synod**
Sermon Text: Rev 5:1-14

Anyone perceived to be in bondage craves for liberation. From creation groaning for freedom from exploitation to a foetus in the womb craving to be given the privilege to live we are surrounded with the deep desire for liberation all over. However since the shackles that denies full expression of one’s possibility is a systemic reality nourished through ages of unjust structures liberation to be genuine and overarching should also be systemic and all inclusive. It therefore need to have a vision and a direction. A clear revelation of the plan and desire of God, understood in context and in collective consciousness is essential for liberation to be an experiential reality.

The book of Revelation is believed to have been written in a context of the Empire holding the sway. The kingdom of God projected as an alternate to the exciting systems of exploitation had to be carried across through a powerful language of symbols. John who is believed by many to be author of the book is himself in exile facing the gruesomeness of a regime as an old man. Voices of dissent has been stifled, freedom of expression muzzled and disagreement harshly dealt with. The author knew he could not do much as an individual but trusts in a God who is able. History was replete with examples of the intervention of God and he is sure the same God will act. But how will he act? What is the nature of liberation that they want? John sets forth an agenda of liberation, a dream of freedom, a road map for the way ahead.

Of the several salient feature of the book of revelation in this regard one striking contrast is the transformation of the Lion of Judah into the slain lamb and the latter taking the throne. After an inexplicable narration of heavenly worship in Revelations 4 the author goes ahead to talk about a scroll that was sealed. The question that was all over was, “Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll. Unfortunately no one in heaven or earth or under the earth was able to open the scroll and look into it.

1. **Tears as the stepping stone of the Liberation Dream:** The author of Revelation was in tears because no one was found worthy to open the scroll and to look into it. The content of the scroll is not revealed yet, but then for a people earnestly desiring freedom and liberation the expectation was that it would contain the road map for their search for the alternative to the empire. The tears here is not because of the suffering that was meted out on them but because they did not find someone worthy to take their cause forward. It was not a passive weeping in complacency but an active aggressive and creative weeping in the search for a process of liberation. Revelation happens only when the heart burns for it, when there is genuine searching in, when the soul craves for a way forward. This exactly is what we see in the text here.

When the weeping was on there was a voice of consolation. Do not weep. See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David has conquered, so that he can open the seal and its seven seals. The immediate response is as the system would have tuned someone to respond in such a context. If liberation has to come it has to come from the Lion, it has to come from the root of David the king, it has to come by conquering and we cannot also neglect the gender bias herein.

2. **The Lamb- the central image of the liberation dream:** The author then takes a close look through the image studded vision and between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders he saw a Lamb standing as if it was slaughtered. It had seven horns and seven eyes, the seven spirits of God. He went and took the scroll. The entire congregation there knelt before the

Kristu Jignasa
Lamb. They sang a song of praise saying that You are worthy to take the scroll and open its seals for you were slaughtered and by your blood you ransomed for God saints from every tribe and language and people and nations and have made them to be a kingdom and priests serving our God and they will reign on earth.

Several implications of this imagery should be noted here. First, it is the Lamb that becomes the central figure in the dream of liberation. The little lamb is powerless but carries with it the powerlessness of God that would be central to the liberation of creation. The slaughtered lamb is another very poignant imagery. The victim or the hunted would be central in the liberation dynamics. Slaughtering is a violent form of annihilation which several people who lived in contexts of bondage could identify with. The slaughtered lamb returning to the throne sends out the message- Nothing is over yet, even with slaughtering. There is hope beyond. The ransom that the blood of the lamb made possible is surely a pointed to the cross event and achievement by the text weaves it to the liberation paradigm in a very subtle way. The participants in the liberation include saints from every tribe and language, people and nation. No one is excluded. Exclusion being an overarching motif in the empire dynamics this narration of inclusion in itself has several layers of meaning. A powerful understatement follows with deep political implications- they will reign in earth. An alternative to the empire on the anvil and it will be an all-inclusive model of governance.

3. **Redefining the margins- the core of the Liberation dream:** The myriad voices of the heavenly chorus set the liberation dream in a passionate context. With full voice they sing- It is important to note that the singing was not in muzzled voices which marked the empire of domination. The peripheries and margins were full of silenced people who did have the right of voice. Here the voiceless is encouraged by the myriads and myriads who sang aloud the song of liberation. Everything that is attributed to the powerless lamb are images of the center, realities that were denied to those excluded. That included power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing. By attributing these to the Lamb the liberation picture takes a powerful counter culture dynamics. Power that is denied to them, wealth that is kept away from them, wisdom that is often walled from the margins, might, honor, glory and blessing with is always attributed to the one in authority- these are the realities that will come to the slain lamb. Those in the margins would no longer be in the margins because by then the margins would be re-defined or even done away with. The chorus of all creation then joins the affirmation adding that this alternative system of governance and life shall be for ever and ever.

The Liberation dream is thus preceded with a Revelation of the Dream and that is exactly what the church and the world needs today. We need to dream big of an end to all exploitation. The new empires should be told in unequivocal terms that domination will end. The reign of the Lamb is not far away and in that reign there will be no exclusion, no periphery. Even as we look at another Christmas and the major with the shadow of the cross May God enable us to see the Revelation of Liberation in clearer terms.

**Rev. Dr. Vinod Victor**

**CSI South Kerala Diocese**
Christ Draws all Nations to Himself

Isaiah 56:1-8 Psalm 72
Revelation 7:9-17 Matthew 2:1-12/Mark 1:1-9

The People of Israel had unique faith in God and they were eagerly waiting for the ‘Messiah’ the Christ. The Bible has many promises concerning the coming of the Messiah. Psalmist in Chapter 72 predicts that God’s reign will have no end and His name shall endure and continue forever, that all the Kings will bow down before God and all nations will serve God. All people and nations will be blessed by Him. The whole earth will be filled by His glory forever since the poor and the needy are precious treated and there will be abundance of grains. Therefore prayers and praises will go on forever. The House of God is a house of prayer for all nations in which God would gather the outcast of Israel, eunuchs, foreigner’s children along with the selected people. God says “since they keep my Sabbath, choose what please me, holdfast my covenant, I will give them an everlasting name and their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar and they will be filled with joy with an opportunity to offer their gifts to the Lord”. In general keeping justice, doing righteousness alone will please the Lord.

The Prophet Micah exhorts that the Lord’s house will be established and exalted on top of all the hills and mountains. The people will resolve to come to the House of the Lord. The Lord will teach His ways and everyone will follow his path. He would rebuke strong nations and therefore they would convert their swords into plowshares and pruning-hooks. They will learn war no more. Everyone will sit under his vine and fig tree without any fear. In that day the Lord will gather and assemble the lame, outcast and those God has afflicted.

The Isaiah’s vision, promise and expectation of His servant whom He will appoint with His Spirit will bring-forth justice to all and even the coasts and islands will wait for his voice, the word of God. The revelation of John depicts nonstop celebration with the great multitude, people that no one can count and they are drawn from all nations, languages, cultures, ethnic groups and will stand before the throne of God and the Lamb of God, clothed in white robes and palm branches in their hands and shout with loud voice that Salvation belongs to God and fall on their faces before the throne. They will also sing a new song Amen Blessing, glory, wisdom, thanksgiving, honor, power and might belongs to God forever and ever. This sort of veneration and celebration of God can come out of grateful hearts who have gone through great tribulations and have washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb of God. Therefore they all will serve God day and night and God Himself will dwell among them.

In the birth narratives of Jesus in Luke 2, the Angel Gabriel appearing to the ordinary, simple shepherds in the fields watching their flock in the night said, “Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.” The shepherds in the same spirit of the Angel have immediately responded to go to see the babe Jesus in Bethlehem and after seeing Him got back home not quietly, but whoever they met on the way were excited by the lively sharing of the shepherds. And in Matt.2 the birth of Jesus have attracted the wise men in the east guided by the star according to them, they would like to worship the King of the Jews. These wise men opening their treasure offered gold, frankincense and myrrh as gifts representing the varieties of valuable gifts that eastern nations and community would offer.

Jesus Himself said, I am the way, the truth and the life for eternal life. John the Baptist in Jn.1:29 could recognize Jesus as the Lamb of God that would take away the sins of the whole world. The Samaritan women could discern Messiah in the earthly Jesus and testified to her people in the village inviting them to meet with the Saviour of the world. One another regular feature of Jesus’ earthly ministry was wherever He went crowds thronged to Him and many a time He had no time neither for

Kristu Jignasa
In Jn.12:12 multitudes of people, the blind, deaf, dumb and all others who have been hither to deprived to go into the temple have entered in to the Jerusalem and gathered around Jesus Christ singing Hosanna songs and they were led to confess, “Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord.” He entered the temple of Jerusalem; He thrashed down those who were selling and buying and emphatically told everybody “My house is a House of Prayer for all nations.” In Jn. 13:32 as well as in Matthew Jesus Himself says, “when the Son of Man is lifted up He will draw all people unto Himself and there will be Judgment in the world.” John 10:16; while Jesus calling Himself the Good Shepherd, He emphasized His fold to be concerned and be mindful and responsible for the sheep of the other fold. “And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd.” In Matt. 25:32 When He comes He would gather all tribes of the earth and divide them into goat and sheep to His right and to left. The people on the right are rewarded because they have learnt to do good to the people in need, the least and the oppressed community whom Jesus calls my “brethren”. On the contrary the people on the left have been condemned for punishment because they have not understood the calling of their life.

St. Paul is right in saying that “whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain…” for the commence of God. The promise that comes from the seat of the throne is, “I will make new heaven and new earth and everything will be new.” The universal Christ draws all people to Himself as he is the Lord of life and salvation. Having the name above every name, every knee will bow before Him and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord. He embraces all those who come to Him. In Him, there is a space for all. May God the Holy Spirit inspire all of us to be united and to unite the rest of the whole creation unto Christ our Lord. Amen!

Rev. Y.L. Babu Rao
CSI Madras Diocese
Righteous life is characterized by Christian Character:

In the Old Testament lesson (Proverbs 20) sets forth some details of a righteous life, and to brand the opposite vices. Applying these principles in life helps the formation of a Christian character. Wisdom and truth, and all their elevating effects upon human character, require absolutely for their acquirement effort and toil. This is God’s call to mould oneself into a noble personality.

Caution is to be taken in life to avoid drunkenness (v.1), which makes a mockery of the person. Pretending to be a sociable thing, it renders people unfit for society, for it makes abusive with their tongues and outrageous in their passion. (See Prov. 23:29 and Eph.5:18). Verse 2 pleads for the wisdom of avoiding conduct, which might rouse anger so sure to lead to destruction of self (see Prov.8:36). Verse 3 calls for remaining far from strife (see Prov. 17:14; 18:1). Verse 4 exposes the ill effects of idleness and reminds that present conduct determines future conditions. Verse 5 calls for being prudent in life. Verse 6 reminds that thoughtfulness and modesty are parts of Christian perfection. Verse 7 underlines the integrity of a just person, where his/her children are blessed after him/her. Verse 8 calls for the prevention of evil with righteous perceptions. Verse 9 invites God’s children to a spiritual life of clean heart acceptable in the sight of God. Verse 10 denounces dishonesty in trade, which is a great folly and sin. Verse 11 stresses the importance of possessing Godly character even from childhood. This verse eleven demonstrates the centrality of the message of leading a day to day practical life that will witness to the world that we are a people set apart by God. Our life is characterized not by what we say but by what we do as children of God.

In Romans 6:12-21, the apostle discusses the reign of sin, and contrasts it with the reign of grace. Sin may be our master, but as the slave of sin we shall get rewarded in shame and death; or righteousness, that is, the God of grace himself may be our Master, and, as the slave of righteousness or slave of God, we shall have our reward - a reward of grace, in the development of holiness, and in the gift of eternal life. We cannot do better, then, than contrast the reign of sin with the reign of grace.

I. THE REIGN OF SIN (Vv. 12, 13, 21.) God wants us to know that:

1. Sin is a very exacting tyrant. In fact, when we become slaves of sin, we cease being our own masters. We lose the dignity of our nature; we lose self-command; we lose will-power and decision of character. Our bodies become the instruments of unrighteousness, and the lusts of the flesh are obeyed.

2. Sin is a very poor paymaster. For even allowing that it has pleasures to bestow, the pleasures of sin are found to be only for a season (Hebrews 11:25) and after these come shame, remorse, and the horrible tempest which infuriated sin entails, and then comes death, the real wages of sin. This means, of course, alienation from God, and, when it sets finally into the experience, proves a hopeless and helpless condition.

3. The sooner all slaves of sin change their master the better. The reign of sin only tends to torment. The soul that sells itself to such a tyrant is a fool. He is beside himself, like the prodigal, when he does so. He comes to himself when he renounces the tyranny and transfers his allegiance.

II. THE REIGN OF GRACE (Vv. 16-23.) In this passage St. Paul uses three terms to denote the new and better reign. These are "grace," "obedience," "righteousness." And then, dropping personification

Kristu Jignasa
altogether, he shows how we become subjects and slaves of God. From the slavery of sin it is possible to pass into the service and slavery of God. We may get free from sin, and then shall we be at liberty to serve God and be his slaves. We shall not make much mistake if we take up Paul's teaching under the idea of a reign of grace.

1. We enter of our own free-will into the slavery of the God of grace. We are not forced into it; we are "made willing in the day of God's power". The slavery to God is voluntary. It is a yielding of ourselves. In both slaveries we must remember that the will is not forced, but free. We are free in our slavery to sin; we are free when we turn from it to the slavery of a God of grace.

2. We enter our state of grace through obeying from the heart ‘that form of teaching whereunto we were delivered’. This refers clearly to the all-important doctrine of justification by faith, through the reception of which we get delivered from condemnation, and started on our course of sanctification. It is most important, therefore, that that doctrine should be faithfully and clearly stated to the soul which is enslaved through sin. It is the very charter of its spiritual freedom.

3. We find that in serving a God of grace we secure holiness of character. For this voluntary and gracious slavery implies the dedication of all our powers to God. We lay ourselves as living sacrifices” on God's altar. We find ourselves in consequence visited by an increasing sense of consecration. We learn to live not unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again (II Cor.5:14). This sense of consecration becomes habitual. We feel that we are not our own, but bought with a price, and therefore bound to glorify God with our bodies as well as spirits, which are God's. (I Cor.6:20).

4. We find this service of grace happy as well as holy. In other words, we find in God an excellent Paymaster. His service is delightful. Feeling that we are less than the least of all his mercies, feeling that we are at best but unprofitable servants, we accept joyfully whatever he sends; we feel that he daily loads us with his benefits, and then, regarding the great future, he gives us therein ‘eternal life’. Doubtless we do not, strictly speaking, deserve such rewards; they are rewards of grace, not of debt; they are free ‘gifts’ from a gracious Master. Let us, then, renounce the reign of sin, and accept the reign of grace. Its fruit, increasing with the consistent years, is unto holiness, and its end is everlasting life.

Matthew 7:16-23

Jesus Christ our savior has laid down the rule saying ‘By their fruits ye shall know them’. The world will know recognize us by our words and actions, and the course of our conversation. The world observes how we live; our works will either testify us or against us. If we pretend to be God’s children and are immoral, that disproves our pretensions; then we are no true friends to the cross of Christ, whatever we profess, our God is our belly, and our mind earthly things, (Phil.3:18,19). Those are not taught nor sent of the holy God, whose lives evidence that they are led by the unclean spirit.

By the fruits of their doctrine; their fruits as prophets: not that this is the only way, but it is one way, of trying doctrines, whether they be of God or not. What do they tend to do? What affections and practices will they lead those into, that embrace them? If the doctrine be of God, it will tend to promote serious piety, humility, charity, holiness, and love, with other Christian graces; but if, on the contrary, the doctrines these prophets preach have a manifest tendency to make people proud, worldly, and contentious, to make them loose and careless in their conversations, unjust or uncharitable, factious or disturbers of the public peace; if it indulge carnal liberty, and take people off from governing themselves and their families by the strict rules of the narrow way, we may conclude, that this persuasion comes not of him that called us (Gal.5:8).

Jesus Christ has laid down another rule saying, ‘Not everyone that says, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven….’ It will not suffice to say, Lord, Lord; in word and tongue to own Christ for
our Master, and to make addresses to him, and professions of him accordingly: in prayer to God, in
discourse with people, we must call Christ, Lord, Lord; we say well, for so he is (Jn.13:13); but can
we imagine that this is enough to bring us to heaven, that such a piece of formality as this should be
so recompensed, or that he who knows and requires the heart should be so put off with shows for
substance? Compliments among people are pieces of civility that are returned with compliments, but
they are never paid as real services; and can they then be of an account with Christ? There may be a
seeming importunity in prayer, Lord, Lord: but if inward impressions be not answerable to
outward expressions, we are but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. This is not to take us off
from saying, Lord, Lord; from praying, and being earnest in prayer, from professing Christ’s name,
and being bold in professing it, but from resting in these, in the form of godliness, without the power.

It is necessary to our happiness that we do the will of Christ, which is indeed the will of his Father in
heaven. The will of God, as Christ’s Father, is his will in the gospel, for there he is made known,
as the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: and in him our Father. Now this is his will, which we believe in
Christ; that we repent of sin, that we live a holy life, that we love one another. This is his will, even
our sanctification. If we comply not with the will of God, we mock Christ in calling him Lord, as
those did, who put on him a gorgeous robe, and said, Hail, King of the Jews. Saying and doing are
two things, often parted in conversation of people: he that said, I go, sir, and did not go (Matt. 21:30);
but these two things God has joined in his command, and let no man that puts them asunder think
to enter into the kingdom of heaven.

The hypocrite’s plea against the strictness of this law is offering other things in lieu of obedience,
v.22. The plea is supposed to be in that day, that great day, when every man shall appear in his own
colors; when the secrets of all hearts shall be manifest, and among the rest, the secret pretenses with
which sinners now support their vain hopes:

(1) That we have prophesied in thy name? Yes, it may be so; Balaam was overruled to prophesy, and
Saul was against his will among the prophets, yet that did not save them. These prophesied
in his name, but he did not send them; they only made use of his name to serve a turn. Note, A person
may be a preacher, may have gifts for the ministry, and an external call to it, and perhaps some
success in it, and yet be a wicked man; may help others to heaven, and yet come short himself or
herself.

(2) That in thy name we have cast out devils? That may be too; Judas cast out devils, and yet was
a son of perdition. Origen says, that in his time so prevalent was the name of Christ to cast out
devils, which sometimes it availed when named by wicked Christians. A man might cast devils out of
others, and yet have a devil, nay, be a devil himself.

(3) That in thy name we have done many wonderful works. There may be a faith of miracles, where
there is no justifying faith; none of that faith which works by love and obedience. Gifts of tongues and
healing would recommend men to the world, but it is real holiness or sanctification that is accepted of
God. Grace and love are a more excellent way than removing mountains, or speaking with the tongues
of men and of angels (I Cor. 13:1-2). Grace will bring a man to heaven without working miracles, but
working miracles will never bring a man to heaven without grace. Observe that which their heart was
upon, in doing these works, and which they confided in, was the wonderfulness of them. Simon
Magus wondered at the miracles (Acts 8:13), and therefore would give any money for power to do the
like. Observe they had not many good works to plead: they could not pretend to have done many
gracious works of piety and charity; one such would have passed better in their account than many
wonderful works, which availed not at all, while they persisted in disobedience.

Conclusion:

May God enables us to live a life that is worthy of our calling; help us to follow the righteous paths
and avoid all evil in our day to day life, strengthen us to be firm to evade the reign of sin and submit

Kristu Jignasa
ourselves to the reign of God grace in our lives. Let us not be satisfied in orally confessing Christ as Lord but to live a life that demonstrates the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives with serious piety, humility, charity, holiness, love and other Christian graces.

Rev. Dr. Chilkuri Vasantha Rao
CSI Medak Diocese
In Numb. 11:23-30 Moses has been asked by God to select seventy elders from among the people of Israel to be the elders and officers over them. On them he puts some of the spirit taken from Moses that they could prophesy at the tent. The other two who could not be at the tent which was outside the camp were also given the spirit and they prophesied in the camp. Whether chosen were at the tent or away from the tent, that is in the designated place of God’s presence, because of the spirit given, every one of them prophesied. I prophesying with the help of the spirit was not confined to one place. The spirit rested equally on them and empowered them to prophesy. Those who received the spirit could not be restricted. It was given by the same LORD to those who were in His presence and those in the camp. They were anointed to minister. The spirit of God worked in the lives of people and empowered others also, in contrast to the monopoly of the priestly class.

Paul recalls the historic event of God leading the Israelites out of Egypt and making them pass through the sea thus baptizing every one of them in the cloud and the sea (1 Cor. 10:1-4). Along with Israelites also were a “mixed crowd”-the aliens. They too passed the same way as Israelites. This saving event was for all- all of them ate the same spiritual food and drank the same spiritual water. The same God gave same baptism, same food and same drink from the ‘rock’. The baptism was one for all.

In John 10: 7-18 Jesus says he is the gate (door). Many went before him. Though the sheep were innocent “did not listen to them” They know their right owner. Others came as hired ones to lord over the sheep but the Lord owns and protects them. Those who enter through this Lord will be nourished, nurtured and protected. Hired ones think of their survival and safety. In times of crises they run away but the true shepherd protect and lays his life for his sheep. All who listen to him will be saved.

Priesthood and prophesying was not allowed to be the monopoly of a few. In God’s saving act even those who has associated and followed the privileged ones were able to taste God’ provisions. And the shepherd who became a door for the sheep owned them and laid down his life for those innocent sheep.

In all these we see there is an identity in being called. To become Christian is to receive a new identity and that identity is through baptism and following one same Lord. A Christian is one who has “put on Christ” and become a new person.

Through baptism we are initiated into Christ’s holy church and incorporated in to the body of Christ- the Church. From the beginning, baptism has been the door through which one enters the church. Baptism when administered in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, it is not incorporating in to a denominational church but in to the Church of Christ- the Church Universal. Because of this baptism one can relate with his church anywhere in the globe though there may be doctrinal and theological variations. We need to know as someone explained “that our baptism unites us with Christ who took upon himself our sins and those of the whole world that they might be forgiven and blotted out, and opens to us newness of life”. We are baptized by one spirit in to one body to serve one Lord. When the baptism administered with water in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit for the remission of sins, we are baptized by one spirit into one body and it is not repeatable. This baptismal unity in Jesus Christ constitutes a call to the churches to overcome their divisions and to achieve full visible union-that there will be one baptism, one Lord and one Church.
Rev. Satyanandam Paul
CSI Karnataka Central Diocese
Introduction:

One of the greatest challenges the Christians face today is maintaining unity among them. Although everyone believes in one Lord they often differ in several other areas of faith and practices. Despite of continuous efforts to uphold ecumenical spirit, the divisions among Christians still persists. Ecumenical Sunday not only urges us to meditate upon the unity among Christians but also unity among the whole creation to bring justice and peace in the world. In this situation of disunity among God’s creation, let us look at Ezekiel 37:15-28.

Prophet Ezekiel speaks to the Israelite exiles who are in Babylon. Ezekiel was one of the two important prophets who lived in Babylon during the exilic period of 6th century BCE. Repeatedly the prophets remind the exiles that exile is a punishment of the corporate sins of the people of Israel and Judah. Both the wicked and the righteous had to face the fate of exile. The exiles, the audience of the Prophet, were in utter hopeless situation. They almost lost their faith in their God and also their future. Many shifted their allegiance to gods of Babylon. The exiles were at the verge of declining. To this very people, the prophet speaks of unity and hope in future. The prophetic visions in Ezekiel 37 deal with the restoration of the nation Israel. And they inform us that unity is God’s will for God’s creations.

1. God Desires Unity of Every Creation:

Deportation and scattering of conquered populace into various parts of the empire was one of the political strategies of ancient empires. This was carefully done in order to avoid the possible threat to the empire forever. The Neo-Babylonian Empire of 6th century BCE was no different from this common attitude of the ancient world. The Jewish exile in Babylon was the result of this very policy. The deportation and exile not only made the Jewish community vulnerable but also absolutely dismantled the hopes and aspirations of the community.

The prophet communicates the message that the Lord wants the exiles to look forward with hope to a new home God would provide them. To do so, God asks them to look back to their old home, from which they were exiled. The assurance given to the exiles was the active presence of God, who is omnipresent and omnipotent, among their life struggles in Babylon.

The first step of deliverance was to make the exilic community united. God takes initiative to bring unity among the children of God. Through the prophetic vision, God conveys the message of the need for unification of the people of God forgetting all differences that divided them in the past. The envisioned unity is to bring glory to God. Through the vision, God makes the Jewish community aware of the need of unity among them for God to act and deliver them from their bondage. The disunity was the main hindrance to see and experience the acts of God in their lives.

The vision further conveys God’s desire to bring unity among the deported and to make the community into one stronger in faith and hope. It is God’s desire for everyone to be united to partake in the mission of God. It is God who is taking the initiative for uniting the creation. God invites everyone to be part of the unifying process.

Phil 4: 8-20 speaks of bringing unity among the people through helping and caring each other. Paul says that it is God’s desire for everyone to show compassion to his/her neighbours and those in need.
By giving the examples of the Church in Jerusalem, the Apostle explicitly tells the fact that our actions should ultimately bring unity of all God’s creation.

2. Unity to Bring Peace and Justice to Whole Creation

People unite for several reasons. United force of human being may be used for constructive as well as destructive purposes. But God’s desire for the unity of God’s creations is to bring glory to God and welfare of whole creation. Unity is to bring peace and justice to everyone. Matt 5: 21-26 speaks of the significance of reconciliation in bring peace and justice into the society. This passage clearly depicts God’s desire to bring peace and justice in the society by removing all kinds of prejudices and negative attitudes to our brothers and sisters live around us.

Even in the hopeless and depressing times of the exiles in 6th century BCE, the Prophet assures the presence of God in their midst. The history tells us the story of the wonderful experience of the deliverance of the exiles from their bondage and their return to their homeland. Deliverance from the scattered situation and bring them to unity and back home are God’s plan for the Israelites in Babylon. God’s plan of deliverance was meant to bring welfare to God’s children and for the glory of God. The deliverance of the unified people of God becomes witness before the nations.

The assurance of God’s presence in the midst of struggles and strives of god’s children extends to us too. Just as God delivered the exiles and brought them as a unified force to their home country safe and sound, God is going to deliver everyone who lives today from all kinds of bondages and makes them a unified force to bring peace and justice to the whole creation. In the midst of struggles, one needs to know that he/she is not alone but God is there. Moreover, one needs to remember that unity and deliverance are for bringing peace and justice to the whole creation.

Rev. Dr. Royce Manoj Victor  
CSI-EMS Liaison Officer

Kristu Jignasa
One of the innovative and people’s participatory projects which has been introduced by or Prime Minister Mr. Narendra Modi “Swachh Bharat Abhiyan” enables us to either accept or at least realize that each one of us are responsible to our nation in one way or the other, invariably, the Church is also part and parcel of the development project. As we are commemorating the 66th REPUBLIC DAY of our nation, let us reflect the Biblical passages which help us to apply God’s word to our present context.

**Amos 5: 7-15**

The content in Amos 5 is simple but is full of meaning. “Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again…” “Deserted in her own land, with no one to lift her up.” She has no power to remain standing and there is no power for her to get back on her feet. Not only was there an inner collapse, but a force stronger than her had thrown her down. This is nothing but the result of a broken fellowship with God. The Hebrew word *natash* means more than being forsaken. Amos clearly point out that apart from God, neither the altars which we build to worship God nor any Individuals can lift Israel up. Therefore the restoration of the broken relationship is only possible if there is a renewal of fellowship. In verses 4-6 God makes the issue very clear with the word: “Seek me and live.” The emphasis in these words is on the person of God: “Seek Me!” What is needed is personal fellowship with Him.

“Seek me and live” consists of only two words: *darash chayah*, “seek, live.” It is said in one single breath. Finding the Lord means life. The form in which the word “live” is stated is a command. It is the same kind of command as in book of Genesis “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.” If “live” is stated in the imperative, “Seek Me” is also a command. As a new-born blind animal seeks his mother’s breast for milk so we must seek that which is so close to us that we can touch it, without being able to see it. Real seeking begins when we turn away from ourselves.

Amos says man turns justice into bitterness. The Hebrew word is *la’anah*, which means: “to curse,” “wormwood,” or “poison.” Justice is part of God’s character. Justice is applied as a measuring rod that draws a comparison between God’s character and that which is out of character with God. Justice is the practical application of righteousness. Unrighteousness makes us lose the perspective of whom we are dealing with.

**St. Mark 12:13-17**

Jesus has been sent to this world to inaugurate the Lord’s Kingdom on the earth. Apart from the ministry what the Lord Jesus has done on this earth, especially dealing with the opponents who were always tried to criticize him and his style of functioning as the Messiah, Jesus was logical in answering the critical questions raised by the Roman rulers who were trying to catch Him as an accused person in public and prosecute to death.

Apparently, it was felt that there was no safe answer Jesus could give to their question. If He recommended that they ought not to pay taxes to the Romans, they could report Him to the Roman occupational forces and have Him arrested. If He told them that it was OK to pay, He would have lost
public support, because He would have sided with Israel’s enemy. Jesus recognized the hypocrisy of those who asked the question.

Jesus said that the coin belongs to Caesar, for it bears Caesar’s image. Human beings bear God’s image! So, the implication of the passage is that Caesar too belongs to God and must obey God.

Romans 12:13

Paul as a theologian and as a follower of Lord Jesus Christ had developed a comprehensive understanding about being a responsible citizen. Though his letters speak many volumes about God’s Kingdom, which in his words has already come and not yet fulfilled, his letters also apparently reflect the theme of responsible citizen.

The first principle is that of submission to the government in power, whether we voted for it or not. The Greek word, rendered “submit” is hypotasso, which means “to be subordinate.” or “to obey.” The same word is found in the verses: “Then JESUS went down to Nazareth with His parents and was obedient to them.” The Apostles equates obedience to the government with obedience to God. The followers of Christ who disobey government regulations disobey God. Paul mentions two areas in which secular government limits personal freedom; one is morality and the other taxation.

Things may look bad of our political and, moral condition, but God is still firmly in control of the situation. But we are here to use the gifts God has given us to the best of our ability to serve the best interest of his kingdom and of our neighbors.

Edward Everett says “I am only one man, but I am one man. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And what I can do, I ought to do. And what I ought to do, by the grace of God, I will do.” People like Joseph, Daniel, and Naaman actively served their governments without compromising their principles. We too must not be paralyzed into inaction by fear of failure, but trust God’s guidance and forgiveness.

Who can serve the government better than a Christian? Only a Christian can have unselfish motivation, for he realizes that true happiness is not a life cluttered with possessions and accomplishments, but a life filled by Christ. A Christian citizen does not have to grasp and claw for his/her own advantage. He/she can risk his/her own interests. He/she can let go of self-interest because he/she knows that Christ is his/her solid possession.

When we speak of whether the Church has a political responsibility, we are not speaking about endorsing particular candidates, conducting partisan campaigns, or representing a party or platform. What we are doing instead is clarifying the mission of the Church that enfolds the welfare of the cosmos, and applying the teachings of the Church about human life and behavior to the circumstances under which we organize ourselves as a society. As responsible citizens of our country, let us strive for the unity, Peace and harmony of our Country.

Rev. Zaccheaus Katta
CSI Medak Diocese
The Goodness of Creation

Genesis 1:24-31 Psalm 104:1-13
Eph. 1:3-14 Matthew 6:9-13
E: Exodus 17:1-6 Acts 10:9-16

God’s attitude towards His creation
The Bible is the story of God’s relationship with His creation, and it begins with an inspiring account of the beginning of that relationship. The story shows God’s delight and pleasure in crafting and forming interesting and diverse spaces, sights, sounds, tastes, and textures. Each day builds on the day before, creating an interconnected web, and every moment of creation brings something new and beautiful. On the sixth day God created many kinds of animals. God also made a very specific and special being in the image and likeness of Godself—humankind. And at every moment, God sees that the creation is good. That is the unmistakable message of the opening chapter of the Bible. Six times God declares what he has just done to be ‘good’, and the seventh time ‘very good’.

The first thing God did next was to bless humankind and all the plants and the animals that had just been created throughout all the earth. It was an invitation into relationship with God, into fellowship with all creations on the earth. We live in community with the entirety of God’s creation, and we have a responsibility to give fellowship for God’s creations. This knowledge helps to instill in us a rich and abiding love for creation—a love that guides our daily actions and brings us closer to our Creator. The Bible affirms that all creation already praises/worships God. Indeed, John’s vision of the whole universe, centered around the throne of God reaches its climactic crescendo of praise when he says ‘Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea and all that is in them’ bringing worship ‘to him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb’ (Rev. 5:13).

Now, we may not be able to grasp or explain how creation praises God. Worshipping God in a fellowship with the creation enhances the goodness of the creation. The three principles that keep the goodness of the creation are:

1. The principle of intrinsic value
The repeated affirmation, ‘God saw that it was good’, is the seal of God’s approval on the whole universe in all its functioning. God created the universe and all its components with an intrinsic worth/value. The whole earth as a complex ecological system and all the components of those systems—from rocks to rainbows—have worth because they are the part of these systems. Earth is a living creature with an intrinsic value. The formation of Adam from “the dust of the ground” (Genesis 2:7) highlights the connection between human beings and the earth. Adam, the word for “human being,” is a play on adamah, the word for “ground” or “earth.” Everything created by God has an intrinsic value and nothing in the universe is neither a waste nor useless.

In the face of a deluge, God commanded Noah: “You are to bring into the ark two of all living creatures, male and female, to keep them alive with you. Two of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and of every kind of creature that moves along the ground will come, to you to be kept alive”. But deluges need not be only of the watery kind; they can also be floods of people sprawling over the land and displacing God’s creatures. “Be fruitful and increase in number” (Gen 1:23). To those who would expand across the land at the expense of all other creatures, the prophet warns: “Woe to you who add house to house and join field to field till no space is left and you live alone in the land” (Isa 5:8). The story of Noah has much to say about biodiversity. In Genesis chapter 9 the phrases ‘every animal’ or ‘every living creature’ is mentioned six times as well as ‘every bird’ twice. This is a biodiversity chapter, but most importantly God’s covenant was not just with Noah and his descendants, but with the animals. It is quite obvious that it is not God’s will that the animals perish or become extinct. All species were saved in the ark and to be protected through the covenant. God has provided an eco-

Kristu Jignasa
system suitable for its intrinsic value. For Poisonous animals God allotted shola forests. Man entered the ecosystem of poisonous animals, hence they are now coming to the plains. We failed to understand the intrinsic value of each components and the ecosystem surrounding it. Economists value only those things which has a monetary value. From the point of view of Economics the value anything in the universe is determined by demand of the Market. This is against the biblical perspective.

2. The principle of purpose
The Universe, Earth and all its components, are a part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has a place in the overall goal of that design. God designed each component to play a role in the total wellbeing of the Earth. The goodness of creation is of value to God and was created with a purpose. Thus, e.g., Psalm 104 celebrates not only those aspects of creation which serve human needs (crops and domestic animals), but also those that have no immediate connection with human life - the wild places and wild creatures that live there.

The creation of Mangroves and Frogs are the two best examples to illustrate the principle of purpose. The Mangroves were considered as a ‘useless’ vegetation. The conversion of mangrove habitat into tourist resorts, contributed significantly to the catastrophic loss of human lives and settlements during the 2004 tsunami. Myanmar and Maldives suffered very less from the killing spree of the tsunami because the tourism industry had so far not spread its tentacles to the virgin mangroves and coral reefs surrounding the coastline. If only the mangroves were intact, the damage from tsunami would have been greatly minimized. It happened earlier in Bangladesh. In 1960, a tsunami wave hit the coast in an area where mangroves were intact. There was not a single human loss.

Frogs are an important indicator of ecosystems. Frogs are also friends of farmers. Frogs feed on many insects and pests that frequently destroy the crops. Also, they are consumed by fish, some large insects, snakes, lizards, larger frogs, birds and small mammals. In the food chain, frogs play a big role in maintaining a healthy environment. Many of the human activities are unhealthy to frogs and their habitats. We drain the wetlands to claim land for cultivation, housing and tourist resorts thereby causing habitat destruction. The extinction of frogs, results in the multiplication of mosquitoes and other insects which will spread fatal diseases. If we could understand the purpose of the creation of Mangroves and Frogs and the role they have been playing in nature, we won’t destroy mangroves or kill frogs. Everything created by God has a purpose and nothing in the universe is neither waste nor useless.

3. The principle of interconnectedness
All components in the Earth are mutually interconnected or dependent on each other for life and survival. Man is not alone, we share this earth with 80 million other species. The relationship between these species is connected in a complex web of interaction. People who profess faith in God should discover and acknowledge the contributions that species and abiota make to their shared ecosystems. Actions that inhibit their contributions will be identified and prevented.

In the web of life, every animal and every plant relies on other plants and animals to survive. All animals and plants in a sense work together to survive, for instance, bees visit the flowers of plants and take nectar and use it to make honey. While the bee is collecting nectar, it usually gets a powder on it called pollen. Bees fly from one flower to the next, carrying this pollen. Some of the pollen falls off into the flowers, and the plants use that to reproduce! The plant is helping the bees, and the bees are helping the plants.

An amazing variety of habitats, people, plants, and animals are all interconnected in a fragile web of life we call “biodiversity.” And every member is essential in keeping this web in balance. About 1.4 million species have been identified, and researchers estimate that millions more have yet to be counted. Thousands of species may be vanishing each year as a result of pollution, over-harvesting,
habitat degradation, and other human actions. God created the web of life which is interdependent. A loss of one species will break one link in the web which will weaken the whole web.

**Conclusion**
The creation is a symphony where we find a variety of creatures each singing and worshipping the Maker in accordance with its unique character, different from creatures of another ‘make.’ The webbing together of God, humans, and all creation in justice, fulfillment, and delight is what the Hebrew prophets call *shalom*. In the Bible, shalom means *universal flourishing, wholeness, and delight*—a rich state of affairs. For a rich state of affairs we have to acknowledge the intrinsic worth of each components of the creation, the purpose of each component of the creation, and the web of the creation. Shalom, in other words, is the fellowship of the creation to keep the goodness of the creation.

Consider another section of Scripture in which God inspired a psalm revealing more about the Goodness of His creation. "O Lord," the psalmist writes, "how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions . . . You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You *renew* the face of the earth" (Psalm:104:24, 30).

**Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackadu**
**Convene, CSI Synod Ecological Concerns**
In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, bringing in to being everything out of nothing. Transformation of formlessness into form and transformation of chaos into cosmos. The whole creation was made possible within six days and the seventh day God took rest. He found everything He created was good and man, His own image was the crown of creation. God gave woman to man as helpmate and companion. They were placed in the Garden of Eden as the stewards of His creation.

God so loved them that He, gave all freedom to move, to act and to eat everything but prevented them from eating the fruit which gives knowledge of good and evil. God visited them every day. Walked with them, talked with them, spent time with them. God loved them and cared them and kept friendship with them. The pre-fall condition was all perfect and harmonious.

But man and woman were not satisfied with what they had. They were not sincere to God the creator. They did not obey the word of God, they did not keep the command, they were disobedient to their creator God. The disobedience set apart God and the creation. They lost God’s presence, His friendship, His care, His counsel, His protection and His providence, when they agreed to the word of the Serpent and believed it, than God the creator.

When man and woman had broken the command of God, they couldn’t face the God, so they hid from the presence of God. The Serpent tested the man and the woman about God’s instructions. They couldn’t firmly hold on the word of God. When God came to visit them, man and the woman did not accept their faults. The man blamed woman and the woman blamed the Serpent. As a result, the curse was on three of them. They were sent out of garden. The man has to toil to get the lively hood. The woman has to suffer great sorrow and pain and submit to man. The Serpent must eat dust and on his belly he shall move through all his life. The sin entered in to this world, and consequently, the pain, sorrow, sufferings and shame.

**Conclusion:**

All have sinned against God the creator. But God wishes His creation should come back to Him.

John 3:16 says “ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

The word of God gives us the call to turn away from sin and submit our lives to Jesus. The worship guides the sinner to hear the word of God and prepare his/her heart to accept Jesus Christ.

All have sinned against God, But Jesus’ blood redeem and sanctify the sinners. God forgive sins of the people those who are believing in Jesus, and justify those who turn to Him. Only those who forgive their brother/sister will be justified before God and will be blessed by forgiveness and mercy.

**Dr. (Mrs.) Souminijayam**

Kalloor, Ernakulam
“At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk”. John 5:9

The Church is called for the healing ministry in the society, besides preaching and teaching. Health is not only related to body, but is related to physical, emotional, social and spiritual aspect of life. There are several incurable illnesses affecting our society, such as discrimination in the areas of caste, gender, religion, and race.

Mind is as important as the body. Spirit is as important as the mind. All are closely linked and work together. Basically health is a combination of physical and mental well-being. It depends on the correct functioning of all bodily organs. Thus health is one’s spiritual realization, self-development, social adjustment and physical fitness. All these are necessary to satisfy the concept of “holistic health”. Thus the church is to promote a holistic health approach in the community.

**Biblical Understanding of Healing**

Healing is a gift of God. It belongs to God (Gen. 20:17, 18). Jesus possessed this gift (Matt. 8:16), and gave the healing power to the apostles (Matt. 10:1-8). The restoration of health helped people to lead a spiritually oriented life and also understand the spiritual aspects of health and well-being. Our spiritual well-being with God needs repentance, faith and prayer. If our spirit is tuned with God, it is certain that our mind will remain healthy and we overcome fear and anxiety.

**Repentance heals Mental Illness**

Health is not only the absence of diseases, but it is related to the whole human body. In fact, we try to maintain health in body alone, but in our daily life, most of the time we are sick in our mind. Jesus heals the sinner who sinned against God and fellow human. For example, in the story of the prodigal son in Lk. 15:11-31 and the story of Zacchaeus in Lk. 19:1, both repented and consequently were healed in their conscience.

**Prayer Heals Spiritual Illness**

In times of sickness and depression, we get prayer support from others more than the normal situation. The spiritual sickness affects our relationship with God and keeps us away from God and his plans. But prayer alone helps and supports us to take proper way to lead life. There are plenty of examples for the power of prayer in spiritual healing in the Bible. In Jesus’ time, people came to him with sickness and mental agony. Jesus sympathized and consoled them and healed their spiritual illness. He challenged the disciples to bring forth miracles through prayer. It is a challenge to the church also. Most of the Para church organizations advertise that healing ministry is outside the ministry of the Church. And now we see plenty of healing tents. Further, the present scenario of prayer and healing is very much commercial. Faith in God is needed not only for the miracles but for the well-being of the wider humanity. In such a situation, the call of the church is to educate the people to draw near to God by leading a strong prayerful life.

**Faith Heals Community Illness**

In a multi-religious context, each one has their own beliefs and customs. Healing of the community through faith is an ongoing process. God calls us to participate in God’s Kingdom, in which our responsibility is to share God’s love with all members of humankind. It should be spontaneous and...
without laying any preconditions. For instance, Lk. 17:11-19 explains how the ten persons stricken with leprosy came to Jesus without laying any preconditions. Jesus healed them to lead a normal life in their community. The healing ministry to the minority should be without any hurdle of suspicion both from the people for whom we work and from those who are against our service to minorities.

There are sicknesses of unjust and corrupt political, social and religious systems in the community. The church is expected to respond to these unjust issues. We need a healthy community life. Nobel Laureate and scientist Sir Aron Kluge said, “Science will not offer all answers to the ills of humanity; Science is not a panacea for problems facing humanity. We can’t expect miracles or wonders from science”.

However, we should give adequate importance to other options like spiritual healing, faith healing, Psychological cures and similar approaches in order to create a healthy community. By faith, people believe that God is personally interested in their welfare and they are not alone in their struggle to fight against disease and problems in the community. It is true that, faith is active in healing many severe diseases. In fact, healing beyond medicine is a great challenge to the Church in India.

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Lent season is a very significant in the life and activities of the church which enables to introspect and rededicate ourselves to God. Lent enumerates the church to meditate upon Christ and his suffering on the cross which would bring spiritual revolution in the lives of believers in and through the scripture in our faith journey. It is a time of repentance. “Metonoiao” in Greek means turning from our folly to God, accepting His will in our lives for his ministry. It also refers to spring season, falling of the old leaves of and blossoming of new leaves, indicating the renewal of life, and spirituality.

Lent is also a time for lending our blessings of gifts to the needy and identify ourselves with suffering communities and the oppressed. Many Church leaders like Martin Luther, the great protestant church reformer were touched by our Lord during the lent season to be committed to their calling of God. At this time it is obvious and imperative to meditate on the theme “A Time of Reconciliation” which brings peace and joy among the individuals and corporate. The word used in Greek for Reconciliation APOKATALLASSEIN refers to bringing two parties into peaceful relation or bringing together friends, who have been estranged or hostile.

I. Reconciliation among the brothers: Genesis 45:1-11.
This is the episode of Joseph, son of Jacob who had been persecuted by his own brothers due to his honesty and integrity which made them jealousy upon Joseph. In fact they plotted to kill him and finally they sold him to Ishmaelities for 20 shekels of silver. Afterwards, he was brought to Egypt and there again he was punished by Pothipar’s wife unjustly. But God was with him and delivered from all his tribulations and lifted him up to be in the second place to Pharaoh in Egypt to reign the country. Since God gave him wisdom, he used his prudence to protect the country from famine. Then the climax was that the brothers who gave him agony, came to Joseph in Egypt in order to be rescued from famine. Joseph was kind enough to forgive them, he reconciled with them without vindication. He even said “God sent me before you to preserve life”. Since Joseph was concerned about his brothers, he helped them to live in Egypt with all facilities. It shows Joseph’s magnanimity to coexist with love and goodness, not counting their criminality.

II. Reconciliation in the church:
God is the reconciler and we are reconciled through our Lord Jesus Christ Eph.2:11-22). Since God loved us by giving His only begotten son, to sacrifice his life on the cross, Jesus paid price for our sins and pleased God through his sacrificial death. For in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell unto him to reconcile to himself all things, whether in earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross (Col.1:20). St. Paul realized this fact and experienced this meaning of reconciliation through Christ. He shared this message with Ephesians, as how this alienated gentiles became children of God through faith in Christ and became one with Christ and with one another. Before accepting Christ, there was enmity between Jews and Gentiles. But Paul says that those who are far off have been brought near. Isaiah had heard God say “Peace, Peace to the far and to the near” Is.57:19. Jesus abolished the law of commandments expressed in ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace and he might reconcile us both to God in body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility. Our Lord created new age of fellowship among the brethren that they are no longer strangers or aliens but the fellow citizens with the saints and members of the house hold of God. In Him the believers are being built together in the dwelling place of God by the Spirit.

Kristu Jignasa
Reconciliation ministry is a finished ministry through the death and resurrection of our Lord and our duty is to cooperate with God’s plan to be engaged in the mission to the world. It needs repentance and accepting others as brothers and sisters. Reconciliation brings peace and freedom (Eph.2:14-17; Gal.5:1) and also it enables not to receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear but to receive the Spirit of adoption as sons by whom we cry Abba, Father. As we are living in the pluralistic context, we cannot ignore the realities of conflicts between races, the difference of creed and colour and enmity. But we carry the vision of Christ through the gospel, in word and deed, to create a new era of fellowship, peace and justice through reconciliation ministry.

Faith is the basic factor for salvation as Paul states in Eph.2:8. For by grace you have been saved through faith and this not of yourself; it is a gift of God. And also faith helps us to discover miracles and wonders in our lives. The above portion is a fascinating passage which tells us that Jesus manifested His glory through miracle in the wedding at Cana. Jesus and his disciples were invited to this wedding but there was shortage of vine in the marriage party. Immediately Mary the mother of Jesus said to him they have no vine. Jesus asked the servants to fill the waterpots with water and they filled them up to the brim. Then he said to them, draw some out now and take it to the master of the feast. That became good vine and everybody was surprised to taste the sweet vine. It was a first sign Jesus performed in Cana of Galilee and manifested his glory and his disciples believed in him. Here we find Jesus’ intervention in the need of the people and manifestation of his glory made the people to realize God’s power and believed in him. In fact Mary had acknowledged our Lord’s power in the crisis situation. When we meditate this point of view, we comprehend God’s presence and power is always available as long as we have faith on him and cooperate to the God’s plan in our lives and ministry. This would make us reconciled and have right relationship between God and man and fellowship among brethren. Today the church is divided by human strife and carnality and we tend to fail to carry this reconciliation ministry in the world. So we need to have faith in God and also submit ourselves perfectly to the will of God as ambassadors of Christ to extend God’s kingdom in this world. May God bless our Churches and ministry.

Rt. Rev. Dr. A. Rajavelu
Bishop in Vellore
Introduction

Today, Christians around the world will mark the beginning of Lent by observing Ash Wednesday. In these forty days leading up to Easter, believers devote special attention to the disciplines of repentance, self-examination, and self-denial. The ashes which many traditions daub on the forehead symbolize our inner penitence, and also remind us of our mortality as we read in the words that God spoke to Adam in Genesis 3:19, words which are often read during Lent: “you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (NRSV).

Ash Wednesday inaugurates not simply the 40 days preceding Easter but the whole 90-day paschal cycle, which extends beyond Easter seven weeks until Pentecost. The Lectionary cycle grew backward and forward from the central celebration of Easter. Hence we are reminded of the one mystery—the death of Jesus, his resurrection and the gift of the Holy Spirit.

What the Roman Catholic theologian Karl Rahner said is of pertinence: "When on Ash Wednesday we hear the words, ‘Remember, you are dust,’ we are also told that we are brothers and sisters of the incarnate Lord. In these words we are told everything that we are: nothingness that is filled with eternity; death that teems with life; futility that redeems; dust that is God’s life forever."

Ash Wednesday is also a time of celebration of interconnectedness. "Remember that you are dust and to dust you shall return," is said to each and every one of us. In this connection one may try to understand the sign of the cross. We all know that it is at Baptism we receive the sign of the cross on their foreheads, and are "marked as Christ's own for ever." We are ‘signed with a corporate identity as children of God,’ brothers and sisters of Christ, citizens of the household of faith and the kingdom of God.

Then on Ash Wednesday, as we are marked with the sign of the cross, the sign is clearly visible. It is important to focus our minds to this sign. The mark of the cross is the shape of a capital "I" scratched out. This capital ‘I’ is uniquely me. My strengths and my weaknesses. My talents and my sins. But this capital "I" is also that which separates me from God. In imposing the ashes, the vertical stroke of the capital "I" is followed by the horizontal stroke of crossing it out. The "I" that is crossed out is the "I" that leads to the feelings of alienation from God. It is the ‘sin’, the alienation and fallings of being separated from God, the sense that God is totally transcendent and holy and I am simply mortal and fallen. It is as if in the horizontal stroke the loving arms of Christ are stretched out to welcome me back home. The wiping away of the "I" that separates me from God gives me the freedom and the ability to reach out to my brothers and sisters.

The ‘cross of ashes’ is a call to repent of the "sin" that I allow to separate me from God -- a call to forgiveness and wholeness -- and at the same time, the cross of ashes is formed by my personal relationship with God intersecting with my solidarity, my commonality, with all the others for whom Christ died.

Ash Wednesday is a time to introspect our spirituality:

Ash Wednesday is a time when we as Christians are reminded that our spirituality is not simply an individual way to feel good in our private relationship with God, but a call to confront evil in
whatever form it appears, within ourselves, in our communities, in our culture, and in our world. It is a call to return to God, through practices of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. It is a call to look upon the human condition, and see it as God sees it.

The message of Ash Wednesday is that there is no shortcut to Easter, but it points toward Easter. Ash Wednesday is the beginning of a journey that leads through Holy Week and Good Friday, and then to Easter. And then necessarily to the Day of Pentecost as I said in the beginning. The message is not that God snatches us out of suffering, or provides a way to avoid having to face our mortality but that God became one of us in Jesus, and walks through it with us, to open the way of resurrection, not apart from the dust and ashes, not apart from the way of the cross, but through the dust and ashes, through the utter desolation of the cross to the resurrection. Jesus walks this human journey with us, to its uttermost, most desolate and empty end, trusting only in the One who alone can bring life out of these ashes.

**Conclusion:**

The ashes are a sign, not only of our mortality, but also of our repentance, our return to God. Let us move backward from our stance and forward to God from our ‘alienation’ into ‘close association’ with our Saviour who is waiting to receive us with ‘His stretched arms,’ ‘the pierced arms,’ through which only comes our salvation.

So our call this Ash Wednesday (2015) is to follow Jesus into the wasteland, into the darkness, to face the entire human predicament head on, and to return to God, who restores us to life in Christ. Jesus himself has walked this way. We begin this Lent with our response to the call to follow in his footsteps.

**Prayer:**

Almighty and everlasting God, who hatest nothing that thou hast made, and dost forgive the sins of all them that are penitent: Create and make in us new and contrite hearts, that we worthily lamenting our sins, and acknowledging our wretchedness, may obtain of thee, the God of all mercy, perfect remission and forgiveness; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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**Rt. Rev. Dr. Daniel S. Thiagarajah**

Bishop, Jaffna Diocese, Sri Lanka
Introduction

Today’s theme is highly relevant for an increasingly divided and fragmented Indian social environment. The scripture portions, which are suggested for reading this Sunday, brings out the crux of the gospel, namely justice, peace and inclusion by referring against any kind of ‘untouchability’ or ‘purity- pollution’ concept. Though the references are mainly about the diseases, which make people either under ostracised situation or contempt and thus a ‘lesser human being’, it has a wider connotation of social exclusion. The Trinitarian God, by presenting himself as a God of unity, inclusion and fellowship, stands against any form of discrimination and exclusion.

Leprosy: ‘decayed’ body and the social body (II Kings 5: 1- 10)

It is clear from the story that this leprosy is something that Naaman (and perhaps his wife) wanted to be rid of, mainly because of the social stigma attached with it in Israel. He is a foreigner, particularly a powerful foreigner, commanding the army of Israel's enemy, Aram. It appears that Naaman’s leprosy did not carry the stigma of social and cultic alienation in Aram, such as is described in Leviticus 13-14. But, within the geographical territory of Israel, Naaman had to face the contemptuous attitude of the people even though he was a powerful person.

Indian social system, inflicted with the caste system based on the purity- pollution concept; actually make people from the lower caste vulnerable. The qualities of people from the lower caste of the society, and their ability to be in the higher positions are not affirmed or respected by many a people from the higher strata simply because of the racial/ caste discrimination. ‘Polluted’ body of the people from lower strata will not be part of the body of the society. St Paul points out that “Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it” (I Corinthians 12: 27). The body of Christ will become incomplete or rather deformed while any of the components, human beings or even nature, is ostracised, and considered as untouchables. Untouchability is prevalent in the 21st century India, and unfortunately ‘Ache din’ (good day) is yet to come for the Dalits and Tribals who are in the receiving end of the practice of untouchability. It is evident that the Indian church is also not free from the caste practices, and thus India needs people who points out remedy for the malady of casteism and untouchability- both physical and social- as the Hebrew slave girl. The body of a person or the bodies of the oppressed communities do not make the society rotten; but the social norms of disparities and discrimination do make the society rotten.

Leprosy: myriad ways of exclusion (Matthew 8: 1- 4)

This leper in this narrative was in a desperate situation. Biblical leprosy (distinct from modern Hansen's disease) was an assortment of serious skin problems that isolated the leper from the rest of society. He knows Jesus is able to make him clean if he wants to; he is not using “if you are willing ” as a religious way of saying, "I doubt that you can, but I would be happy if you might do something for me anyway." Yet the text demonstrates, as has been already noted, that his trust in Jesus' power is not presumption either. This faith should not be taken only as a personal belief and its fruitful end. Instead this could be viewed as the belief in a system where Jesus suggests to consider your neighbour as yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). A person with physical or mental ailment is also our own brother/ sister. Only when we will feel that pain and agony of the person who is sick and we will show empathy to them. We will be trying then, to help them in the best possible ways. But, this will not be an easy task.

Many of us are willing to take care of our relatives/ friends while they are sick. But we ourselves will become skeptical about diseases such as AIDS. Across the country, many of the children living with HIV/AIDS are denied education in the schools fearing that they will spread HIV. The social stigma
connected with AIDS is stronger than that off leprosy in the ancient ages. Though the world know very well that AIDS could be transformed in other ways apart from the sexual relationships, it is still considered something as the result of ‘sin’. It is sad to see that the empathetic approach of Jesus Christ to those who suffer from ailment is not seen among the present-day Christians.

While we respectfully acknowledge the work of many doctors with the Christian zeal, it is sad to note that many of the so-called Christian hospitals follow the business-driven style in the field of healing ministry. New hospitals such as ‘multi-speciality’ and ‘super-speciality’ are christened in such a way to give the idea that health care is the sole right of the affluent in the society. In other words, the retreat of the Christians/Indian church from the field of healing ministry makes most of the poor and vulnerable patients ‘untouchables’.

Today’s theme suggests us to rethink about our social system which promotes casteism and thus untouchability and about the healing ministry from which we are escaping. Casteism and negligence to the healing ministry are crimes against Jesus Christ who surpassed the social barriers by living with the Samaritans (John 4: 39-41) and healing many sick persons even by making a medicine with his own saliva (John 9: 6). The passages for today are a challenge to fight any kind of discrimination and a call for an inclusive community.

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Director, Department of Communications, CSI
“Faith is the act of the intellect when it assents to divine truth under the influence of the will moved by God through grace”

(St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica II.II.q2.a.9)

Faith is that aspect of life that leads us forward every moment, every day. As our life is filled with ups and downs, happiness and sorrows, health and sickness, fortunes and losses, faith pushes us forward through the lowly times of life. Faith is a Biblical concept and divine assurance. Faith is described rather than defined in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. These descriptions tend to be in two ways: firstly, the relationship of Israel, as a nation, to Yahweh; and secondly, the relationship of certain specific people to Yahweh. The Hebrew Bible, in fact, does not have one single word for faith. The term frequently used in the New Testament to express the idea of faith is 

\textit{pistis}. \textit{Pistis} does translate the sense of faith as assent. But, \textit{pistis} does not completely express the variety of meanings encompassed in the Hebrew Bible’s terminology. The Hebrew Bible uses the root ‘\textit{˒mn}’ to express what we are calling “faith.” The verb form of that root, \textit{˒amān,} never means “believe” but expresses the basic sense of the root: that is, “to sustain, support, and carry” (2 Kgs 18:16). The same root also used to refer daughters carried at their mothers’ sides (Isa 60:4); to firm places (Isa 22:23); to permanent posts in the royal service (1 Sam 2:35; 1 Kgs 11:38); to the people of Israel in perpetuity (Isa 7:9); as well as to a variety of notions all of which have the sense of firmness, stability, and confidence (1 Sam 2:35; 3:20; Deut 7:9, 12; 1 Kgs. 8:26; Ps. 89:29, 111:7; Neh. 9:8). This same root, in its nominal forms ‘\textit{˒emet}’ and ‘\textit{˒emunā},’ mean “steadfastness,” and “reliability.”

Therefore, faith according to the Bible carries numerous meanings. It may represent simple trust in God or in the Word of God, and at other times, faith, more or less becomes equivalent to active obedience. It may also find expression in the declaration of a creedal statement. Thus, it also comes to represent the complete body of received Christian teaching or truth. In Colossians 2:7, the term suggests something to be accepted as a whole and embodied in personal life. In 2 Timothy 4:7 Paul witnesses to having “kept the faith.” The sense of \textit{trusting} and having confidence on God, who is the source of life, is the life-giving aspect in faith. All the readings for this day express the life-giving faith in various contexts. We would focus our reflections primarily, on the Old Testament lesson 2 Kings 4:1-7.

1. Faith Facilitates Connection to the Sources of Life at Times of Crisis

Sources of life are always around and connecting to them properly at the time of crisis becomes important. The widow in 2 Kings 4:1-7 is able to connect to the sources of life in times of crisis. The place where this incident took place is not stated. Probably the widow lived in one of the cities where the schools of prophets were located, perhaps in Bethel, Gilgal, or Jericho. The widow pleads the prophet Elisha to intervene in their family’s crisis. From this pericope, it appears that the members of the colleges of prophets did not withdraw themselves completely from ordinary household life. The prophets were allowed to marry and to have family life. They might have been joined the companies of prophets occasionally, during seasons of devotion, at Bethel, Gilgal or elsewhere, and they would
then have returned to their home duties. The widow’s husband, being one among the prophets, was not been enjoying a well-paid job. He did not have a profitable business. Therefore, he had nothing but a professional income, which, in that time, would be precarious and very scanty. That might be the reason why he was not in a condition to provide for his family, and needed to look for other sources for money. He was engaged in some transaction for which money had been borrowed, and unfortunately, he had died before it could be paid off. The widow comes to Elisha crying that “the creditor is come to take unto him my two sons to be bondmen” (v1). As per the custom during those days, a person’s family could be seized and sold into temporary slavery to pay a debt owed by the father (Lev. 25:40). Robert Jamieson and Fausset say that, “By the enactment of the law, a creditor was entitled to claim the person and children of the insolvent debtor, and compel them to serve him as bondmen till the year of jubilee should set them free.” This Mosaic Law (Ex.21:7; Isa.50:1; Neh.5:5) had similarities to the Code Hammurabi; the law governed the people in Canaan during the time of the settlement of people of Israel in Canaan. This widow connected her family to Elisha for help in her hour of need. She appealed to him on the basis that her husband had been faithful to the Lord (he revered the LORD). She, in faith, looks for ways to save the family from that peril of sending the children into slavery. She was confident that the prophet would be able to do something that can save their life. Connecting to the sources of life is important at times of crisis. Today there are many people and families who are undergoing similar situations due to domestic violence, alcoholism, debt trap, drug addictions, violence, mafiyas, terrorism, war, communal conflicts, urbanization, forced migration, and many such problems. Faith would facilitate to connect to sources of life in such crisis situations. Church, assigned to be a source of life, needs to be equipped to help the victims to connect to the sources of life in today’s world. These connections thus established also initiate networking between victims and the people around.

2. Faith Initiates life-Saving Networks

The crisis situation in the life of the widow initiates life-saving responses in multiple ways. There is a life-saving network created. The widow, the prophet, children and neighbours of the family are all part of this network. Each of them, in turn, started looking for possible ways of helping this family in crisis. The widow’s response came out in the form of a cry for the life of her children. If the sons were sent into slavery she would be left with no means of support. In response to her cry, Elisha intervenes. This response is guided by the divine providence (Ps. 68:5). James reminds us that true religion involves action, such as caring for “widows in their trouble” (James 1:27). Elisha’s miracles, as contrasted with Elijah’s, frequently involved meeting the needs of individuals. The prophet’s response to her cry initiates a network of responses. The widow had to look back into her home for the provisions she already had. She had a pot or cruet of oil (v2). She had to take the whole stock of domestic utensils also. The oil, she had, was olive oil which is used for food and fuel. Elisha told her to collect empty jars; they would be filled with oil, which God would provide. He directs her to borrow empty vessels from her neighbours. She had to collect the maximum number of vessels possible. Then, secluding herself with her children, the widow needs to pour oil from her cruse into the borrowed vessels. Then afterwards she needs to sell the oil, discharge the debt, and then maintain herself and family with the remainder. Lawrence O. Richards says that, “Refined olive oil was used in cooking, cosmetics, and burned as fuel in the light always kept burning in even the poorest Hebrew home. It could easily be sold by the widow, the debt paid off, and the family’s own needs met.”

The widow, her children, the neighbours who provided the empty pots, those who purchased the oil and the prophet constituted the life-saving network. The involvement, participation and contribution of each one become decisive in this life-saving activity. God, who becomes part of this network, uses their own potentials and multiply them to transform their life-threatening situation. As A. P. J. Abdul Kalam says, “God, our Creator, has stored within our minds and personalities, great potential strength and ability. Prayer helps us tap and develop these powers.” Elisha was helping them to learn this truth. When they recognized the potentials, strengths and abilities stored within them by God, God intervenes and thus they were able to overcome their crisis. Church, being a life-saving network, need
to connect the people in life-threatening situations to potential sources of help and with God. This calls for an active and dynamic involvement of every one.

3. Faith Demands Dynamic Activeness from the Faithful

Saint Augustine says, “Pray as though everything depended on God. Work as though everything depended on you.” Here the widow and her sons prayed and also worked well. They were the only people who witnessed the miracle take place. They were the direct beneficiaries of God’s grace. The children were expected to go to the neighbours to collect empty vessels and make them ready for their mother to fill the oil. God provided oil enough to fill all the jars the children had collected. The woman returned to Elisha with a report of the miracle and he told her to sell the oil and pay her debts. There was enough money left over for her to live on after all her financial obligations had been met. Elisha, here, is called a man of God (vv. 16, 21, 22, 25, 27). Elisha, the prophet of the true God, asks for active involvement of the widow and her children to solve their own life-threatening situation.

Similarly, Acts 5:12–16, narrates a situation where the people brought their sick to the apostles with the faith that their sick will be healed when the shadow of the apostles fall on the sick. Luke 5: 17-26 also narrates a similar situation where the few friends’ faith heals the paralyzed man. Faithful cannot keep quiet; they will always be active in their search for the sources of life and also bring those who need help to the sources of life.

The faithful needs to be dynamic and active in order to initiate life-saving actions which God transforms to bring miraculous results. Being faithful people, we all are expected to initiate creative and transformative actions that can bring unimaginable life-saving results in our life and in the lives of the people around us. Elisha’s act demonstrated God’s concern for the widow and orphan, who symbolize the poverty-stricken and the powerless. A concern for the ‘smallest’ in our society is what God require of us. Faith is life-saving. Faith is dynamic. Faith is active. Faith initiates connections. Faith creates networks that help each one to sustain, support, and carry themselves and the other forward in God’s ways. Faith is certainly an essential element in the life of every human being.

“Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want.
It is the belief that God will do what is right.”
— Max Lucado, *He Still Moves Stones*

**Collect:** O God, the author of our life, thank you for calling us to be dynamic and active to connect together to create life-saving networks. Give us life-saving faith that we may become friends to the needy, support to the weak, comfort to the sick and channels of your healing. Empower us to be committed to the needs of the little-ones around us and bring our fellow humans to your space. Transform us to be useful instruments in your healing hands. Through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and ever. Amen.

**Rev. Anilal M. Jose**
CSI South Kerala Diocese
Introduction:

Prayer is a subject matter which involves the creator God, the human beings and the creatures around us. God is the prime mover of all things. Human beings are created in such a way that it is natural for us to look beyond for things which are not within our limits. Human beings are finite and God is infinite. So we depend on God. Prayer in simple words is a child asking the parent for help, assistance, and guidance and healing etc. Jesus in his teaching said that he is the way, truth and the life. When situations make us to pray persistently we will gradually realise that we are to take away our focus from things around us even though however difficult it may be. It does not mean we are denying its existence. But rather we are taking the same in prayer to God. We trust in God to take care of our circumstances and situations and allow him to intervene on our behalf. When we take things in prayer to God, we get the sense of relief that things will never be the same but it will change. God’s answer may not suit our expectations but surely we will find a way to come out of the burden in which we find ourselves. Prayer does not necessarily change things, but it provides us new avenues to look at the same things in a positive way now. Accepting one’s finiteness itself is a form of expression by an individual that s/he is repentant of one’s own wrong understanding of self-sufficiency. Only when we come to the position of inability do we accept the ability of God in our lives. So there comes the need of accepting God’s ability so that God can respond to our needs.

Exposition:

Now, we are moving towards the time of Easter. In this context we are locating our text Mark 7:24-30. This portion brings before us the pain, humiliation, separation of a particular group of people who had to suffer because of other’s pre-conceived understandings. We see Jesus as the source of true light and freedom. He came to give understanding to humanity that freedom does not come in building walls but rather through looking beyond barriers of walls. Jesus as a travelling preacher in this text is seen to be moving towards Tyre and Sidon, a gentile area. Jesus’ intention shows that he is not confined to local but he is universal in his approach to provide light and freedom to all to be united with the fellowship of God.

Jesus’ encounter with the Syrophoenician women brings out the general attitude the people of those days had about the gentiles. Jesus was approached with a specific request for healing. Jesus’ initial answer was not favorable and it could have been devastating. The approach of the women probably shows that she was used to this kind of humiliating experiences. She was determined to overcome the situation forever. This overcoming power was seen by Jesus. Her faith was so strong that even Jesus was moved and granted her request.

Conclusion:

Thus, Gospel that is God’s word deals with the human situations which are so disturbing and distracting from the truth. We by ourselves cannot find the true way. We need the intervention of Jesus in our lives like the Syrophoenician women who needed Jesus to heal her demon possessed daughter. We too are bound by bondages from which we need to be free. Persistent prayer enables us to overcome devastating situations in our lives.

With Jesus Christ, from times of lent, we make progress to reach heights of Easter. May all that prevents, keep us back from receiving the grace from Jesus move away from our lives as we continue to live a life of persistent prayer, which must not be an occasional event but rather a continuous part of our lives. Amen.

Kristu Jignasa
Rev. A. Vinayalal Bangera
CSI Karnataka Southern Diocese
TRUE WORSHIP THAT LIBERATES


All three portions from the scripture provide examples of the relationship between the worship of God and the liberation of God’s people. While the exodus account tells about God’s deliverance of the people of Israel out of slavery from Egypt to enable them to worship God, the account from the Acts gives details of God’s deliverance of Paul and Silas while they were worshipping God in prison at midnight. The gospel narrative stresses that there is no better time than worship to experience deliverance from the different types of bondages that diminish life on earth.

What is true worship? True worship is determined neither by the style of worship nor the place and time of worship. It is not depended on the worth of the leader of the worship as well. But true worship is worshipping God the Creator in truth and spirit; and submitting oneself to the will of God that longs restlessly for the liberation of God’s creation from all sorts of bondages that weaken the fullness of life.

Based on the passages three points can be discussed in relation to worship and liberation.

1. Worship is the time when one can experience liberation. Paul and Silas were in prison. Their Master was crucified. They too were expecting the same experience of their Master and waiting in prison. Yet at midnight while they were in this most vulnerable stretch of their life they prayed and sang praises to God. It was not in a church but from a dungeon they were worshipping God. And God changed their situation by opening the doors of the prison. God was in the earthquake to deliver them from the bondage that darkened their hope in life. Similarly our worship services are capable of becoming the context of liberation where it is held and whatever the problems may be. Worship should become an occasion when we come before God with confidence to conquer the physical, mental, and social bondages that reduce our well-being. It should become a time when we realise the forces that work against achieving equality and fellowship in our life situations and challenge the inequalities that darken and divide us and make necessary correctives in our personal and communal lives.

2. There is no difference between sacred and secular time or space to perform acts or liberation. The gospel lesson narrates the miraculous cure of a woman from the bondage of a spirit that crippled her for eighteen years. The day of the week was Sabbath day - and the context was worship in a synagogue where Jesus was teaching. Finding the woman oppressed by an evil spirit Jesus set her free from her ailment resulting in her standing straight and praising God. However the leader of the synagogue finds fault with Jesus. According to him there are six days she could have come and got liberated from her bondage but not on a Sabbath day. Here we find how the law is working against the freedom of God’s people by stretching it beyond its intentions. But Jesus calls them hypocrites and stresses that there is no better time or place to act for the liberation of people from any sort of bondages.

3. The range of liberation is not limited to the worshipping community but extends to the society as well. The prison worship experience of Paul and Silas did not only liberate them from the bondage but the extent of God’s deliverance reached the jailer and family too who were not part of that worship. Thinking that Paul and Silas escaped, the jailer tried to kill himself to prevent a more terrible death. The law would have made him accountable for the escape of the prisoners and undergo the same punishment that should have been inflicted on the prisoners. But noticing what the jailer was about to
do Paul stopped him saying, ‘‘Do not harm yourself, for we are all here.’ This saved the jailer from death and he became part of the liberation that Paul and Silas experienced through their worship. Similarly the liberation that we experience in and through worship is not complete if not shared with the rest of God’s creation. The deliverance that we receive freely from God should make us committed to work for the freedom of God’s people in this world. Our worship experience should make us identify the darkness in us and overcome it selflessly like Paul and Silas valued the life of the jailer same as their own. Thus the liberation that the faith community experiences in worship should overflow from the boundaries of the institutionalised church and reach out like ‘salt’ and ‘light’ in removing the darkness and disorders in the society.

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One of the great joys of having children is to see how small children respond to gifts. Small faces beaming with excitement. Gifts can help children to imagine. Being a fairy or a lion or the more exciting little astronaut—the small child is transported to some world of make-believe. Suddenly the little one becomes an explorer in a strange land or an astronaut daring to go anywhere. Indeed, imagination is all. Of course, the tiny dew drops of pure imagination quickly evaporate as we all grow. It does not go altogether, but is replaced by the more sinister or bleak ones. Our anxieties even come to us in our dreams.

Today’s readings appropriate for Passion Sunday are evocative of envisioning new life amidst deep suffering.

Deut. 18: 15-22: The passage in Deuteronomy promises in 18: 15 that God would raise up a prophet who would proclaim the word of God. It envisions a particular prophet who would bring forth justice, who would bring forth hope. One of the Youth of the church that I attend has a very nice T shirt that reads: Impossible is Possible. It might be a trendy statement, but holds true at least in this instance. The passage suggests the seemingly impossible, that God would restore people by raising a prophet who would bring forth the vision of God. It is precisely this kind of vision—imagining the impossible which should lie at the heart of the church and in every believer, that it is possible for God to change any situation, however implausible it may seem. Michaelangelo once warned, “The greatest danger for most of us is not that our vision is too high and we miss it, but that it is too low and we reach it.” Imagining a new way of life and living it can actually create a new and different reality.

II Cor. 1:3-11: Suffering reality around us may force one to reconsider or worse still, question visions of hope. Paul in II Corinthians 1:3-11 speaks of his personal encounter with suffering. However when we consider the witness of scripture and Church history, we realise that suffering has always been part of the Christian witness. We understand that most of the psalms were born in difficulty. Most of the epistles were written in prisons. Even the saints who gathered at Nicea to give us the Nicene Creed that we profess as a mark of our faith, almost all of them had suffered great persecution. Someone asked C S Lewis: “Why do Christians suffer? He replied: Why not? They are the only ones who can overcome it.” The Cross envisions a deep entrenched hope that rises above everything else.

Luke 18:35-43: The Gospel passage in Luke 18:35-43 actualizes the proclaimed text in Deuteronomy and the situation that was expressed in the passage in II Corinthians. There is a new vision both literally and metaphorically when the prophet meets the suffering one. What is surprising is that way in which people try to mute the voice of the suffering man in need of help. Other parallel passages indicate that even the disciples were instrumental in stopping the man in seeking help. The disciples had fallen into a cultural trap. And therefore it is sometimes said that the disciples had “left their fishing nets to follow Jesus but they were still caught in a cultural net.” They lived in a system of hierarchical structures and powers. Rulers dominated their subjects. The higher class of life could buy and demand services at the expense of the more vulnerable. The suffering man did not come under their scheme of acceptance. In the midst of religious faith is a certain kind of feeling as if we are going into a dark room. We may be able to touch and feel our way through life. If we are able to pray, it is as if we are speaking to an iron heaven without signs or emotions. How can the cross help us to position ourselves in this blanket of darkness? Jesus’ willingness to walk the way of the cross, even when there were a host of social and political alternatives available for him, provides us faith to

Kristu Jignasa
pursue the vision of the Cross. 1 Peter 2: 21 says that Christ has given the example. To believe in God means, that even if we feel God has virtually disappeared from our lives and is seemingly helpless to save us, we would still go to the Cross, committing ourselves, whatever happens.

The new vision of the messianic age proclaimed through the Cross is found in the love for the other, irrespective of unequal power relations that exist in community, including ours. The life, death and resurrection of the one who was God’s love in action shows that the manipulation of our language and life is not final. Love can be found in the one who was and will be God’s love poured out into our world. The articulation of this love is also to be found in the resources of communities who live on the edge of being and may be, with deep reverence, we may be able to hear the songs of love that question the very credibility of violence and death, and in the face of brokenness, still affirming and celebrating life in all its fullness. Amen.

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The Annunciation to Mary
Isaiah 7:10-14 Psalm 40:1-10

Introduction:
Annunciation means announcement or proclamation. The announcement by the angel to Mary was that she was to be the mother of Jesus Christ. The scripture portions set apart for today’s meditation highlights what does this annunciation means to Mary and to us to day. The gospel narration highlights Mary’s faith. Her response to angel Gabriel was the climax of her faith and willingness to be the channel of God’s plan for humanity. Mary was submissive to fulfill God’s plan of salvation. She was given a responsibility and privilege to be part of God’s plan of salvation. It was her faith and complete surrender to God’s will that has brought great blessings upon humanity. With this introduction let us look at the passages given to us for our meditation. Annunciation to Mary brings God’s blessings to humanity. The blessings that the proclamation of Angel to Mary brought to us are:

I. It proclaimed the assurance of God’s Presence. (Isaiah 7:10-14)
Mary, the virgin was a chosen vessel and willing human instrument to bring Jesus into the world. It is God’s initiation to show his love to his people. She was given instructions and information what it is going to be and how it is going to happen. She was called to do an extraordinary thing for God’s sake. She was given privilege to share with God in bringing salvation. It was a shocking news for her and requires a courageous response. In her response to angel, she portrays fear but she was given assurance of God’s presence in her journey towards fulfilling God’s plan of salvation. God promised her of His presence. It says; fear not, it will happen through the Spirit of God. Spirit represents God’s presence which is eternal. In the Old Testament reading people of Israel were asked not be afraid because virgin shall bear a son and his name shall be ‘Emmanuel’ means God is with us. Mary had to take risk, pain, humiliation, oppression, abandonment in order to be part of God’s Plan of Salvation. Mary responded in faith to shocking news by saying, I am the Lord’s servant, May it be to me as you have said to me. She could make such a daring faith statement, willingness and submission because she was convinced of assurance of God’s presence that will neither leave nor forsake.

II. It was a Proclamation of liberation. (Gal 4:1-7)
Mary could foresee God’s liberative force which is in action in her annunciation. It is evident in both the statements of Mary (vs. 38) and in the song of Mary (1: 46 ff). Jesus is liberator and Mary is the instrument to bring that liberator into this world, instrument to bring the divine into humanity. The Son of God liberates the world from bondage. According to the liberated status we are no more slaves, servants now we are ‘children’ of God. Galatians 4:1-7 says, when the fullness of time had come God did two things: First God sent his Son. God’s purpose in sending His Son is both to ‘redeem and Adopt.’ Not just to rescue from slavery but to make slaves into sons. The Son who was sent to accomplish our redemption was perfectly qualified to do so, because he was God’s Son. He was also born of human mother so that he was human as well as divine, the one and only God-man. Secondly, God sent His Spirit. It is the indwelling presence of Spirit witnesses to our son ship and prompting our prayers, which is precious privilege of children of God. It is because you are sons’ that God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. No other qualification is needed, God is liberator and we are the children of that Liberating God, hence, we are liberated beings. This changed status is through God. We are no more slaves but we are children of God.

III. Annunciation to Mary is demanded her life (Luke 1: 26-38)
Jesus is the salvation to the world and Mary is the chosen instrument in God’s hands to bring the divine into humanity. An angel visited Mary with the news. The angel said to Mary, you have found favour in God’s sight; God has a plan for you. Angel said you will bear Son, who will be called Jesus, because he will save the sinners. For Mary it was not an easy task, she was betrothed to a man called

Kristu Jignasa
Joseph. In this passage, we see Angel is inviting Mary to take risk, trouble, shame what not. We read Mary completely surrendered her will to fulfill God’s will. It was a life and death struggle for her. She had to choose, Mary chose to lose herself to gain eternal blessings. Her response was spontaneous and meaningful. She surrendered to God in complete obedience to lose or gain.

Hence, dear friends, annunciation to Mary is a promise of God everlasting presence among us. It is a good news of human liberation and changed status of life beyond the bondage of law and any slavery. We are children no more slaves. To bring the privilege of being the heirs, Mary had to submit herself until she loose herself to gain God self. As we commemorate the blessings and privilege that the annunciation to Mary has brought to whole humanity, let this be our assurance and source of happiness.

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Matthew 21:1-17 presents a beautiful narration of Jesus' entry into Jerusalem as King. That event has traditionally been described as Hosanna. Matthew 21:9-13 offers the climax of the story. v.9 The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,

“Hosanna to the Son of David!”
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

v.10 When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

v.11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.”

Hosanna brings Christian spiritual literacy in today’s context of complex identities that prevail in our society. Jesus could very powerfully encounter the wider culture in Palestine through this action and confrontation. The message of Hosanna had been everywhere in the cultural, social and political dimensions of the people of God in Palestine. Due to exilic, post-exilic experiences, there were images of God’s liberation very explicit in all events.

It was in this context, Jesus’ Hosanna became a most challenging metaphor. It is noted as a metaphor in a historical and theological sense. It inspired many at that point of history asking the precise question what happened at the spiritual and religious realms when a clear religious-social confrontation took place. The chosen and elect ones namely the people of God who had been guided by and under the covenant of God could not fulfill the requirements of the covenant. Therefore, I should acknowledge the fact that many communities under the covenant of God moved away from the covenant for various reasons. Post-exilic experiences made them to express multi-culturally their dreams and aspirations which created a new atmosphere of messianic expectations. This created a new path for messianic hope which was the milieu of Hosanna event.

How did Jesus Movement alter the milieu of Hosanna? There should be at least three phases of Jesus movements that influenced Hosanna, messianic expectations. Firstly, the early phase of Jesus movement namely incarnation, secondly, the Galilean ministry and thirdly the preparations for passion of Jesus of Nazareth. Thus, the meaning of Hosanna becomes the meaning of deliverance of the people of God by God. This deliverance in Hosanna is again a combination of two strong components namely repentance of the people of God and restoration of the people of God by and through the intervention of God.

1. Connecting the Stories of the People with the Messiahnism

Galilean people indeed developed a framework for articulating their dreams and aspirations through their stories. This is exactly we now take about contextualization of biblical texts. Prophetic and messianic texts were understood by Galilean people within the framework of their personal experience of suffering and struggle. Therefore, it is a connection, a story of link between people of God and God’s greatest act of liberation and deliverance. The kind of connection would explain and expand the scope of messianic aspiration. Such a connection brought forward new aspects of liberation which eventually became the cornerstone of the early Christian communities and church. The enthusiasm and passion of Hosanna should be in this line: “The crowds that went ahead of him and those that followed shouted,
“Hosanna to the Son of David!”
“Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!”
“Hosanna in the highest heaven!”

Gerd Theissen, a leading biblical sociologist who analyzed the social background of the early Christian communities agreed clearly that the aspiration and struggle of the early Christian communities constituted the identity of the early Christian church. To understand the social struggles of the people of Palestine, we need to look at the political context of the wider imperial powers of Palestine. Thus, the message of Hosanna becomes very relevant. It is relevant, as Hosanna talks about the real people and real situation.

2. Hosanna is a Celebration of New Covenant

The people who started Hosanna willfully joined the new covenant established by Jesus and his Kingdom message. In Hosanna, this divine message is a very powerful and passionate one. Jesus, who brought divinity through his messianic character, in a very complex political scene, remains a powerful hope for the people of God. In Hosanna, the Covenant was renewed and restored with necessary hermeneutical alterations. This seems to be a new direction. It is exactly the people who wanted to retell their stories die. The people of God who followed Jesus indeed made it a celebration of the covenant. “When Jesus entered Jerusalem, the whole city was stirred and asked, “Who is this?”

v.11 The crowds answered, “This is Jesus, the prophet from Nazareth in Galilee.” By shouting Hosanna, the people of God underwent an experience of repentance, renewal and restoration. The focus of Hosanna thus becomes a reestablishment of Jerusalem to be the focus of God’s salvation. In today’s context, we need to understand the message of Hosanna by keeping it within our spiritual guideline to see the great dimension of God’s salvation.

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INTRODUCTION: In contrast to the common understanding of ‘Remembrance’ as a mental exercise, Bible illuminates it’s spiritual and ethical implications too. For every Jew, a Passover Meal, or any Meal for that reason, spiritually reminded them of the divine abounding grace which was expressed in their prayers before, during and after the meals. Further, it also ethically reminded them of God’s love and care for all His people, which demanded them to share the same with all including the aliens and refugees in their land. The Exodus event too, which was remembered during every Passover Meal, reminded them of the redemptive act of God and called them to ethically re-orient their lives to witness this redemptive act.

TEXT: In today’s Gospel portion, Matt. 26:17-30, we find a community, Jesus and His disciples that remember their past, filled with God’s grace, guided by God’s love and guarded by God’s care. Their preparations included searching a place to eat the Passover Meal called ‘Sedar’, that too in Jerusalem, roasting and eating a lamb that was sacrificed in the Temple, along with other traditional foods such as unleavened bread and herbs, all of which were sign posts to the Divine redemptive act. Interestingly, in the context of this remembrance of their past, they also remember each other and their commitment to each other. It clearly depicts the spiritual and ethical undertones of the ‘act of remembrance’. However, there is a difference in terms of the consequence of ‘remembrance’, when Jesus remembers His people, and when the disciples, particularly Judas, remember Jesus.

1. Judas Remembering Jesus
Judas remembers Jesus, not out of his love or affection to Him, but to betray Him. His hopes and aspirations about Jesus as a great liberator, who would liberate the Jews from the reign of the Romans, was not accomplished and hence he was disillusioned. And further, as someone who always had an inclination towards money, saw in Jesus a ‘potential target’ to make a profit, though only a little. In other words, Judas remembers Jesus as a target and a tool to accomplish his whims and fancies. He remembers Him, searching what good he could earn from/through Jesus. It is that kind of remembrance, that results in his betrayal of Jesus and ultimately in His crucifixion.

2. Jesus Remembering His People
On the other hand, Jesus remembers His people, not expecting anything from them, but to attempt a great thing for them. He remembers not to earn but to give, His own life. This is what Jesus means, when He re-interprets the meaning of that meal. Jesus, taking the loaf of bread, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to them, saying, “Take, eat, this is my Body, broken for you”. Further, He takes the Cup, gives thanks and gives it to them, saying, “Drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins”. He remembers His people to break for them and pour His own life for them.

APPLICATION: Now let us have a time of introspection on why do we remember God? Why do we remember someone? I remember the words of Bishop Thomas Samuel (Former Bishop in CSI - Diocese of Madhya Kerala), who urged and challenged his flock, saying, “From this day, when we celebrate Eucharist, let us not only remember the Body and Blood of Christ, but also the little ones in this Asha Bhavan, who make these wafers and wine for us.”. He was speaking in one of the meetings in Asha Bhavan (A Home situated in Kottayam for the Mentally Challenged and Differently-Abled Children), when the Asha Bhavan launched a new project to make wafers and wine. Such remembrances would urge us to offer ourselves to the people around us who are weak and vulnerable.
Yes, Eucharist calls us to break ourselves and pour out our lives. Often we tend to be ‘Judas’ who while walking hand in hand with our friends and colleagues, sharing the same table of grace during every Eucharist, betray them for our own selfish motives. We maintain relationships to use them as our targets and tools to achieve our goals and make profit. But, the Eucharist table challenges us to promote a different culture of remembrance, a kind of remembrance that would really REMEMBER the ones who are displaced and forgotten. Today, as we partake in His Body and Blood, let us make a new covenant with Him and all our fellow beings that we ourselves would become the ‘bread and wine’ sharing our life, shedding our blood, to redeem this world, to create a new heaven and new earth.

**Conclusion:** To remember a God who had redeemed us, is also a call to continue His redemptive mission, and to participate in His act to redeem many around us. When, and only when, we are able to do so, our ‘Eucharist Services’ would become meaningful and our ‘Eucharist Tables’ would become purposeful. May the Almighty who had remembered and redeemed us from slavery continue to inspire us to remember and redeem many around us. Amen.

**Rev. Viji Varghese Eapen**  
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Cross: Death of Death
(Good Friday)

Numbers 21:1-9 Psalm 22
1 Cor. 15:50 – 58 Matthew 27:1-56

Introduction

Good Friday is the focal point of the Lent season of Christianity, on which the Son of Man handed over for crucifixion. Usually the seven words on the cross are the main thrust of our meditations. Cross is the main and inevitable symbol of Christianity. When people see the cross on one’s ring or on a pendant he/she is recognized as a Christians. When we see a cross on a building, it is identified as a church. For many, cross is just an ornament. But what does it mean to Christianity today? The cross of our Lord Jesus Christ is the central point of the Gospel.

The suggested Bible portions for our meditation are pointing to the conflicts between death and life. Cross is the death of death. It means, Death has come to an end with the death of Jesus on the Cross. The judgment made by Pilate to crucify Jesus leads to the end of death. The following three thoughts may strengthen our meditation on this theme.

1. Death of Death: Judgment on Death
The religious leaders who have made conspiracy to annihilate the Jesus and His Movement had to persuade the Roman Government to sentence Jesus to death because they did not have the authority to do it by themselves. The religious leaders of that time wanted the Death of Jesus as a Roman sponsored event so that the crowds cannot blame them. Hence though they had arrested Jesus on theological grounds, their intention was to show Jesus as a rebel who claimed to be a king and thus a threat to Caesar. The Jewish leaders brought Jesus before Pontius Pilate for trial.

Pilate was the Roman Governor for the regions of Samaria and Judea from AD 26-36. He took special pleasure in demonstrating his authority over the Jews. Pilate could not find a single fault in Jesus and found him innocent. But he was failed to pronounce it due to the lack of mental courage. Pilate hesitated to give the religious leaders permission to crucify Jesus. In making no decision, Pilate made the decision to let the crowds crucify Jesus. So he washed his hands and handed him over to be crucified (Matt. 27:26). When we see this, it may appear as a historical mistake from the part of Pilate, but it is the will of God. Through this verdict of the crucifixion of Jesus, the greatest threat to humanity—‘death’ had come to an end. Death of death brought an end to the terrifying death process. The fearful nature of death was questioned and challenged by Jesus through his death and resurrection. The evil powers of death couldn’t prevent the eternal nature of life. Through his death, Jesus made a clear-cut judgment on death and proclaimed that ‘all authority has been given to me in heaven and on earth’ (Matt. 28:18).

2. Death of Death: Judgment of Purity
Jesus’ death on the cross reflects a litmus test of purity of a person. According to the Scripture, Death is always related to sin, as a just or reward ‘the wages of sin (Rom. 6:23). At the same time, Jesus had no sin of his own, in his nature, character or conduct. But Jesus came down to this very world in order to go voluntarily to the cross. It was not only Pilate who handed him over to be crucified but also he himself allowed him to do so. As Luke represented it, it was a self-determined act of Jesus and he said, ‘Father, into your hands I commit my Spirit’ (Luke 23:46).

There were many miraculous events happened, in association with the Death of Jesus. The accompanied events are darkness, the tearing of the veil in the temple into two, the earthquake and the rising of the dead people from their tombs. Like his transparent public ministry, his death was also noticed by the world around him. Everyone including the soldiers who have crucified him, and the

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religious leaders who have made all possible means to kill Jesus knew that some significant event had happened. The statement made by the Centurion that ‘truly this was the Son of God’ is the final solution of Jesus’ inner purity after several trials by the Roman courts. Thus Jesus, through the death of death on the cross undoubtedly proclaimed that no human being in this world can blame in any of the matters. The death on the cross thus indicates his purity.

3. Death of Death: Judgment for Life

As we discussed in the first point, Jesus extinguished the human fear caused by death through his death on the cross. Not only he wiped out the fear but also brought out a new hope of life after the death. The crucifixion is the victory over death. In the book of Numbers 21:1-9, we can see the saving act of God through Moses by making a bronze serpent. In verse 8, God instructed that ‘whoever looks at it, they will live’. Jesus explained that just as the Israelites were healed of their sickness by looking at the serpent on the pole, the present world can saved from the sickness of sin by looking at Jesus on the cross (John 3:14-15). It was not the snake that healed the people rather their belief in God healed them and instructed them to be obedient and faithful in their faith journey without any complaints. So we are not supposed to look at the life negating serpents rather the life giving Christ on the cross. As a faith community it is our inevitable task to look to Christ in all our endeavors (Heb. 12:2).

May God Almighty bless us to internalize the message of cross as the end of the fearful death, as a mirror of purity and a hope for eternal life. Amen.

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Kristu Jignasa
**Introduction:** It was the silence of the Lamb. However, awaiting for the renewal of the Eagle. (cf. Psalms 103: 4-5). This is how one can interpret the Holy Saturday. It was the day which remains in the history of the human kind and was the crucial test for the power of Roman Empire and also a test of Hope for the women and the disciples of Jesus. The Roman Empire has to make sure that, the prophetic words of Jesus about his resurrection would not be fulfilled. On the other hand, the women, disciples of Jesus and the common people were facing the greatest test of their faith. The so called Sanhedrin Tombs in the Northern part of Jerusalem give the present day visitor a good impression of what Joseph’s tomb may have been like. The larger of them contain several chambers (each with spaces for a number of bodies), sometimes on two levels; the largest had spaces for more than sixty bodies.

We shall see how both the parties, Chief Priests and Pharisees on one hand and the women and disciples of Jesus on the other hand, prepared for their test regarding the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

a) **Preparation out of fear:** It was out of fear that chief Priests and Pharisees came to Pontius Pilate and asked for the high security, lest the disciples of Jesus might steal the body of Jesus and propagate that Jesus is raised from the dead. They also recollected how Jesus foretold about his resurrection in his ministry (Mathew 20: 17-19). It was out of certainty of the words of Jesus that Chief Priests and Pharisees made all the possible security arrangements, to make sure that nobody would take away the body of Jesus. In verse 64, Pharisees believed future resurrection of the dead, whereas Sadducee priests denied the possibility of the resurrection altogether (Acts 23: 6-10), but none of these Jews believed in resurrection. The security of the tomb was important enough to become the subject of Roman imperial edict (pronouncement) between 50 B.C and AD 50.

Certainly they did not believe his prophesy regarding his resurrection. Whatever they had knew or heard of, it was enough to motivate them to take the precaution of guarding the tomb lest the disciples deceive the people by stealing the body and making the claim that he had risen from the dead. There is a twofold miscalculation here. Firstly, the Jewish authorities underestimate Jesus by failing to realize God’s purpose in and through him. That Jesus could rise from the dead they wrongly rule out apriority. And when they have no explanation for what happened to the body of Jesus, ironically they invent the very lie they attempted to protect against (28:13). Secondly, they overestimate the disciples, who were not thinking of Jesus’ words about rising from the dead and whose psychological condition hardly made it possible for them to perpetrate such a hoax as the Jewish authorities feared.

b) **Preparation out of Hope:** After the death of Jesus, the curtain of the temple was torn into two pieces, there was an earth quake, the stones were broken into pieces, the bodies of the saints were raised out of the tombs and entered into Holy city and have appeared to many. (Math27: 51-52). Even after these supernatural (fearful) events, the women were firm in their hope that Jesus would rise again. The women Mary and Mary Magdalene did not move away from the place of the Tomb of Jesus, rather sat down right in front of the tomb. (Math 27: 61). Thus, the preparation of the women was out of spiritual Hope in the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The courage and commitment of the women; Mary and Mary Magdalene was rooted in the faith and trust in the teachings of Jesus. He prepared his disciples and his followers about his sufferings, death and resurrection. These words of Jesus, instilled hope for the new Life in him. The incongruous, ironical result is that the opponents took Jesus’ words about rising from the dead more seriously than did the disciples. A vague fear in this case was a greater motivation than the **hope** of the disciples. Calling attention to the irony in the passage, Gnika aptly concludes; “The laughter of God roars through the pericope”
c) **Hope against hope:** The preparation of the women and the disciples was an excellent example of a Christian hope because, in the context of the rule of Roman Empire, it was humble and meek people; the disciples and women, who trusted the words of Jesus about his resurrection and waited at the tomb with strong hope for the dawn of new life. It is the situation which can be compared to the situation of Abraham, when God promised him that he would be father of many nations (Romans 4: 18). He hoped against hope and it was reckoned as righteous to him. Thus, it is an inspiring passage for us towards strengthening our Hope in the midst of hopelessness. In the context of trials and tribulations in the form of social discriminations, spiritual challenges and ecclesiological institutionalization, it demands a strong commitment in the risen Lord to Hope for a New Life.

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The early Christian proclamation of the risen Lord depended fundamentally on the four Gospels – Math.28; Lk.24; Jn.20 and 21 and Mk.16:7; Lk.24:32. 1 Cor.15:5-7 says that he appeared to more than 500 brothers and sisters at one time. St. Paul predominantly underlines his own witness in 1Cor.9:1; 15:8; Gal.1:12; 1:16 where he attests that the risen Jesus appeared both to various individuals and to groups of witnesses and more so particular to the 11 disciples (Lk.24:33), to the 12 disciples (1Cor.15:5), quite possibly because of the defection of the Judas. This witness of Jesus’ resurrection makes the disciples as Apostles and in a unique manner as ‘the choicest’ of the earth.

Fact of empty tomb: The center of Christian faith: If the tomb were not empty, the centrality of Jerusalem would not have been maintained for a single day in the history. Faith in the crucified and risen Jesus cannot exist without the historical knowledge. St.Peter in his charismatic speech as recorded in Acts of the Apostles (2:32) “God raised this man Jesus to life, and all of us are witnesses to that, and he further qualifies “God had made this Jesus whom you crucified both Lord and Christ (2:36).

This primordial event remains a concrete reality which divided the history as “Christ-centered” history. By coalescing the divine and human histories, thus making the Christ ‘fulfilled history’ and the “Christ controlled history”. It is this ‘Christic event’ dictated the history as ‘before and after Christ’ as the decisive and ‘kairotic’ moment. Confidently looking at all the 11 Apostles added up with St.Paul and the host of Saints in the first two centuries would not have sacrificed their lives as Martyrs but for the Resurrection of Jesus. This Christic event could not contain the power of God within the grave. The ground wherein the Chinese Sage Confucius still evidently closed at the outskirts of the Kufow, the glorious tomb of Prophet Mohammad at Medina is found closed; but the Sepulcher of Jesus remained open ever as the ‘un-healed wound’ on the earth. Therefore, this fact of empty tomb becomes both as the reality and a constructive hope of life for eternity.

Fact of empty tomb: Celebration of hope of life: The eschatological hope that Jesus’ resurrection brings is an ethical change for believers. The Pauline faith in the divide of ‘flesh’ (Sarx) and ‘social’/’life’ (zoe) means physical and spiritual. The resurrection is believed as ‘the power’ (dumanis) (1 Cor.15:56-57) over sin. To live in the resurrection-power over sin through Jesus Christ, is always possible for the one who is ‘in Christ’ (Rom.6:11) as Paul says, ‘so if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: Everything old has passed away; see everything has become new’ (2 Cor.5:17). This indicates the continued faith-journey of the believer beyond death, as it is said ‘Jesus Christ is the first fruit of new creation.

Jesus’ resurrection involves a soteriological hope (Hope of salvation) while the (vicarious) death of Jesus on the cross is for the sake of the world. In other words the righteous dying for the un-righteous (1Pet.3:18). The death of Jesus must be understood, always in the context of Jesus’ resurrection. John in his Gospel puts it, that God loved the world by sending Jesus to save the world (Jn.3:16-17), the Lamb who takes away the sins of the world. Therefore, if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like this (Rom.6:5). This hope in Christ’s resurrection is always a celebration of believer. The Eucharistic acclamation which follows the words of institution expresses almost sensory experience of the risen Christ, who is present with

Kristu Jignasa
his redeeming life-giving power. The first acclamation; ‘Christ has died; Christ has risen. Christ will come again,’ is a declaration which confesses Easter faith.

But the three acclamations directly addressed the risen Christ in person:
Dying you destroyed our death, rising you restored our life. Lord Jesus, come in glory.

When we eat this bread and drink this cup, we proclaim your death, Lord Jesus, until you come in glory.

Lord, by your Cross and Resurrection you have set us free, you are the Saviour of the world.

**Fact of empty tomb as ‘Anubhava’, the experience in resurrected Lord:** The path to sharing and growing in Easter faith has become possible by experiencing the risen Christ in worship with others, much more than analyzing evidence in favour of the resurrection. It has been a matter of knowing the risen Christ in direct and lasting experience rather than knowing things (the relevant data). It enjoys a practical as well as a logical and spiritual credibility.

Resurrection faith claims not only that Jesus rose from the dead but also that, through the power of the Holy Spirit, he has remained actively present in the world and in particular, in the lives of Christians. Thus the personal experience in the resurrection of Jesus can be appeared with that of the primordial experience of Moses’ ‘Burning Bush’ or Jacob’s Penue-el and the like.

This experience leads us to understand the divine self-revelation. In other words, this experience is ‘God-encountering’, that dispels the darkness both in the mind and life. This gives a new vision and perspective towards changing our identity and the behavior as found in the case of St.Paul’s personal experience on the road to Damascus. However, the Church always celebrates the ‘Easter experience’ in the ‘breaking of the Bread’ as in the experience of the two disciples at Emmaus how they found their eyes opened and knew their risen Lord at the ‘divine-encounter’ (Lk.24:30-31).

Secondly their experience of breakfast together on the lake side, the disciples ‘knew’ that ‘it was the Lord’ (Jn.21:12-13).

The climax of course comes in the experience of Thomas, in his confession of a unique faith in the resurrected Lord as ‘my Lord and my God’ yet another divine-encounter. And John concludes it in the climactic statement, exhorting believers to come: ‘Blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe’ (Jn.20:29). They are blessed who believe in and experience the risen Christ, who-even if he remains invisible – is truly present and disclosed to them. ‘Christ is risen’, Hallelujah.

**Rt. Rev. Dr. G. Dyvasirvadam**
**Moderator, CSI & Bishop in CSI Krishna Godavari Diocese**
During the days after the celebration of Easter we meditate on the encounters which the disciples had with the risen Lord. This Sunday we have to meditate on the encounter of Thomas with Jesus.

Thomas is an Aramaic name. In Greek it is Didymus. Thomas means “Twins”. He was born in Galilee. First he was a carpenter and then became a fisherman. He was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. Thomas had written (1) The gospel of Thomas (2) Acts of Thomas (3) The book of Thomas the contender. Now let us meditate on Thomas’ encounter with Jesus.

1. Believing Thomas
Traditionally Thomas is considered as “Doubting Thomas”. But in reality he was a “believing Thomas”. Although from the very early morning on the day of resurrection the good news of resurrection was carried throughout creation, and even the angels from heaven (Mk.16:6) and holy myrrh bearers on earth (Mt. 28:11) had already told of the miracle, the Apostles were still in a state of fear and doubt, hiding behind doors, “for the fear of the Jews” (Jn.20:19).

The Disciples of Christ after their teacher’s arrest, forgot the prophesies concerning the death and resurrection of the Messiah. They did not believe the miraculous story of the Holy Myrrh bearers (Mk.16:11; Lk.24:11) and even while talking to the risen Lord face to face, they hesitated to trust their own hearts (Lk.24:25). The marvelous human weakness, incapable of encompassing the magnitude of the miracle that took place, is reflected in the famous words of the Apostle Thomas, “unless I see the nail marks in His hands and put my fingers where the nails were, and put my hands into His side, I will not believe (Jn. 20:25).

Perhaps he told these words because Jesus himself had once said “Then if anyone says to you “Look here is the Messiah! Or there is! – do not believe it. For false Messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce great signs and omens to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” (Mt.24:23-27). Remembering these words Thomas hesitated to believe in his colleagues. He wanted to have a physical verification on the risen Lord. Thomas expected strongly that Jesus will appear once again before them and then he himself could test the marks of the nails on Jesus’ hands (Jn. 20:25). By we can say without any doubt that Thomas is “believing Thomas”. The orthodox Church confirms that he is “Believing Thomas”!

There are thousands and lakhs of people around us having the marks of nails, swords, atomic and chemical weapons, bitter words, socio-economic political oppressions, and class and caste discrimination. What do we do for them? They must be risen from the ‘death’. The Lord asks us, “Mortal, can these bones live? (Ez.37:3). Yes these bones should get life.

In the Old Testament readings we see Jacob who prayed overnight and wrestled at the bank of Jabbok river (Gen.32:24) and had an encounter with God (Gen.32:30). On that day God touched his hip socket and blessed Jacob with a new name “Israel”. The Israelites are blessed because of the “Limping of Jacob”. Likewise we must suffer for the sake of others that they might believe in God and be blessed.

2. Worshipping Thomas
Thomas was a “worshipping Thomas”. When Jesus once again appeared before the disciples in a closed room while Thomas also was with them, Jesus greeted them saying “peace be with you”. Then
he saw Thomas and asked him “put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side” (Jn.20:27). Thomas saw the hands and the side of Jesus which had the marks. But he did not dare to put his finger on Him. Instead, believing the risen Lord, he knelt before Him and affirmed “My Lord and My God”. Among the whole New Testament people, only Thomas had affirmed Jesus as God! He accepted Jesus as Lord and God.

People who gather in a Church can have that same wonderful encounter with the risen Lord in worship. It not only speaks to each one of us, it also questions how we approach our worship. Do we prepare ourselves for worship with a time of quiet reflection beforehand, remembering that we are here to own and encounter God’s presence among us? Does our experience of Holiness inside our Churches lead us to recognize the Holiness in the world and the people surrounding us? God-centred worship makes the vulnerable to experience life and makes them to witness God. Let us have such true worship in our Churches and ourselves.

3. Witnessing Thomas

After the encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, Thomas was encouraged to proclaim the Good News out of Judea. Leaving the Roman Empire, Thomas travelled to Asia. As per the tradition, he came to India in 52 AD and landed on Kodungallur, Kerala. There he preached the good news and baptized thousands of people (paravar) into Christianity. He built a few Churches. The Churches began to grow. These Churches were called as Ezharaiappikal (seven and half Churches – seven Churches with catechists and one Church with visiting catechist). He appointed selected local Churches with Indian ministers. These Christians are the saint Thomas Christians. The Mar Thoma Churches is one of the biggest Churches in India. The Brahmins who did not like the mission work of Thomas killed him on 21.12.72 at Parangi Malai (St. Thomas mount, Chennai). Thomas was called as the “Apostle of India”. During his ministry with Jesus also he was ready to be a martyred for his master. He lived such a courageous sacrificial life and died in India. (Jn.11:16)

In the portion of the Epistles reading (Acts: 9:1-8) we see Saul’s encounter with Jesus. On that event Jesus gave him a new name – Paul and called him to be an Apostle for the gentiles. Paul travelled all over Asia and proclaimed the good news. He gave his life for the salvation of the gentiles. St. Paul was an “Apostle of the Gentiles”. We as the Indian Christians have been called to serve the Lord in a manner that is appropriate in our context. While Christianity is seen from a negative stand point, how do we unmask the myths concerning our commitment to the risen Lord and the people in distress. Being transformed by the encounter with the Lord in our day to day affairs, let us be bold enough to proclaim the love of God through words and deeds.

Rev. Sharma Nityananda
CSI Vellore Diocese

Kristu Jignasa
The resurrection of Jesus certainly changed the way his first disciples thought about economics. The early disciples reckoned that the resurrection of Jesus had made all things new and turned the world upside down. The risen Christ inspired them to initiate an extraordinary economic experiment, where they abdicated private ownership of all possessions and everything they owned was held in common.

The last chapter in St. John’s gospel, vividly, portrays the risen Christ’s encounter with his disciples at the latter’s workplace. The disciples’ identification of Christ as an engager, encourager and empowerer equips them to evolve effective ethical foundations for economic explorations.

Cohesive Engagement

The disciples’ decision to go fishing was not a case of backsliding, but on the contrary it was a determined and courageous initiative to step out of their self-imposed prison and venture out into the sea - an arena, which symbolically represents the mysteries and ambiguities, their future vocation entails. It was a resolute effort to choose a spirit of engagement over and against that of estrangement or escapism in the face of a monumental crisis.

When Peter decides to go fishing, the other six disciples express their desire to accompany him, by emphatically stating, “We will go with you.” This expression of cohesive solidarity in a context of fear and suspicion of the other, stems out of their encounter with the risen Christ. The risen Christ engages with them and forges a positive relationship among them and inspires them to share a common vision with a deep sense of belonging.

Any commercial establishment, which seeks to optimize its potential, must create a work environment where strong relationships are fostered among the workforce. Cohesive engagement between the co-workers at the workplace creates a consensus among them, which in turn produces positive results.

Corrective Encouragement

The list of disciples, mentioned by John, is very unique in its composition. The disciples who are mentioned by name, i.e, Peter, Thomas and Nathaniel, have two things in common. Firstly, they have failed the Lord or expressed their doubts about him. Secondly, they have uttered significant faith statements about Jesus. Peter terms Jesus as the ‘Holy One of God’ (Jn. 6:69), whereas Thomas and Nathaniel adore him as ‘My Lord, my God’ (Jn. 20:28) and ‘Son of God, the king of Israel’ (Jn. 1:49), respectively. Hence, these disciples, who waver between faith and doubt, are portrayed as the leaders of the new community of disciples.

These disciples, who were lost, empty, distressed and at the end of their resources after a night of failed fishing, are endearingly called as children, which indicates a restoration of relationship. Moreover, the disciples get another opportunity to get their act right. In a success-driven work environment, people who fail are disposed off quickly; they do not get second chances. But the wise entrepreneurs have always valued the positive effects of failure. Bill Gates, very famously, quipped, ‘success is a lousy teacher. It makes people believe they cannot fail’. Hence, a good judgment comes from experience and experience comes from bad judgments.

Kristu Jignasa
The risen Christ, not only, encourages his disciples to persevere in their endeavour, but also critically examines their style of functioning and challenges them to correct their approach (cast your nets to the right side).

**Compassionate Empowerment**

The risen Christ invites his disciples to join him for a meal on the beach. Jesus, as a worker, makes all the arrangements for this breakfast, thus reaffirming the dignity of work. The last supper was followed by a time of denial, desertion and betrayal of Jesus by his disciples, whereas the last breakfast can be understood as Jesus’ symbolic initiative to empower his disciples’ for their ensuing ministry.

Jesus’ empowerment of his disciples is followed by an emotional conversation with Peter. The presence of the charcoal fire makes an allusion to the site of Peter’s denial of Jesus. Peter is challenged to reaffirm and express his love for Jesus by feeding and tending the latter’s sheep and lambs. According to John Maxwell, ‘leaders become great, not because of their power but because of their ability to empower others.’ Thus, the risen Christ empowers the disciples, so that they can become channels of empowerment. Moreover, they are challenged to empower the most vulnerable sections in a society (lambs and sheep), compassionately, and thereby, contradict the logic of ‘the survival of the fittest.’

The risen Christ motivates entrepreneurs and workers to perceive their establishments, not just as instruments for maximization of profit, but more importantly as vehicles for restoring economic and ecological balance. He reiterates that corporations should exhibit a conscience in their decision making, through empowerment of people at the margins of the economic world (which is a moral and spiritual requirement), and a compassionate concern for the created order.

May the risen Christ continue to encounter us in our workplaces and inspire us to create and sustain ethical economic systems!

**Rev. J. Christopher Samuel Devanesan**

**CSI Karnataka Central Diocese**
Acts 4:34-35: For as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

1. Thankfulness and Generosity:

The post resurrection community shows great energy in their community life. They met and prayed together. They sold their belongings and shared together. There was none who had their needs unmet. Everyone was happy and thanked God for the great grace.

There is an event which marks the opposite to this generosity and joyfulness in II kings 6:29. There were two mothers who were unable to bear the brunt of the famine. So they decided to cook and eat their sons. One woman gave her son and they ate together. The other woman could not give her son to be killed. So the first woman came to seek for justice. A strange justice which demands for the killing of the son. This story narrates the plight of sorrows, refusal to share and eating away the sons in hunger.

Our world offers two options: to share and be filled with thankfulness. Or to accumulate and allow the hunger deaths. Millions of children die of malnutrition. Poverty and hunger are the consequence of affluence and unwillingness to share. Resurrection of Jesus offers the energy to move forward to a community of sharing and thanksgiving.

2. Trust and Comfort

They did not know where the money can be placed until the resurrection event. Now they realize that the money and resources may be brought to God and God will take care of all the brothers and sisters. ‘Apostles’ feet’ becomes a beautiful expression for the emerging church. Church is best expressed as Apostles feet than as a building or a location. A building is not trust worthy. A location is not worth keeping the treasures. However, now they have discovered a very appropriate place where all resources can be brought and be used properly for all human beings.

‘Apostles’ feet’ is an expression for trust and comfort. Perhaps we must bring back this imagery for the church. A church which has trustworthy apostles and discipleship. A church which governs the resources of the members with care and transparency. A church which leaves the people in comfort and safety.

The world is longing for safe arms and compassionate eyes. They are searching how to create trust worthy communities. They are desperate for trust and care.

When Jesus was alive, he became a place of trust for so many people. Whenever he asked, ‘Do you believe (me), they said, yes Lord, I believe. The disciples were believed trusted by the Christian community. Church is an expression of the heavenly commonwealth. Post resurrection community was an expression of trust and comfort.

3. Unity and testimony:

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was
upon them all. The proclamation of resurrection and the abolition of private property went in hand in hand. The absence of poor became the character of the early church.

Deuteronomy 15 offers two options for the future. One, a society where ‘there will always be poor’ (15:11). In such a society, we must seek ways how the poor will be able to survive. The second option, ‘there will be no poor among you’ (15:5). People will begin to seek the higher and more important things in life. To obey the Torah, to obey to the gospel, would mark the end of the poor in this world. However, as God, there has to be a great patience to reach there.

There was unity and love in the community. The testimony was proclaimed with vigor. Resurrection is an unexplainable experience. Christianity envisions impossible things since it is based on the most impossible of ever, the resurrection experience. The resurrection community cannot confirm to this world but must be able to transform this world.

**Conclusion:**

This text is a beautiful narration of the post resurrection community. This offers a great vision for our churches. Resurrection alone can make us what we are. Shall we encourage each other to d rediscover our forgotten identities?

**Rev. Dr. John Samuel Ponnusamy**
**Professor in Old Testament, TTS, Madurai**
Introduction

May day is observed as working class day across the world. This can be described as liberation day for the working class in Europe and America, who were victims of the Industrial Capitalism. It further reminds of struggles of the working class while affirming dignity of life, otherwise dehumanized in the experiences of alienation of labour, alienation of labourer and alienation from human species. It was acknowledged by many that the “Pilgrims Progress,” a book written by John Banyan, read widely in the English working class struggles. In this story book, an impossible path was made possible through faith in Jesus Christ. Likewise, the impossible task of achieving “8 hours work, 8 hours recreation and 8 hours rest” was made possible through the struggles of the working class, struggles together, and sharing the story of hope with one another all through, otherwise, some were working for 20 hours per day for very less pay. This day theme “Participating in God’s work” is an occasion for us to reflect upon the need to affirm dignity of life for which struggles is the way and being together is the method.

Voices of the Victims in the Text

The text selected from the book of Acts, Chapter 9: 36ff, presents togetherness of the women, the widows, along with the disciples of Jesus Christ, who were remembering and witnessing to the handy works of Tabitha. Their effort to bring Peter from Lydda to Joppa, probably to console the bereaved, was a wise effort in life affirming direction. The widows in that society were very much marginalised, as a Gospel witness to it (Mark 12:40); the religious authorities of that time indulged in devouring widow houses. Such was the hostile environment of those days towards the widow. Against such exploitative environment the widows and disciples of Jesus came together and worked together for the renewal of Tabitha’s life from death bed.

Yet another text, St. John 4: 34-38, explains about social stratification, some as “sower” and others as “reaper.” According to the text both these workers don’t compete with each other but, they complement each other. To work in agricultural fields the nature of work had to be complementing, not competing. We are also very much familiar with other texts which say about two competing groups of working class, one in the name of Paul and other Apollo (I Corinthians 1:12). Even such texts were directed to understand human activity in agriculture in terms of complementing and not competing with one another.

The voices of victims in the above texts are that of the disciples and widow disciples of Jesus Christ. Their marginality is based on the social locus of their standing and also because of their faith in Jesus Christ; the rejected one by the majority population and the power centers in the than Palestine. Their voices affirm life against the powers of death, which was possible through their being together, thinking together and complementing each other in their struggles. Finally it is these marginalised as “sowers” and “reapers” of harvest constitute the major workforce in agriculture- a production of life giving seeds.

Another text from the first testament, Exodus 36:1-13, presents thoughtfully perceived spirit, which is in contravene to the spirit of greed found in yet another first testament text (Proverbs 30: 15-16 ). To proclaim “enough” and to “restrain” people from bringing in more gifts into the house of God presents as picture of wisdom, which understands “labour” as something to be highly respected and never to be exploited.
Based on the above three texts and a brief reflection the following discussion is a directive to the Christian faith, to be aware of our being partners in God’s work.

**Need to be with One Another To Affirm Life in Globalisation**

Being in partnership in God’s work denotes affirmation of life, affirmation of community labour. The present day globalization phenomenon can be explained as society understood in terms of “individuals” and not as communities living and working together. Because of which there is growing strive in the name of “identities” between the communities and increasing cut throat competition between the individuals, something prompted by the market forces. As a result the fruit of May day is lost for our generation, something evident in “feminization of labour market.” The powerful trade unions seem to have lost their relevance in defense of the cause of working class, consequently “new social movements” are responding to the demands of the marginalised. In the same vein the alternative movements are taking their due space through bringing in marginalised together to affirm dignity of life in new ways. In such developments the Church, with all its rich Biblical and Theological resources, needs to envision new ways of coming together in order to affirm dignity of life against the forces of death beyond caste, class, gender, etc., barriers. Theological expression of being partners in God’s work is an expression of praxis oriented faith affirmation by the marginalised.

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CSI Karimnagar Diocese  
Auxiliary Secretary, BSI, Secunderabad
Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live” John 11:25

The raising of the dead Lazarus to life is the last sign of the seven signs recorded in the John’s Gospel. The evangelist John has placed this sign in a context of Jesus getting ready to die on the cross. And this sign has gained special eminence because it focused on the restoration of life and also on the authority of Jesus over the life. Jesus though heard that Lazarus was ill, he did not immediately rush to Bethany which was just 3km away from where Jesus was, instead he waited for two days to visit Lazarus whom he loved. Jesus wanted to create an opportunity to bring out the message of resurrection and life which was made clear in the later dialogue with Martha.

According to Genesis 15:6, “Abram believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.” One is to believe the lord to be considered as righteous and now according to the disclosure of Jesus, the same belief leads to the resurrection. When a person believes in Jesus the Lord, he/she gains a quality of life where death has no dominion over life rather becomes a process through which one enters into heavenly abode which is everlasting. Jesus here in his self-revelation expounds that he himself is the resurrection and life. And he supplemented it by saying that those who believe in me, even though they die, will live.

Believing in Jesus is

➢ To accept and acclaim Jesus as the incarnation of God and Savior of the World
➢ To be born in Jesus
➢ To be washed in Jesus
➢ To imitate Jesus
➢ To adopt Jesus’ liberative motifs and acts
➢ To be fed in Jesus
➢ To experience the suffering of Jesus
➢ To be raised with Jesus

Believing in Jesus is combating the evil forces in the world and responding to the situations where there is oppression and injustice. Jesus is expecting that all who believes in him will act and will react like Jesus. Therefore, believing in Jesus is putting end to the dark forces and to discern new life to live in Jesus to lead life in its fullness now and even after death.

Rev. K. John Vikram
CSI Krishna-Godavari Diocese
Christ’s Invitation to be an Expression of Mission

Ezekiel 34:25 – 31 Psalm 47
1 Peter 2:1-10 John 20:19-23
E: Psalm 96 Eph. 5:1-14

Jesus came into this world to fulfil God’s mission of restoring the lost image of humanity and to save the world from perils of satanic features. Jesus Christ put his whole and soul even to the extent of giving himself as a sacrifice on the cross only in order to inspire the humanity to fulfil the mission of God. This is what the expression “Missio-Dei” means. Anyone who claims faith in Jesus ought to have been inspired for this mission. Such inspiration is both subjective as well as objective at functional level. Thus an invitation is inherent in the faith of an individual to inculcate the culture of God’s Mission that becomes part of one’s lifestyle. The scripture portions chosen for this theme express four features that complete the mission-culture of a believer.

1. Titles or Ranks in mission:
1 Peter 2:1-10 describes how “no people” become “people of God”. Once no people have now got the title as people of God. The Dalits were deprived of temple entry or to have a god of their own. They had no religion nor hope of salvation in the past. Now in Christ we are called people of God. They are holy priests longing for pure milk of salvation. They make the spiritual temples at whom the world around them would find the sparkling grace of God. Once you have the taste for it you will never ignore it.

When we say that mission is God’s, then God alone is the authority over it. Jesus had chosen the disciples and wanted them to be his co-workers in the mission of God. Jesus always tried to equipping the disciples as agents of his mission. Jesus had given reasonably enough training. Still they were afraid of the circumstances and hid themselves in the upper room. What they needed was the authority. So Jesus decided to breathe over them and commission them to go out in mission. Authority became real when they confirmed the marks of Jesus and received the peace from him and then they all became overwhelmed before making a solemn oath for the mission of God. The Holy Spirit was given to them as means of strength. The authority to forgive sins of people was the climax. Now the disciples became ready to fight the faith.

3. Mission manifesto (Ezekiel 34:25 – 31)
With the authority given to them so solemnly by Jesus the disciples went out to fulfil the manifesto of the mission of God. Ezekiel 34: 25-31 explain the dynamics of mission in the form of David who represents all agents in the mission manifesto.

- I will appoint David to be the shepherd. The shepherds must be appointed
- David will feed the flock as a leader so that sheep shall live fearless in the wilderness
- They sleep peacefully (Ps127:2)
- They look like God’s blessings all around his mountain with timely rains
- Field is fertile and harvest is full
- People must live with peace in the nation because the shepherd will deliver them from the bondages of slavery
- And thus they know who their God is.

Kristu Jignasa
4. Mission celebration
Psalm 47 explains the celebration of mission accomplished. The celebration started when all nations clap and shout the triumphal slogans of God. The Lord most high is awesome. Nations are given to us in the mission. The inheritance is promised. Celebration needs to be filled with praises and songs. Each time we accomplish a bit of the mission there is a sure result of God’s blessing that we celebrate corporately. Church is the reason for corporate celebration.

Conclusion
The above sequence of mission expressions is manifested through the lifestyles of believers. And hence we need mission examples rather than mission lectures. Jesus did not write volumes but remained as an example for the mission life style. Mother Theresa never wanted to be in public news but she always remained an example of mission that the whole world realized her expressions. Let each one of us become a unique mission expression in our own neighbourhood.

Rt. Rev. Dr. B.D. Prasada Rao
Bishop in Rayalaseema
The theme ‘Christ Lord of All’ draws our attention to one of the important events in the life of Jesus Christ, namely the Ascension. The 40th day after Easter is celebrated as the Ascension Day, also known as the Feast of Ascension. The forty days count is given by Luke in his second letter to Theophilus, which is the book of Acts of the Apostles (1:3).

It is an important festival in the life of the Church and it presents to us an important event in the life of Jesus Christ. Since the day of Ascension is not decided on the basis of Sundays after Easter but on the basis of the number of days after Easter, the fortieth day falls on a Thursday. Perhaps this could be the reason why many of the churches do not observe this although it is an important festival.

On Ascension Day we remember that Christ is our reigning King, who brings all the things into subjection to himself. The message of Ascension is about the Kingship of Christ and in ignoring this festival, an opportunity to reflect on such an important theme is lost. It is important not only because Jesus is presented to us as the King who conquered the world and the powers that were evil and opposed to God, but also to understand that without the Ascension, the Work of Christ would be incomplete.

Since the detailed narration comes to us from the Book of Acts let us focus on the second reading.

The section has the following parts:

Verses 1-2 Preface to the Book of Acts

3–5 Brief description of the period of time after Jesus’s death and resurrection;
Reference to the teaching of Jesus during the 40 days
The content of the preaching, namely the Kingdom of God

9 – 11 Jesus’s Ascension

Let us look at the last section, the ascension of Jesus since that addresses the theme given for this day.

A careful look at the way the ascension is described to us we could declare that the ascension was a glorious event. The risen Lord ascended from the earth after his conversation with the disciples and disappeared into a cloud. We are reminded of the cloud in the transfiguration event (Mat 16:5). The transfiguration event was also a glorious event but in that the witnesses to the event were a selected few whereas in the ascension event the number of witnesses is more. A large number of witnesses give more authenticity to the event and the commandment to go into the world and preach the good news is also given to more number of followers. Since the subject of conversation between Jesus and the disciples was about the kingdom, the ascension was a display of the splendor and glory of the coming kingdom. The message to be preached to the world by his followers is also about the Kingdom of God. Obeying the command of the risen Lord the disciples remained in Jerusalem to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. When they were filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter preached a long sermon to clear the doubts in the minds of the crowd who thought initially that the disciples were drunk. More than that, Peter proclaimed the gospel of Christ and said that “the Jesus of Nazareth

Kristu Jignasa
whom they crucified is raised from the dead and that he is the Lord and Christ”. That was the message preached throughout Jerusalem, Judea Samaria and to the ends of the earth.

The expression ‘he ascended’ means that he had also ‘descended’ from heaven. Paul in his letter to the Philippians states that ‘though he was in the form of God ... he emptied himself by taking the form of a servant. After stating the humility and death of Jesus Paul continues to write saying 'therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name’. He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens.

Ascending into heaven is not to mean that Christ has disappeared and has moved to a higher place. ‘Heaven is the sphere of creation which already totally corresponds to God because it is totally pervaded by his glory’ (Jurgen Moltmann). Heaven is the immediate presence of God’s glory. In the OT, the manifestation of the presence of God is names as shakinah. God’s presence is the majestic presence. The concept of shekinah is behind the wonder of the incarnation in which Jesus descended as much as it is manifested in the act of ascension. The ascension gives importance to the immediate presence of God. In our confessional statement we say that Jesus had entered into the divine glory, that the risen Jesus now dwells in the immediate presence of God. Christ’s ascending in a cloud showed the disciples that he was being exalted to be in the presence of God in glory. Mark briefly states that ‘Jesus was received into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God (16:19). It was like home coming for the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

In the gospel passage Jesus is the one who led the disciples out, lifted up his hands, blessed them, parted from them and was carried up into heaven. In the entire episode Jesus is the subject and the disciples simply follow him. In the book of Acts the disciples in the narrative are engaged in a conversation with Jesus about the coming of the Kingdom. Jesus also gives them a command to stay in Jerusalem to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. And then Jesus is lifted up. The disciples are active witnesses, looking on as Jesus is lifted up and gazing into heaven as he is taken out of sight. The disciples could see and experience the divine action upon Jesus. God lifts him up and covers him with the cloud which as mentioned earlier is the glory and the presence of God. The crown of thorn was changed into crown of glory. He as the ascended one is the highest in the Universe and is the Lord of all.

Rev. Moses Jayakumar
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Former General Secretary, CSI
I am unable to erase that horrifying incident etched my mind. It was the predicament of two young girls in hurry. As I was slowing down my bike at a cross road on a summer midday, the two young girls sped ahead from behind me. They could not notice the young man on a bike from the right side trying to cut across the cross roads. It was catastrophic movement of mindless speed and bloodshed. Luckily for him the young man on the bike escaped with few scratches and a few broken parts of his two wheeler. The plight of the girls was worse which required calling up an Ambulance to shift them to the nearby hospital.

The world is in a hurry. We have lost the art of waiting. We simply can’t wait for the opportune movement to present itself before us. Hurrying and overtaking, speeding up and rushing through, buzzing around and looking busy seems to be the ‘in thing’ and even the normal mode of life nowadays. The world has lost much form running around than gaining anything comparatively.

Waiting is eternal call from our creator from the biblical times to till today. We move towards a new season of Pentecostal Sundays preparing ourselves to celebrate the day of Pentecost next Sunday. The call to wait upon the Lord comes to us once more. The very central message of the book of Isaiah is waiting upon the Lord.

The ministry of First Isaiah (1-39) is bracketed between two Judean Kings who could not wait upon the Lord, trusting him completely. We see king Ahaz frantically seeking help from the Assyrian aggressor instead of waiting upon the Lord in complete trust (Isaiah 7 and II Kings 16: 7, 8). The consequential fallout was that the Assyrian aggressor came next up to Jerusalem besieging the city until a miraculous deliverance from the Lord of the hosts (Isaiah 39 and II Kings 18). Of course King Hezekiah preferred to wait upon the Lord during the siege. Nevertheless, once the aggressor receded he was again tempted to meddle with political alliance much to the displeasure of the Lord (Isaiah 39 and II Kings 20: 12ff).

The downfall of the kingdom of Judaea, brought forth by the Babylonian king (II Kings 24—25), had its root in the meddling of the political alliance which evidently showed Hezekiah’s lack of faith on the Lord. The book of hope and restoration, that Second Isaiah (40—55) starts with the Lord’s assurance that those who waited upon the Lord in the Babylonian captivity will soar like eagle. Waiting upon the Lord is an eternal call which requires us to:

a) To allow Lord to act in our lives
b) To repose our faith upon the Lord
c) To give ourselves up to will of God

In the New Testament texts, both in Luke and in Acts the Risen Lord calls upon the disciples to wait (Luke 24:49, Acts: 1:4). The disciples were asked to wait upon the Holy Spirit. This is commandment of the Christ who is ascending. Christ asks them to wait patiently until they are given the power from above, which is the Holy Spirit. We all know how the pouring of the Holy Spirit totally revitalized the disciples to become apostles. However, we should not fail to see that even before the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the waiting itself began to create therapeutic changes in the lives of the disciples who were devastated by the brutalities of the Good Friday.

a) Waiting becomes a exercise which helps to remove their psychic disturbances and infuses joy in the their hearts (Luke. 24:52).
b) The disciples spend their waiting time not in doubts or fear but in praising God in the temple (Luke 24: 53).

c) The disciples who were scattered due to fear of persecution came together into a single minded fellowship (Acts. 1: 14).

d) The disciples commit themselves totally to the guidance and the will of God in selecting a substitute for Judah (Acts. 1: 24, 25).

The waiting which the risen Lord commanded them to do infused joy into their hearts which made them to praise God and their praising brought about oneness of fellowship through which they were able to commit themselves to the will of God. Now the platform is set for the Holy Spirit to descend and invigorate the disciples to become apostles. It is a waiting which create a conducing atmosphere of joy, praise, fellowship and yielding to the will of God which allows the Holy Spirit to blow them in to action. Any church expecting to become the church of Pentecost must exhibit the tendency to wait upon the Lord which will adorn them in the qualities that we find above. May the Spirit of our God descend upon us.

Rev. M. Benjamin Inbaraj,
CSI Diocese of Madras
May 24, 2015, Sunday
Come Holy Spirit Renew Us
(Pentecost)
Ezekiel 37:1 – 14 Psalm 104:24 - 35
Acts 2:1-13 John 16:1 – 11
E: Joel 2:28- 32 Titus 3:5- 8

Introduction

Come Holy Spirit and renew the whole creation was the theme for the seventh assembly of the World Council of Churches at Canberra 1991. The theme suggested a mode of prayer for all the ecumenical churches to reconsider the priorities from the perspective of global challenges that accelerated by neo-liberal economy where the environment and its poor were the most affected. Every prayer is an explication of commitment and concern. As Kristen Stendhal points out prayer is the language most authentic to the church for it invites us to be co-creators with God in Christ. It is with this pretext that meditates on the theme from the Acts 2:1-11.

Come Holy Spirit and Renew us – Prayer of Pentecost

The book of Acts opens with the promise of the coming of the Spirit on the disciples which is realized at Pentecost. Edward Lohse appropriately speaks of this narrative as the front porch, ‘a great porch at the beginning of the history of the Church, which the reader must pass through in order to enter into universal history’. Pentecost is the founding event. According to Luke, one cannot be unaware that the Church is not born from humanity, but from the breath of God. He expresses a conviction shared by the whole of primitive Christianity: the pouring out of the Spirit was a post-paschal reality; it is not the work of the earthly Jesus, but of the risen Christ. In the Old Testament the Pentecost is usually called the feast of Weeks (Exod 23:16; Lev 23:15-21; Deut 16:9-12). It was a one-day festival celebrating the wheat harvest. The distinctive feature of the festival in ancient Israel was the presentation to Yahweh of an offering of two loaves of new corn. By the second century AD rabbinic Judaism regarded Pentecost as the day the law was given to Israel at Sinai. Most significant events in Luke-Acts occur in connection with prayer (Luke 3:21-22; 6:12-16; 9:18, 28; Acts 10). So it is here. In Luke-Acts, prayer functions in three ways: (1) as a means of knowing God's will/plan/purpose (Luke 3:21-22; 9:18-22, 28-31; Acts 10:1-8, 9-23; 11:5-17; 22: 17-21); (2) as a source of power to enable one to do God's will (Luke 4:18-21; 22:39-46; Acts 1:14 and 2:1-4 [Luke 11:13]; 4:29-31); (3) as a catalyst for God's accomplishing the divine plan/purpose (Luke 11 :2-4; 18:1-8; 22:31-32; Acts 8:15; 9:40; 12:5-6, 11, 12, 13-17). In this context, it is function (2) that is applicable. The disciples have been praying for the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1: 14) just as Jesus had told them to do (Luke 11:13: "how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him"). Now their prayers are answered. They are filled with the Holy Spirit (v. 4), empowered to do God's will. This community of Men and women are united at their heart and together at one place to pray as response to the promise of Lord Jesus Christ. The biblical motif of Promise and fulfilment is warranted from the readers in order to understand this prayer. Though, it was not specifically spelt it here that their purpose of being together at one place is for prayer the later accounts points to this fact. Luke here describes the fulfilment of the prophecy of John the Baptist (Luke 3:16; "he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire") and the prophecies of Jesus (Luke 24:49: "And behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you"); Acts 1:5; "before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit"; Acts 1:8: "you shall receive power after the Holy Spirit has come upon you"). That "they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (2:4) fulfils the promise "you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (1 :5) and shows that the two expressions refer to one experience.

Come Holy Spirit and Renew Us- Call for Proclamation
Verses 2-4 relate the events that happened on Pentecost: an audition ("a noise like a strong driving wind," v. 2), a vision ("there appeared to them tongues as of fire," v. 3), and action ("they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them," v. 4).

In the first place, Luke here describes a theophany- Divine Manifestation. Any intrusion of the heavenly world into human affairs in Luke-Acts is likely to be accompanied by visions and auditions. Sound, fire, and speech understood by all people were characteristic of the Sinai theophany. The same ingredients are found in the Pentecostal events. Verses 5-11 give an explanation of the tongues in v. 4.

In Jerusalem there lived "devout Jews from every nation under heaven" (v. 5). The reference is not to the large crowds in Jerusalem for the feast, but rather to Jews who had come from all over the world to settle in Jerusalem (Acts 6:9). These Jerusalemites gathered when they heard the noise and to their amazement heard the Galileans, who were notorious for poor linguistic skills speaking in the language of each auditor (vv. 6-8).

In the Galileans beginning to speak the mighty works of God to the Jerusalemites in essence reverses the process of salvation discourse. Because the conventional verbatim pattern at the religious sphere is subverted in this powerless, excluded and submerged deviant identities claiming the power to speak the content which normally prohibited for them. The clear-cut emphasis of this subunit is found in the threefold refrain "heard them speaking in his own language" (v. 6); "hear them in his own native language" (v. 8); and "hear them speaking in our own tongues". In telling his story this way, the evangelist seems to be describing xenolalia, a variation of glossolalia found repeatedly in Christian history. It is similar to the cases of modern people who claim to hear their own language being spoken by people with the gift of tongues. The Pentecostal events of Acts 2:1-11, however, are not just a Messianic renewal of the Sinai covenant but the new covenant.

Jesus said, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which will be shed for you" (Luke 22:20; Exod 24:8 Jer 31:31-34. In Ezek 11:17-20, God says about the new covenant: (a) "I will assemble you out of the countries where you have been scattered, and I will give you the land of Israel" (v. 17); (b) "I will give them a new heart and put a new spirit within them" (v. 19); and (c) I will "give them one heart" (v. 19). At Pentecost in Acts 2, this promise is fulfilled. A new spirit is given, the Holy Spirit!

The promise of God has been fulfilled in the presence of those who have been assembled out of the countries to which they had been scattered. At Pentecost event by the coming of Holy Spirit on these Galilean minority community and the impact of it has been radical, it marks the inauguration of the world transforming history of the Christian Kerygma. The power of the spirit given to the Church at Pentecost will proclaim the Word of God to all which will prove to the world wrong about sin, righteousness and judgement(John 16:8).

Come Holy Spirit and Renew Us- Commitment to Witness

The Spirit is a power; she enables the disciples to be witnesses of Jesus, from Jerusalem to the ends of the earth. The Spirit makes the witness possible, and better to say that she is the witness. The gift of the Spirit is the power to witness to Jesus. The entire unfolding of the mission in Acts confirms this function of the Spirit as the enabling power to witness. It is likely that Luke has rewritten a narrative that was centered on speaking in tongues and has transformed it into an event of universal communication. The text describes this miracle: the Galilean minority community loses their Galilean particularism and become the core of the universal Church (vv. 6–11). Luke hardly considers that the gathering crowd, made up of Jews and proselytes residing in Jerusalem, might understand their language. On the contrary, what is important for him is that this microcosm, this kaleidoscope of nations, a nucleus of the Church, announces the great acts of God to the whole world. From its birth, the Church created by the Spirit has three distinctive features: (a) it is a missionary community, not by vocation but by definition ;(b) everyone in the community receives the Spirit, a sign of the eschatological times, in order to testify; (c) the Church comes from and cannot understand itself without Israel.

Luke shows how, in order to enlarge the Pentecostal nucleus to worldwide dimensions, the Spirit pushes the community in spite of itself to go beyond the boundaries of Israel, to go beyond the limits of the Law, to exceed the boundaries of Asia to arrive in Rome, the imperial centre. The Pentecost

Kristu Jignasa
event and its details and definitions in terms of the arrival of the promised and prophesied Holy Spirit, advocate and guide for everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, regenerates and strengthens the community to continue the praxis of witnessing God even at times of rejection and exclusion.

**Conclusion**
The gist of our Pentecostal experience as the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the disenfranchised community, constantly challenge the life of the church to reconsider its prayer-priority, call for proclamation and commitment to witness Christ. A Messianic renewal is essential for the church to live the values of the spirit-community for the realization of the Kingdom of God here in this world.

**Rev. Joseph Samuel**
**Kerala United Theological Seminary**
Introduction
The word Trinity is derived from the word "Trinitas" the Latin term meaning three fold or three in one. Actually, the word Trinity is not found in the Bible. Then what is the necessity of using this term for the understanding of the Godhead. It is utilized to correct different heresies formed by different people against the Divinity of Christ. At this critical juncture it was necessitated for the Church to establish Monotheism - the belief in one and only God. Tertullian (C160 - 233) an African moralist, apologist and theologian brought this doctrine of Trinity first, into the Church. He says that God's unity is deposed into three - the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit who are three not in substance but in form.

Biblical Basis for the Doctrine of Trinity
Biblically, God reveals himself God the creator, God the redeemer and God the comforter - the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit. In the creation account, the spirit of God is involved in the creation of the world. Jesus Christ is commissioned by the spirit of God even at his Baptism. His whole life is empowered by the spirit of God and His mission is successfully carried out by the power of the Holy Spirit. Finally, His teaching of the Holy Spirit to his disciples equipped them to confront any situation of their life and as a result the Church grew rapidly.

The definition of the Word Trinity with Expository Illustrations
God cannot be defined in terms of scientific research. Likewise, the Trinitarian doctrine cannot be explained by hypothesis and human interpretation. Yet, the theologians used certain illustrations to make people understand the oneness of God in three. The first one is the Tri-unity of God is like a sound - God the father is the source or speaker - Jesus is the word is spoken - the Holy Spirit is the way which continues to speak. The second is according to Bishop Stephen Neill, that of a scholar whose brain produces, letters, hands write it, and finally it reaches others. The wisdom, the writing and its usefulness are the product of one person. The third one is scientific which compares Trinity to a process where when water is heated, steam comes and when it is cooled it turns into water again. The fourth one is according to mathematical formula which is 1x1x1=1, which is suitable to Trinitarian revelation. In our personal experience, a man is son to his mother, husband to his wife and father to his children. Yet, human illustrations fail to suitably portray the nature of Triune God as He is revealed in the Bible. We must simply believe what the Bible reveals to us: there is only one God and He is three persons. There is no one like Him (Isaiah 44: 6 &7).

Worshipping the Triune God in His sovereignty
The Old Testament portion Genesis 1: 1 - 5, and Genesis 18: 1 - 28 give us two dimensional expression of the Trinitarian revelation of Godhead . The plural form in "Let us make man" refers to the Trinity. Probably, the plural is intended to draw attention to the importance and solemnity of God's decision. In the creation of man, the Trinitarian mission is performed not only in the creation of other creatures, but also in the perfection of mankind. The Triune God has blessed us specially by creating us in His own image. Sin has marred that Divine image but one day all the true believers will bear the image of Christ (Romans 8: 29). The second expression as found in the 18th Chapter of Genesis, indicates the three visitors - two angels and God, the Creator. Abraham calls them "Lord" not "Lords" which indicates the Father the creator, Jesus in His pre incarnation and the spirit of God. Here Abraham and Sarah have a new promise of having a son. The hospitality of Abraham and Sarah to the three visitors and their plea for Sodom express their real concern for others. In the same way, we, the

Kristu Jignasa
followers of Christ are empowered by the Triune God to pray for others and up build human unity for the sake of kingdom values.

**Worshipping the Triune God in His fellowship**
The epistle portion II Corinthians 13: 11 - 14 mentions the three forms of persons as three modes of existence of one true God, namely Jesus Christ the Son, God the Father and the Holy Spirit. These three are one and whatever they do, they do together. First, we receive the grace of Christ, His forgiveness, His righteousness, next we experience the love of God filling our hearts and the third we receive the Holy Spirit who lives within us and gives fellowship. These are all one work of one God. And we need all three, grace, love and fellowship every minute in our lives. In another epistle portion of this day I John 1: 1 - 5, the author explains that God wants us to have living fellowship, joyful fellowship and honest fellowship. Thus the Triune God builds us to live in constant fellowship to prove that we are the children of one God.

**Worshipping the Triune God in His transcendence**
According to the Gospel portion, John 1: 1 - 14, the prologue, John speaks about the coming of Jesus in comparison to the first chapter of Genesis where God creates light first and then creates life (Gene 1 : 3, 11). Jesus, the creative and living word, reveals the father to us. In His many miracles, Jesus shows His power as the creator. Jesus who is the light and life has transcended to the sinful world through His incarnation. The God who was dwelling in the Old Testament tabernacle now comes as human being. Incarnation is the demonstration of God's human possibility for the expression of divine glory. Accordingly, Jesus was sent by God, empowered by the Holy Spirit performed miracles, by the power of the Holy Spirit gave His life a ransom for many and resurrected as the Lord of life to become the embodiment of the Triune God.

**Conclusion**
The doctrine of Trinity is central to Christian faith. Any teaching that does not affirm the Trinity is heresy against the historic Christian faith as affirmed by the ancient creeds and councils. Though the Trinitarian experience of God is mysterious, it can be experienced by a believer who loves God, obeys His commandments and have sound spiritual experience. If the Trinitarian formula, grace, love and fellowship, merges with people's biological composition body, mind, and soul there will be a significant enhancement in harmony, equality and dignity in their life. As we receive the Trinitarian blessings we respect the values, ideals and individuality of other persons. Some incidents from the Bible help us understand the empowering nature of the Triune God. Trinity not only works for the redemption of the world, but also invites us to participate in the great mission of sharing the redeeming love of God which is implied in the great commission of our Lord Jesus in Mathew 28:19. Among the eleven disciples who went to Galilee, some worshipped the Lord, others doubted. Worshipping the Triune God is an empowering experience because it transforms us to lead a life of sacrifices acceptable to God. Worshipping Triune God should be the integral part of the Christian life and it should be the experience of the Church. In Isaiah 6 : 1 - 9, Isaiah has a vision of God's sovereignty sitting on the Throne which suggests that God is for all and that made him submit and commission him for God's ministry. On the day of Pentecost, when the disciples of Jesus gathered with one accord in one place, they had an experience of worshipping the Triune God: the Old Testament God's prophecy of Joel was fulfilled, the redemption of the church through Christ is visualized and the outpouring of Holy Spirit is experienced. In John's vision of worshipping the Triune God, we are reminded that we must never worship any king, any priest, any angel or spirit. We must worship the one and only Triune God - the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit (Revelation 19: 10). Let us adore the Holy Trinity in our worship services in the verse of Bp Reginald Heber,

*Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty!
All Thy works shall praise Thy name, in earth, and sky, and sea;
Holy, Holy, Holy! Merciful and Mighty!*

Kristu Jignasa
God in Three persons blessed Trinity!

Rev Dr. G Stephen Lionel
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Today is set apart as Students’ Sunday – the Sunday where we celebrate our student hood. It reminds us that we are learners and it is the Sunday on which we rededicate ourselves to the pursuit of true knowledge and wisdom from above. It leads us to a clearer understanding of our life and faith. The celebration of this particular Sunday enables us to move towards better understanding and appropriation of faith and life. The readings that are set apart for this day are intended to facilitate the deeper understanding and greater meaning of our Christian faith and living as learners.

A number of Hebrew words are used to explain what we normally consider “wisdom,” which is the ultimate goal of education. The most important words are two, namely ‘Chokmah’ and ‘Binah.’ The term ‘Chokmah’ means wisdom, especially in the sense of sagacity, or skill in making thought issue into the appropriate action. In other words, the biblical (OT) meaning of wisdom is ability to translate thought into action and it has a practical importance rather than a theoretical reference. Therefore, ‘Chokmah’ is different from the wisdom of the Greek philosophy. It primarily refers in the Old Testament to ‘technical proficiency’ rather than ‘conceptual eloquence.’ (Ex. 35:30 ff; Is. 10:13 and Ps. 107:27).

The second most important word is ‘Binah’. ‘Binah’ in the Old Testament generally refers to ‘understanding.’ The Hebrew root ‘bin’ means discern or consider. The noun ‘Binah’ means both the act of understanding as well as the ability of understanding. The term ‘Binah’ is used in Proverbs 28:5 where it says, “Those who seek the Lord understand all things.” Seeking the Lord and understanding all things are precisely the ultimate goal of true education and it is the wisdom gained from above. In other words, contact with God, faith in God is the spring of understanding and that is the spring of wisdom. Therefore, God is the most important object of understanding and having right and sound understanding of God is the ultimate goal of education. However, as we all know, in the intellectual sense, God is beyond human understanding. Therefore, consequently, all our educational endeavors become a continuous search of true knowledge and wisdom.

Wisdom from above is the quality of being wise, gained from the fear of the Lord and this knowledge of God and wisdom needs to help us to design our life style. With this understanding we attempt to meditate upon the given theme from the scripture portions set apart for today.

**Wisdom from Above enables us to Discern the Truth (1 Kings 3: 16-28):**

King Solomon talks about the wisdom in Proverbs 2:6 “for the Lord gives wisdom and from His mouth come knowledge and understanding.” Solomon was a wise man, a rich man, a great man; yet he praised the Lord and loved the Lord. The Lord blessed him abundantly. His dream was not a common one. While his bodily powers locked up in sleep, the powers of his soul were strengthened. He received divine vision and made suitable choice, having a humble sense of his own wants and weakness, Solomon pleads God, to give him wisdom. God was pleased with his plea and granted his heart’s desire along with all worldly blessing. He was given wisdom because he asked for it. God gave him wealth even though he did not ask for it. Solomon asked for the wisdom that is not of this world but of the above, it is an understanding mind to govern well and ability to discern between good and evil. Being learners of faith, we require this desire. Understanding and ability to discern good and evil are the gift of God. One need to ask for it and God gave Solomon’s heart desire and Solomon utilized these qualities for the well-being of the people because God’s gifts are intended for the...
fulfilment of God’s plan for this world. Therefore, Solomon in the book of Proverbs frequently exhorts the reader to search for, seek for, incline our ear, search for it, and cry out for it. (Prov. 2: 4).

A dictionary definition of wisdom is an “understanding what is true, right or lasting.” In the reading set apart for today, we notice an instance of Solomon’s wisdom. As we read the passage, we notice that the context is a very difficult to discern and judge. King Solomon with the help of the divine wisdom, or the wisdom gained from above did not try to find out which mother the child loved more; rather King Solomon tried to find out which mother loved the child best. In other words, King Solomon tried to examine the mother’s sincerity when the child was in danger. It was the wisdom from the above that enabled King Solomon to give the right judgment. His ability to discern the truth made him get more reputation among people consequently, by this, all loved him. How was it possible for King Solomon? It is very clear that King Solomon sought for it. Seeking wisdom takes effort and it can be found through the help of God alone. For the Lord gives wisdom, from His mouth come knowledge and understanding (II Jn. 3:22). He is not storing up wisdom for Himself; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright. One can acquire much knowledge but the wisdom gained from above will enable one to discern the truth and the perspicacity of truth will bring glory to God. So as learners, let us ask God for the gift of wisdom and the heart of understanding so that we may be able to discern truth and by discerning, the truth will enable us to serve God as God’s fellow-workers.

Wisdom from Above enables to be Victorious (James 1: 1-8):
In the second reading, James the author of the epistle says, Christianity is not an easy way. He warns that the believers will find themselves involved in temptations. Temptation also means trials and also means as a testing directed towards an end, and the end is that anyone who is tested should emerge stronger and purer from the experience. Following Christ or being a Christian is to march forward in the midst of trials. There will be the test of sorrows and the disappointments, which seek to take our faith away. There will be the test of the seductions, which seek to lure us from the right way. There will be test of dangers. However, these troubles or trials and tribulations are not meant to defeat us but they are meant to be defeated. They are not meant to make us weaker but to make us stronger; they are not meant to make us fall but these trials should make us soar. Therefore, we should not complain about them but we need to rejoice in them. Christians are like athletes. The severe the course of training they undergo, the more they will be glad because they should know that it will prepare them for a better victorious life.

In the verses 2-4, we read about the result of testing or trials. We notice that the aim of the testing is to purge from all impurity. Facing the trials and temptations will lead us to produce better results. The unswerving constancy in the trials and tribulations will bring three types of blessings. First, it makes perfect; perfection towards a given end. Perfection is not by gaining knowledge or information but perfection from a positive response to testing. This enables the Christian to be fit for the task, which God meant us to do. Secondly, trials will make Christian complete which means perfect in all aspects of life. Thirdly, enduring trials makes us deficient in nothing. In other words, by meeting the testing of life in faith in proper manner day by day, we develop unswerving constancy. It will empower us to live victorious life day by day. Enduring trials will enable us to reach nearer to the standards of Christ Himself. All that we must need to do is to ask God for wisdom that is from above. We must ask without doubt. It means our asking must be sure of both the power and the desire of God to give all who ask him. It is this wisdom that is received from the above will make one to be victorious in life by learning from experiences of life.

Wisdom from Above is Knowing Christ (Luke 10: 21-24):
The Gospel reading clearly shows that, wisdom is simplicity. The simple minds could receive truths that the learned minds could not take in. Following Christ or being a Christian does not mean knowing about Christ, it means knowing Christ. To know Christ, one requires the wisdom from above and it is the grace of God. Verse 22 depicts the unique relationship between God and Jesus Christ.
Knowing Jesus is knowing God because Jesus Christ is perfect mind and heart of God. Therefore, Jesus constantly taught to his disciples that knowing Christ is knowing God. Jesus says, that anyone who sees me have seen my Father who is in heaven and Jesus Christ is the consummation of all (Vs. 22-23, Cf. Mt. 2:15, 17 and 23). To know Christ, one has to receive the Gospel of Good News of Jesus Christ. Knowing Christ is the liberation and attaining of true wisdom. Learners should be both hearers and doers.

To conclude, education is always open-ended and an unending search for that which is true, lasting and desirable. Without that open-endedness, education becomes only domestication and turns the learner into arrogant, closed minded, parochial fanatic. This is precisely true about our learning in Christian faith. When we stop learning in faith, we stop growing and we crumble when the trials come. Wisdom is always open-ended. God Himself is the true wisdom. The search or the efforts to know Christ is an on going process. The goal of our learning or gaining wisdom is not merely being in faith or being good Christians. The goal of our learning is entering into an on going process of becoming—which does not end in death or cross, but goes beyond-beyond into eternity of which the beginning is God and the end is God. Therefore, let us not be complacent with our being good learners, but enter into the process of becoming learners because the call given by Jesus still echoes today, “Come to me, all of you who are tired from carrying heavy loads, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke and put it on you and learn from me.” Let us continue to learn from Him, who is the true wisdom and who has called us to learn from Him so that we might gain eternity.

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CSI Karimnagar Diocese.
Contemporary Realities:

Environment is considered as sacred and the human relationship towards it should also be sacred. In the past, people viewed it with reverence, as they were dependent on it for their survival. Environment is a generous gift of God to human beings, which is to be respected, cared for and protected. Environment proclaims the glory of God and it is for the benefit of life on the earth. However, today we live in a world, which is overcrowded, more polluted and more vulnerable to sudden disruptions. As a result, we are at the brink of a total obliteration of our world. Fast depletion of natural resources and massive pollution of air, water and land have caused this perilous situation. While all of us are affected by the ecological crisis, the life, especially of the poor is further deteriorated by it. Mostly the tribals, the women and children are the victims of this steady deterioration and degradation of the biosphere. Water is the precious resource upon which terrestrial life depends for sustenance. Yet, human beings have neglected to maintain its natural reservoirs and safeguard its purity. Pollution and deterioration of natural resources is a major problem in the global context. In addition, we also experience pollution such as raw sewage, industrial waste discharge into the rivers, devastating effects of mining, nuclear power facilities and toxic waste dumps, e-waste and the rise of temperature on the planet’s atmosphere.

Ecology concerns the life of the earth. It is about organisms and their relationship with their environment. There are different factors, which are responsible for rapidly degrading the capacity of the earth to support life. Never before have had human beings wielded so much power over creation, exploiting its resources by means of a ‘flow-through-economy.’ It is a process of tapping the creations wealth and exploiting nature’s resources without replenishing them and polluting the surroundings so that not even nature can repair it. This is the status of our planet, which poses ethical issues of paramount importance. We live in a post-modern era with the paradox that it is a time of scientific achievement and ecological crisis. When God created the earth, everything was well balanced and it was found good. God blessed them, and God said to them, “be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over everything that moves upon the earth” (Gen. 1:28). To subdue here never meant exploit, rather it meant responsible stewardship. Both God and human beings are mutual custodians of God’s creation, but the fallen human beings have developed and continue to nurture a cultures of damaging and destroying the earth ever since. It is an issue of life and survival for individuals, the earth, and the future generations. If not tackled carefully; it would certainly lead into the extinction of life, and the very existence of individuals, families, and countries will be in jeopardy.

It is in this context, we meditate upon the theme: “Creation Proclaims the Glory of God.” It reminds us of the human responsibility to grasp the glory of God that the whole creation withholds in it, praise God, and be thankful for the Creation of God. Creation proclaims the Glory of God, God’s attributes, God’s character and God’s goodness. The human beings need to learn from the creation about the beauty and the wonders that the hand of God has unfurled. With these introductory words, we shall meditate upon the theme given for us, for our meditation, based on the readings given.

Creation Proclaims that God is Omniscient (Prov. 8: 22-31):

In this passage, we read about the omnipresence of Godhead in the process of creation of the world. Creation is the book of nature. It contains all that has come straight from the hand of God,
uncorrupted by civilization and domestication. God makes extravagant beauty out of seemingly mundane things. As we gaze at the creation, we experience wondrous works of art. We enjoy His gallery in skies above and on earth and sea below (Gen. 1: 1; Ps. 19; Ps. 139; Ps. 145). However, most of the earth’s beauty remains invisible to us; it is seen only by God. Another gallery that displays His Glory is the human beings. We too are made out of something ordinary dust (Gen. 2:7). However, to us He added an extraordinary ingredient - His very own breath. Further, God created whole creation for the sake of life in the nature including for human beings and they need to keep it, subdue and multiply. The will of God is made known by the works of creation and by the consciences of human beings. God’s will is made known to people by His servants such as Moses and Prophets and by the words of Jesus in order to guide the ignorant into saving knowledge of God, the truth.

The Old Testament reading talks of the power of Wisdom. Wisdom, here is Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. It is Christ not only revealed to us but it is Christ revealed in us. All prudence and skill is from the Lord. Through the redemption of Christ’s precious blood, the riches of His grace abound in all wisdom and prudence. The Son of God is actively engaged in the Creation activity of God. The Son of God is able to save the world and He is the savior of the world. The creator’s handiwork demands a response of thankfulness, which is often neglected and ignored. The Psalmist wrote, “The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament shows His handiwork.” (Ps. 19: 1). God’s handiwork is a spectacle that should not enable us only to admire at it but should inspire us to worship and praise God as the Psalmist did. The Lord is greater than our finite minds can grasp. Yet He has made it possible for us to know Him through his Son Jesus Christ who He has sent to live on this earth, to die for us, and to be raised. When we believe in Him, our lives join the heavens in proclaiming His Glory (Rom. 1:20). God is present everywhere and Godhead - the Trinity very actively present in the creation process. We need to recognize this fact and be thankful and give reverence to His holy name by caring for God’s creation.

**Creation proclaims God alone is Eternal (Rev. 21: 1-8):**

Humanity’s fall into sin marred the goodness of God’s creation and creation has ever since been in the state of frustration. It was not the creation that sinned but human beings. So the creation’s humiliation and groaning is not its fault. Creation is subjected to arrested development and constant decay. So the creation stands in need of renewal and deliverance in order to experience a new life - life that is abundant and fullness. John the author of the book of Revelation has saw the awful fate of the wicked and now in this chapter he sees the bliss of the blessed. He saw a new heaven and an earth. The vision of the new heaven and a new earth points to the fact that sorrow is to be forgotten; sin is to be overcome; darkness is to be at an end; the temporariness of time is to turn into everlasting eternity. This belief clearly projects three things. First, it points to unquenchable immoral longings in the human soul; second to the inherent sense of sin in everyone and third to human faith in God. It points to the end of the evil forces hostile to God and human life. God will restore the faithful from the hands of the wicked in order to have fellowship with God and experience the blessings that the fellowship of God bestows on the faithful. God will make his dwelling place with human beings. God’s presence will be with His people as a mark of God’s blessing and God’s handiwork of new beings in a new heaven and a new earth (Lev. 26:11-12; Ezek. 37:27; Isa. 35: 10; 65:19; 25:8). In verses 5-8, we read the words spoken by God himself. He is God who is able to make all things new. It has the connection with the Jewish thought about eternity (Isa. 43:18-19). Paul also witness when he said in 2 Corinthians 5:17, “If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. God can take people and re-create them and on some day, God will create a new universe for the saints whose lives he has renewed. God is alpha and omega - the beginning and the end.

**Creation Proclaims that God is Omni-Potent (Lk. 8: 22-25):**

In the Gospel passage, we read about the story of Jesus calming the Sea. Luke wanted to portray Jesus as the Son of God and as the Son of God; Jesus has the authority over the whole of God’s creation. By calming the sea Jesus wanted his disciples to look around and perceive the way God speaks to human

Kristu Jignasa
beings through the environment. Jesus’ word has brought calmness in the creation and in the lives of those who were caught up in the middle of the razing sea. Jesus’ act has filled in them a divine calmness and also their ignorance has been removed and their eyes and mind was opened to understand that Jesus is the Lord of all and the creation obeys to Him. God is in control of His creation.

On the other side of this divine act of Jesus’ calming the sea also shows the humanness of Jesus Christ. Jesus was tired and was in desperate need to rest to refresh Him. He trusted his disciples because they were fishermen of the lake and he was content to leave things to their skill and seamanship and to relax. At the same time Jesus also trusted God; he knew that he was as near to God by sea as ever he was by the land. Then the storm came down. It was just a sudden storm that struck the boat. Jesus and his disciples were in peril. Disciples looking at the storm and razing sea were filled with fear of death. They woke up Jesus and Jesus by a word calmed the sea. Jesus’ works are always more that temporal significance. The essence of this story is wherever Jesus is, the storm becomes calm. Jesus has the authority over the creation and by obeying to God and Godhead, the creation glorifies God. Creation’s proclamation of God’s glory always increases faith and trust in God. Going to Christ or seeking the help and deliverance by Christ is important.

Creation obeys to God and obedience to God’s word brings life. The first law of ecology is that everything is connected to everything else. Violence to nature leads to violence to human beings. The more we disturb the nature the more we disturb ourselves. It is our ultimate responsibility to save the creation from decay. What we need to be reminded of it here is that the blessings are not for everyone and to all human beings. The receivers of the blessings of God are only those who remain faithful when everything seeks to seduce them from loyalty. The greatest promise of all is that, “God will be their God and they will be His children.” Therefore, being children of God implies that, we need to see ourselves as part of God’s creation and as part of God’s creation, we need to be loyal to the creation and respect the creative power of God. God is eternal and human beings are temporal and being loyal and commitment to safeguard the creation is being faithful to God. Faithfulness to God indeed is a blissful experience. Our environmental concern should not limit itself merely to pressure and protest but to a change of attitude towards the nature.

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Kristu Jignasa
Introduction:

Many people have the idea about worship. Some people feel that worship is something you do in church and that it can only be done there. Some think that worship is going to a church and sitting quietly while religious ceremonies are conducted. Others see worship as a time of good singing, preaching and testifying. Our great need then, is to discover what genuine personal worship involves, so that we might be able to experience God and His fullness in our lives.

The word worship comes from the old Anglo-Saxon word "worship". It literally means to attribute or ascribe worth to someone. It carries the idea of declaring the object of worship as being worthy of honour. The Greek word in the New Testament that is most often translated "worship" in the word "proskuneo." This word means "kiss the hand to one in a token of reverence, also by kneeling or prostration to pay homage." The second most common word is "sebomai", this word means "to revere". Other words are used, but these are sufficient to teach us that the Bible sees worship as an act of honouring God because of His great worthiness to be honoured.

I. Worship enables to identify one’s own nature:

The first reading explicitly exemplifies in Isaiah 6: 1-8, the form of a heavenly worship where the seraphim and cherubim worship the holy Lord. Further, the text gives the importance of the worship and explains the joy of His Holy presence. The real worship enables us to engage in our day to day life situation meaningfully. For the Christian, worship is vitally important. Worship is an absolutely indispensable part of the Christian experience. It involves the concepts of cleansing, purging, purifying, confession and repenting. The true worship should help us identify the real sinful nature, and prompt us to the reconciled relationship with God.

II. Worship enables Sanctification:

The epistle reading of II Thess. 2:13-17 explains that we are bound to give thanks to God always because God chose us from the beginning to be saved, through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth. The means of God's sanctifying grace is Jesus Christ: "We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Heb. 10:10). Worshipping the Triune God will lead us for the sanctification (1 Cor. 1:30); (2 Thess. 2:13; 1 Peter 1:2); (1 Cor. 6:11). Yet Christian faith is not merely passive. Paul calls for active trust and obedience when he says, "Since we have these promises, let us purify ourselves from everyting that contaminates body and spirit. True worship sanctifies and further challenges to live a life akin to God’s will.

III. Worship enables to break the barriers:

John’s gospel chapter 4 is of more spiritual values. As Jesus ministers to this woman, she finds herself under deep conviction of her sins. She realizes her need to get right with the Lord. She perceives that Jesus is a prophet and supposes that He would help her understand God and her worship due to God. Jesus teaches her that genuine worship cannot be relegated and isolated to a single place or to some process alone. Jesus tells her that those who worship God must do so in "spirit" and in “truth”. Though worship may indeed manifest itself in vocal and visible forms. David, for instance worshiped the Lord in two distinct manners, and both were perfectly acceptable to the Lord. First, he danced
before the Lord with passionate zeal, 2 Sam. 6:14-16, then he sat before the Lord in humbled amazement, 2 Sam. 7:18. Essentially, worship is a spiritual matter. Worship, instead of being an event that happens externally, always begins internally, within the spirit of a human, and empowers the worshipper to embrace God’s creation as a steward called out to protect God’s creation. This in turn calls for overcoming the human made barriers.

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The Greek term for “disciple” in the New Testament, *mathetes* means more than just “student” or a “learner.” A disciple is a “follower,” someone who adheres completely to the teachings of another and makes them the rule of his/her life and conduct. Because of the new teachings of Jesus Christ concerning the kingdom of God and the miracles he performed, always a large crowd followed him. However, Jesus was not carried away by the numbers, unlike today’s so-called leaders, but was concerned about the genuinity of the followers. He did not want them to merely follow him, but become true disciples. In John 6:26-27 Jesus surprised the followers by telling them on their face: “very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw sign, but because you ate your fill of the loaves”. Further, he admonished them that they should not seek for the things that perish but for that which endures for eternal life.

Actually, the term *Christian* was never used by Jesus. The first instance of the word *Christian* is found in the book of Acts: “The disciples were first called Christians in Antioch” (Acts 11:26). Most Bible scholars agree that it was highly unlikely that the believers themselves thought up the name “Christians.” The early church had other terms for themselves, such as “disciples” (Acts 13:52; 20:1; 21:4) and “saints” (Romans 1:7; 1 Cor. 16:1; Eph.1:1) and “brothers” (1 Cor. 1:9; 1Pet. 3:8). The name “Christian,” meaning “belonging to Christ,” appears to have been invented by those outside of the church. It was most likely meant as a derogatory term. Only two other times does the word appear in the New Testament is in Acts 26:28 and 1 Pet. 4:16. The idea that the term *Christian* was originally a pejorative finds some support in the first epistle of Peter: “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name” (1 Peter 4:16). Biblically speaking, a Christian is someone who has placed his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 1:12), and is daily being transformed into the likeness of Christ (2 Cor. 3:18).

In other words, a Christian is essentially a disciple, who lives worthy of his/her calling. The basic premise for Christian discipleship is based on Titus 2:14 where it says, “He gave himself for us that he might redeem us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds.” So, the discipleship calls for the recognition of Christ’s atoning sacrifice, his death and resurrection; obedience to the word of God and the commitment to follow Christ’s ways in serving the household of God.

**Discipleship is about becoming:** Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, “It is only because he became like us that we can become like him.” Incarnation was necessary for the salvation of the whole world. God becoming human and word becoming flesh was a sacrificial event that has no parallels. Through incarnation, Christ has set a model for becoming what we are not, for the sake of others. Firstly, the discipleship demands that the true followers of Christ grow into the likeness of Christ in terms of love, compassion, forgiveness and holiness. Secondly, the disciples become what they are not, for the sake of the transformation of the lives of people around. Apostle Paul too says, “I have become all things to all people that I might by all means save some. I do it for the sake of the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings” (1 Cor. 9: 22, 23). In his ‘becoming’ what he was not, he could establish churches which still testify to the grace of God.

**Discipleship is about the discipline:** Discipleship is measured by Obedience and not by the subjective knowledge of the Master. Psm 34:13-14 verses are crucial for the understanding of disciplined life of a disciple. “Keep your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace and pursue it” indicate that the disciple needs to live a distinct life;

Kristu Jignasa
a life that is separate from the carnal response to what the world offers. Peter also writes in his first epistle chapter 3 verses 10-13 that those who desire life and desire to see good days must keep their tongues from evil and their lips from speaking deceit. They must seek peace and pursue it. This is a call for a disciplined or principled life based on the teachings of Jesus Christ our Master. Disciple needs to exhibit the values that he/she professes.

Discipleship is costly: Discipleship is following the path of the cross. Jesus said, “if anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me” (Matt. 16:24) and “any of you who does not give up everything you have cannot be my disciple” (Lk. 14:33). ‘Denying one’s self’ ‘giving up’ everything that hinders true Christian living are the two important criteria for becoming a disciple. In other words, discipleship demands sacrifice and undivided attention on the vocation for which one is called. Daniel’s episode (Daniel 6:10-23) explains the cost of discipleship more succinctly. King Darius had made Daniel one of the three Presidents of his kingdom and Daniel became distinguished above all the other presidents because of an excellent spirit within him. He was faultless and faithful to his responsibilities because of which Darius loved him and planned to set him over the whole kingdom. It is interesting to note that even when the conspiracy of the co-presidents succeeded, the king tried to rescue Daniel, against his own injunction, than to punish him. Daniel found favor with God and also with the human authority because of his disciplined life based on the Torah and commitment to God. And because of Daniel’s unwavering faith even in the midst of death, the king realized that the God whom Daniel believed was a living God.

Truly, discipleship is risky and hence costly. It indeed calls to bear the cross every day. This means, daily death to selfish desires and suffering for the sake of justice and righteousness. Ultimately, it is imbibing the values of our master in obeying the Father and serving the least and the lost by offering ourselves and sharing our resources. Our deeds will follow us; and our deeds will indicate our allegiance.

Rev. K. James Cecil Victor
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Michael Jackson who conquered young minds with his music for about four decades was popularly known as ‘Emperor of pop music.’ He had assets worth several millions of dollars; but at the time of his death he was in dangerous debt. In his childhood his father used to tell him, “You are ugly,” “You are ugly;” he looked at his own ‘black’ identity as something inferior to the white-skinned people. He developed guilt feeling and low self-esteem. He was ashamed of his black colour and rough and fibrous husk like hair. With the help of plastic surgery he changed his colour, increased the length of his nose and hair. His music attained immortality, but he failed in disciplining his personal life and died of acute propofol (sedation) and benzodiazepine (psychoactive drug) on June 25, 2009 with a negative attitude to his racial identity.

The theme given for today’s meditation is: ‘Stewardship: Transparency and Accountability.’

Stewardship is the systematic and proportionate giving of time, abilities and material possessions based on the conviction that these are entrusted by God to be used in His service for the benefit of mankind. A steward is a person entrusted with the management of the affairs of another person. God is the owner of all (Rom 11:36). Humans are the stewards who receive from God the owner. Paul writes “What do you have that God hasn’t given you?” (1Cor 4:7). Let us reflect on the theme based on the passages read for us.

1. Stewardship in using Wisdom and Understanding {Exodus 36: 2-7}

The Old Testament reading emphasises the call of God to Bezaleel and Aholiab and others who were bestowed with wisdom and knowledge and were inclined to the service of the tabernacle. When Moses brought this call, ‘everyone’s heart was stirred to come and do the work (v.2).’ Using of wisdom and understanding for God’s sake was a joy for them. That joy was shared with other craftsmen and the children of Israel who brought free will offerings. The end result was within a short period of time whatever the people contributed was sufficient and more for the task ahead; they had to be restrained by the proclamation of Moses.

Although king Solomon prayed for wisdom ‘to govern the people well and know the difference between what is right and what is wrong’ (1kgs 3:9), and the Lord was well pleased in providing wisdom abundantly, he failed in showing stewardship in using wisdom by marrying many women from alien cultures. They turned his heart away from God for whom he built temples to use for burning incense and sacrificing to their gods which eventually led to his downfall (1kgs 11:1-13). On the other hand, Saul who later became Paul showed excellent stewardship to the wisdom and scholarship he possessed and once that was used for the sake of Christ he became the ‘apostle of the gentiles’ and the author of brilliant epistles for the edification of believers.

2. Stewardship in thank offering {Ps 116:12-19}

King David feared the Lord, and the Lord had graciously delivered him out of his distresses, and in consideration thereof, he enquires what returns he shall make. He speaks as one sensible of many mercies received from God – ‘all His benefits’. He resolves what returns he will make. He will in the most devout and solemn manner offer up his praises and prayers to God. Vs. 13,17: “I will take the cup of salvation…I will offer to thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, the thank offerings which God required (Lev 7:11,12). Those whose hearts are truly thankful will express their gratitude in thank offerings. We must first give our own selves to God as living sacrifices (Rom 12:1; 2Cor 8:5).
grateful heart will accept God’s salvation. By fervent prayer the grateful heart will keep in communion with God, and he will openly acknowledge God (‘I will pay my vows’ v.14).

3. Stewardship in caring {Phil. 4:10-20}

In the epistle reading St Paul thanks the Philippian Church for the gifts brought by Epaphroditus, v.10. His expressions are so courteous and so dignified, like the epistle to Philemon, like all his writings, the perfect gentleman in the best sense of the word. He himself explains, it is not want that prompted his words. Paul is talking of his present condition: he is content with it, though it involves all the hardships of captivity. He had experience both of sorrow and of joy, both of distress and of comfort; he knew how to bear himself in both, because his prime joy was ‘in the Lord.’ Self-reliant and jealously independent as he was, his happiness was greatly increased by the thoughtful generosity of his convert believers. Not because it was in answer to prayer for timely help, but because it typified the true grace of God in his converts. Their liberality was evidence of their personal interest in him and of their Christian stewardship.


The ‘mina’ of the parable stands for God-given opportunity - for the constitutional capacity with which we are endowed; for the favouring circumstances and facilities by which we are surrounded; for the Christian privileges with which we are blessed. The smallness of our endowment affords no escape from responsibility; no plea could be found in the littleness of the sum. No one is entitled to say that his/ her human spirit is worth nothing to God; only God knows how valuable one human spirit, one earthly life, is. He will determine the measure of our award by the degree of our fidelity (vs.17,19). The more faithful and devoted the life on earth, the larger the recompense, the brighter the crown, the broader the sphere, in the heavenly kingdom. The simple lesson is that those to whom God gives a smaller share of reward and of grace are not to complain because there are those to whom he grants a larger one. He will not forget our work and labour of love. The challenging question is with what degree of transparency and accountability that we manage the trust that He has bestowed upon us.

The Nov 2009 edition of Readers Digest published the story of Daniela Garcia who became world’s first quadrilateral amputee physician. As a young medical student of 22 years old in the Catholic University of Chile (Oct 2002) Daniela met with a devastating train accident in which her both legs and hands were amputated. While she was undergoing training in the rehabilitation centre, Dr Alberto Esquenazi, the Head of the unit made a challenging statement to her, “Your life will be what you do with it.” She held on to that words, went back to the medical school with artificial limbs after a long period of rehabilitation training and whole hearted support from her parents and friends. In 2006 and 2007 she was selected as one of the women of the year in Chile. With utmost stewardship Daniela made use of her remnant resources and she became a blessing for the society.

Let us seek God’s guidance to make use of every bit of resource with which God has moulded us so that we become a blessing for many.

Rev. Dr. Malhia Joshua
Union Christian College, Aluva
Theological Education: Knowing and Doing Faith
(Theological Education Sunday)

Exodus 3:1-12 Psalm 111
2 Timothy 2:1-13 John. 12:20-26

Collect: Almighty God, in Jesus you have called common people to be your servants to love life eternal and overcome zeal for worldly life; as a wheat grain falls into the earth and dies and bears much fruit. Grant us wisdom and knowledge to read, meditate and interpret your holy Word. Continue to grant your guidance and inspiration that many young people may be trained theologically; fill with your Spirit that both students and theological teachers may exercise their faith to establish justice, righteousness and peace through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in unity with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

The Bible is witness to two important aspects of faith, the mystery of faith and the continuity of faith. It is mysterious, because faith is the knowledge of God, but the mystery of continuity lies in the fact that the knowledge of God is passed on from people to people and from generation to generation. Faith is mysterious, because it is continually experienced in our contexts. In our texts, faith is passed on to Moses, to Paul, to Timothy, to Philip, to Andrew among many others, who in turn passed it to others. So, what we term as Theological education is not a new phenomenon or an exclusive one. We are and will continue to be part of this faith experience, which finds its foundations in the Bible.

Theology and Education are not contradictory, but complimentary. Education is one of the primary tasks of theology. Because education is a process of ‘equipping to respond,’ and theology should essentially evoke a response and theological education is a holistic and transformative process of ‘equipping to respond.’ Therefore the people of God are all involved in the task of theologizing, although a few may spend their whole lifetime to study, learn, minister and teach Theology. The essential question of any education and prominently theological education is the one asked by Moses as a response to God’s call to him, Who am I? (Exod 3:11). This question is a question of identity. Moses has met God, and he is challenged by God, now to meet Pharaoh, an Egyptian, a ruler, symbol of power and who is equated with God. But Moses is also challenged to meet peoples of God like the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites (Exod 3:8). In 2 Tim 2:1, the young Timothy is addressed as a child, and encouraged to ‘be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.’

In John 12:20-26, the Greeks came and told Philip, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” But Philip is not sure, and meets Andrew and they together meet Jesus. In all three examples, the essential question seems to come back, Who am I? The primary task of theological education is helping every person to find an answer to this question and in the process help a person meet God, but also meet people. It is the rediscovery and affirmation of identities. Faith is not only about meeting God, it is also meeting the peoples of God to communicate the purpose of God, which is salvation and transformation. In the words of Exodus, we need to ‘hear the cry of the people and know their sufferings.’ The crisis of our times is a ‘theological crisis,’ and not a material one. It is a crisis of the knowledge of God and our inability to be part of the intervention of God in this world. It is the inability to think, to converse and respond. In the words of G.K. Chesterton, ‘The problem of Christianity is not that it has been tried and found wanting, but that it has been found difficult and left untried.’ The call is clear, ‘Whoever serves me must follow me’ (John 12:26). The task of theological education in the three metaphors in 2 Timothy 2:1-13, to prepare a Soldier, an Athlete and a Farmer, all indicating that commitment to the task is the defining element in our lives. The task is not easy, but full of challenges. The words of the late Archbishop of Brazil, Dom Helder Pessoa Camara can be a constant reminder for us, ‘Wen I feed the poor, they call me a Saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a Communist.’

Kristu Jignasa
Rev. Dr. Dexter S. Maben, Presbyter of CSI KCD,
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Generally all people are considered as people of God. All those who believe in God’s creation of humanity claim that they are God’s people. However different religious texts view it differently. In the Old Testament Israel is referred to as people of God. In New Testament, especially Jesus’ teachings explicitly convey that those who obey and do God’s will are called “people of God”. Contrary to the Old Testament understanding, New Testament understanding of ‘people of God’ is not based on caste, colour, race or sex. It is based on their specific life style that emphasizes specific qualities and values.

1. Nature of People of God: Salt and Light

The context of Matthew 5:13-16 part of the Jesus Sermon on the Mount. After describing the beatitudes, Jesus defined the nature, function and responsibility of discipleship. The audience was mostly poor, uneducated and unimportant people in the society. Yet Jesus said “you are the salt and light of the world”. By comparing people of God with salt and light, Jesus expects the abilities, qualities and functions of salt and light in lives of his disciples. Light’s nature is to shine and to be radiant. Light and darkness cannot go together. God’s people by nature should have the ability to brighten the place and persons around him or her.

2. Function of People of God: a) Secret and public

Salt functions mysteriously, like the leaven. The nature of salt is its “saltiness” it is the saltiness that give taste to food and prevents from decay. If the “saltiness” is lost we will not call it salt. So the nature of salt is “saltiness” and likewise the nature of people of god is “godliness”. When one loses her/his godly nature he/she is not called as God’s people.

When we live with qualities of salt- that work secretly, silently and mysteriously automatically those who come in contact with us will be changed. But they will not be transformed/ changed into salt. In church’s mission sometimes church will have to lose it identity and transform to another identity. That shows the effectiveness of the salt. The formation of CSI is the best example of being the salt.

The life of the People itself is a mission. The qualitative and high value based lifestyle secretly influence and transform peoples’ life. Just as the salt’s function can be tasted and experienced; the values of the people of God must be experience by others. This is no secret. Like the light it will be seen by all people. This happens automatically. You cannot hide the radiant rays of the light. Your life style becomes your witness, which is seen by all. Like the city set on a hill your secret service will be understood by all. People of God are both visible and radiant. Like the city on a hill and light on a stand that cannot be hidden.

b) Active and transforming

Light and salt is ever active. Likewise those believe in God cannot stay alone, and cannot be passive to the happenings of the world around us. As the salt of the earth and the light of the world we the people of God should be always actively responding to the given situations secretly and openly. When the people of God are actively involved the transformation happens.

1. Responsibility of People of God: Preserve and share

Preserving and sharing is an important responsibility of people of God. You need to preserve your saltiness and light that you have received. There may be factors that hinder the rays of your light and

Kristu Jignasa
the saltiness of your life. It is very important not only to receive saltiness and light but it should be preserved. People of God should be careful and watchful of the forces that stop or put off your light

If we are not making every efforts to preserve and share the enlightenment received, then we allow others to put off the light and to take away the saltiness. If churches are not keeping the required standard of living a true Christian life then she cannot be a transforming agent. Christianity will become just like any other ceremonial religion that lost it saltiness.

By hiding it under the bushel the light’s radiance is limited and it will die out soon. The new teaching you have received, the blessings you reserve, the enlightenment you have is to be shared and it should be useful for others. Your life should not rust away but should be like burning candle that gives radiance to others.

Dr. Susan Thomas  
CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese
The sacrament of Ordination is very sacred. The Church is built on two important pillars: 1. Faith and 2. Order. The Bible prescribes three important orders in the ministry: 1. Episcopate 2. Diaconate and 3. Presbyterate and hence the word Ordination signifies this ‘ORDER’. The ministry of Ordination should not be perceived that a Person is Ordained to be a POOJARI just to perform the duties within the four walls of his or her Church like that of Baptism, Solemnization of Marriage, Conducting funeral and burial services etc. All these activities alone cannot be confined to the ministry of ordination. Being an Ordained Servant of God is not a Privilege but a Calling, is not to wear the Crown but to Bear the Cross and is not to be Masters but to be SERVANTS.

ORDAINED TO SUFFER

The ordination calls and challenges the ordained to suffer. The role-model of our Good Shepherd Jesus Christ emphatically reminds us of this suffering. The breaking of the Bread reminds us that the Body of Jesus was broken for the people denied of life. To ensure Life in all its fullness to people who were denied the possibility of Life, God the Father sent His only begotten Son. The Ordained must often be reminded of these marked wounds of Christ in Mission and Ministry. In the epistle text from the book of Timothy, Apostle Paul very strongly advises Timothy to share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. This statement comes from Paul as Timothy was assigned to lead the Church at Ephesus. Suffering is part and parcel of ordained ministry. A Soldier has to stand up for his nation at the front with an “Do or Die” attitude. He or she accepts the wounds for the sake of his or her nation. This attitude of courage is very much needed for the ordained. The ordained has to speak out the truth as Christ did. The ordained has to be at the front to say right as right and wrong as wrong. The ordained might not be rewarded for this but will be subjugated, deprived, desolated, humiliated, alienated, and also terminated. All of us must strongly believe that it is God who called and ordained and He will never let down His servants. That is why in Luke 9:23 Jesus says “if anyone would come after me, let him or her deny himself or herself and take up the cross DAILY and follow me”. Jesus accepted vicarious suffering. The ministry of ordination calls us to have the experience of this vicarious suffering thus carrying the Cross daily. One needs courage and commitment to accept this challenge

ORDAINED TO SERVE:

In the Nazareth Manifesto of Jesus we see Jesus’ design of his ministry. This reveals to the ordained that both proclamation and Action must be the focus of their Ministry. The service must be extended beyond the campus of the church and reach the people of other faith. Jesus Christ said I have come to serve and not to be served. The ordained must inculcate the value that he or she is a servant. The second model that we come across in the II Timothy is athlete. An athlete is not crowned unless he or she competes according to the rules. An ordained will not be recognized unless their service is within the discipline and rules of the Church. People see the ordained with sacredness. One has to imbibe the values of Christ. If this is not found in the ordained they will be seen mockingly and not with reverence. The rules or the discipline of a person who is a overseer of a church are must be above reproach, husband of one wife, wife of one husband, sober minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunkard, not violent, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, must manage his or her own household well, with all dignity, not double tongued, etc (I Tim 3:2-4). These are some of the prescribed disciplines for an ordained as he or she is serving. Serve to be crowned as St.Paul says. As a an athlete is well disciplined, self-controlled, focused single mindedly, without any
distraction; an ordained must also inculcate these values of an athlete to win. The ordained is called to serve to the people living in all strata of society. It is the bounded duty of the ordained to address to the aspirations and living conditions of the people. Let ordained not build walls which divides but break the existing walls of division to reach the victims and marginalized in our own context. Let the ordained be “Messiahs” in their own situations.

ORDAINED TO SHEPHERD;

The gospel lesson from the John 21: 15-19 is a beautiful dialogue between the risen Lord Jesus Christ and Peter. Peter was chosen as his first disciple along with James, John and Andrew at the lake of Genassaret. After the crucifixion of Christ he backslide and again went back to fishing. The Risen Lord meets him in the same place from where he was called to be his disciple and asks him three questions. Peter was asked “do you love me more than these?” “Do you love me?” and again “do you love me?” First time Jesus asked peter whether he loved Jesus unconditionally (Agape) but Peter responds saying with vulnerability and fragility that he could show only friendly love (Phileo) again the same question and the same answer is repeated. The third time Jesus stoops to Peter’s level and asks Peter whether Peter at least to show him friendly love understanding peter’s own human limitations and Peter wept and said “Yes.” Jesus response in three different stages: 1. “Feed my Lambs” 2. “Tend my Sheep” and 3. “Feed my sheep” and after saying all these He calls “Follow me”. The ordained are called to shepherd the flock the people of God. Being a shepherd demands lot of risk and hard work. It is not a easy road to walk. This role of being a shepherd must be full LOVE. Unless the shepherd loves the sheep, the sheep will not follow. Shepherd must know the sheep by name, must lead, feed, protect at the risk of his own life, heal their wounds, care, etc. An ordained must inculcate all these values of being a shepherd to the members given to his care. Let all the ordained follow the Role model of Jesus the Good Shepherd. Amen.

Rev. Paul Francis Ravichandran
CSI Madras Diocese
**Mission: Sharing God’s Pain**  
(Mission Sunday)

E: Hosea 11:1-12 2 Cor. 11:16-31

**Introduction:** In present scenario we are in a world that divides and stigmatize people based on class, caste, creed and gender. The need of the hour is to build the community of Hope, Peace, Love and Qualities of Humanity. For this we need to establish the [preview of] Kingdom of God. The mission entrusted to us is to proclaim the word of God through our life. To complete the mission we have to have transformed lives that radiates the will of God.

**In Isaiah 6:1-8 we see the pattern of Mission:**

The mission starts with worship. This passage looks like the order of worship. Firstly, the Adoration, secondly confession and absolution, thirdly message of God. Finally it concludes with “Go and tell”, which emphasizes on sharing the word of God. Therefore, our life is to worship and share what God tells us all through our life. Before we share the word of God or proclaim God’s word we must prepare. Isaiah, the prophet, was sent during the time of King Uzziah’s death. It represents precise time and period how Isaiah was called out to proclaim the judgement of God.

Though Isaiah was not worthy, he himself confesses before God his unworthiness and uncleanliness. It is nothing but complete surrender into the hands of God. Sharing the word of God among the rebellious people is not an easy task. The mission given to the prophet Isaiah was a very difficult and daunting task. Isaiah himself responds to God saying - “send me”. Similarly, we are also supposed to go and share God’s message in any circumstances.

**In Acts9:10-18 we have a model of a Missionary:**

“The man who made the followers of Jesus Christ suffer now himself became a sufferer for the sake of Christ.” In other words, the persecutor became the proclaimer. At one stage, Saul was arresting those who call the name of Christ now he himself surrendered to Christ. The transformation took within Saul as he turned towards Christ.

Christ suffered for the innocents, marginalized, poor and the sinners. Now, Saul had a vision which transformed him to share the sufferings of Christ in his life. So, he was chosen as an instrument to share the pain of Christ as an apostle. To share Christ’s pain one must have the proper insight. In the encounter with Christ, Saul had the insight which is filled by the vision of Christ. Through the Christ’s insights he was enlightened to proclaim or share Christ’s pain by surrendering himself to suffer as Christ.

Therefore, an apostle must be filled by the Holy Spirit only then he/she can bear any kind of pain as Christ. This is what happens for an apostle who stands for Christ. Hence, he can proclaim and share the Word of God so that he’s able to build as many churches as he can.

**In Luke9:1-10 we see the context of Mission:**

Jesus sent 72 others like lambs among the wolves. Now, the ministry of Jesus is extended by appointing these men. They were sent with responsibility. They were supposed to travel, carry fewer luggage and to rely on limited resources wherever they go.

They needed to heal and proclaim that the kingdom of God is near. Ultimately, the purpose is that the kingdom of God should reach the people. As the Gospel of Matthew precisely says the kingdom of God is the establishment of God’s rule in the hearts and lives of his people, the overcoming of all the

Kristu Jignasa
forces of evil, the removal of all consequences of sin from the world, including death and all that diminishes life and the creation of a new order of righteousness and peace.

Later, Luke mentions in 17:21 that kingdom of God is within us. Luke’s message to the readers and Jesus’ ministry extension is to share the burden of Christ. It is to feed the hunger of the hungry; thirst of the thirsty; loneliness of the lonely; shame of the outcastes; vulnerability of the vulnerable; poverty of the poor; pain of the sick, the suffering and the dying. Therefore, gospel of Luke warns to be careful with false teachings, people like Pharisees, wolves and to recognize properly what is good.

**Conclusion:** Elizabeth George says “When God gives you a mission; He also gives you everything you need to fulfill that mission.” By trusting and handing over our lives into God’s hands let’s Share the pain of Christ and build the Kingdom of God by leading an exemplary life.

Rev. Ronald Mathew  
Karnataka Central Diocese
A Christian marriage between a man and a woman is a sacred covenant that they make before the Lord (Malachi 2:14ff) and before the community of believers they belong to. They are bound by the vows that they make in loving union. The Bible compares this to the covenant that God made with His people and the relationship that Christ as the ‘husband’ of the Church, the ‘bride’ (Ephesians 5:22ff). Therefore, such a covenant is for a life-time. Anybody treating it lightly will invite the retribution of the Lord. A covenant is valid when it is honoured before the Lord, cherished in private, and celebrated before public.

Marriage as a covenant deals with people, not things. Contracts are made for a limited period of time; covenants are forever. Contracts can be broken resulting in material losses; covenants broken will leave a train of broken hearts. Contracts belong to the market place; covenants are made in sacred spaces and celebrated till the end of life. Contracts are protected by the state; covenants are watched by God. Therefore, marriage is to be taken seriously.

Someone said, “A wedding is an event, marriage is an achievement.” A wedding planner can fix a spectacular wedding but it takes commitment, dedication and hard work on the part of the couple to make a marriage work. Let us look at three requirements that honour the covenant of marriage. Read Mark 10:2-9

1. **Primacy of Marriage – God gave it a special place in human relationships**
   a. The Bible begins with a marriage. God Himself solemnizes the wedding of Adam and Eve in the beautiful Garden of Eden. Gen. 2:22. The Bible also ends with a celestial wedding between Jesus Christ the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride of Christ Rev. 21:2. In between, Jesus and his disciples attend a wedding celebration and he even performs a miracle John 2:7, 8. Marriage therefore is very close to the heart of God and He considers it very important.
   b. The author of Hebrews emphasizes this aspect when he writes: “Marriage is honourable among all . . .” Heb. 13:4. There is a strong, natural relationship between parents and children, between siblings and between friends. But God has given marital relationship a very special place. God declared that “a man will leave his father and mother . . .” Mark 10:7, 8. When a husband and wife, ‘leave’ their families they honour the true spirit of marriage.

2. **Privacy of Marriage – God gave it special privileges**
   a. A husband and wife must learn to ‘cleave’ to each other. They must exercise the joy of exploring each other, and knowing, understanding and celebrating each other. Devote time and energy to communicate love. Do things together. Share dreams and aspirations with each other. Support one another.
   b. A married couple are an independent unit. This is a private and a sacred space and no one must interfere or try to manipulate them. They must be provided freedom to make decisions. Financial freedom and freedom to spend time with each other being very important. In-laws must be discreet in their support. Provide godly wisdom when asked for.

3. **Pleasures of Marriage – God gave special feelings**
   a. After ‘leaving’ parents, comes ‘cleaving’ to each other. Then ‘they both become one flesh’. A strong relationship with God brings spiritual unity between a husband and wife; giving priority to each other brings emotional bonding and a physical union is a culmination of their love. Many couples start their relationships with Eros (sexual love), hope that Philia (emotional bonding)
would happen and neglect Agape (spiritual love) of keeping God first in their lives. Biblically, it should be the other way around.

b. Sex is not only for procreation but also for pleasure. Explore and heighten the sexual pleasures. Your body does not belong to you therefore learn to satisfy your partner. Do not allow “little foxes to spoil your vineyard”. Unforgiveness, harbouring grudge and resentment spoil the joys of your marriage. “Let not the Sun go down on your anger.”

Conclusion:

You are joined together under God’s perfect plan of a beautiful marriage. Honour your marriage by keeping the covenant you made with your spouse before God. Hold your spouse above all by realigning your priorities in your relationships. Take time to invest in your marriage to build a strong relationship. Enjoy the exotic pleasures within the sacred space of a holy marriage.

Dr. Samson Gandhi
MD, PTP Counselling Centre, Secunderabad
India is a Pluralistic society with rich culture and heritage. The multifarious culture, religion, language, customs, etc is a blessing for all of us. This diversity ought to be adored and appreciated by all. Instead of appreciating the differences, in each religion, language and culture, the human society had developed fanaticism and attitude of fundamentalism which had resulted in COMMUNALISM. Everyone started looking at their own religion, culture and language superior to others which had dissected and divided our society thus disturbing the peace and harmony of the created order. As we celebrate the 69th Independence day let us recommit, reorient and relook into ourselves and make a pledge that we all would be channels of peace and harmony in our own situations.

The text from the traditionally called the Sermon On the Mount, expresses the very nature as how the human society must behave at the time of humiliation by others. Eye for an Eye and Tooth for a Tooth is Old Testament spirituality and Old Testament teaching, but by the advent of Jesus there was a tremendous change in teaching on Peace and Harmony. His new Spirituality and new teaching emphatically rejected the eye for an eye and tooth for a tooth replacing ‘if anyone slaps on your right cheek, turn to him the other also, which is radical in nature. Love your neighbours and hate your enemies, persecute those who persecute you, curse those who curse you are the teachings that are contrary to Harmony. The teachings of Jesus were reversal to this, pointing to harmony and peace.

APPRECIATE THE UNIQUENESS;

Religious fundamentalism and Fanaticism are two evils which would completely destroy the harmony. Diversity is the gift of God. Every religion running into a mad race of supremacy leads to communal conflicts. We have to appreciate whatever is unique in other’s faith, the discipline, the ethos and other values. When Jesus healed the servant of a Centurion he said, ‘not even in Israel I have found such faith’ and in many instances Jesus says ‘your faith has made you well, your faith has saved you’. In dialogue with woman of Samaria He calls her’ daughter of Abraham’ and with Canaanite woman He says’ O woman great is your faith’. In all the dialogues Jesus concluded appreciating the faith of the person. This attitude of appreciating the differences can be inculcated in us through humility and without any prejudice.

ATTITUDE OF ONENESS;

It is very striking that our Nation and our CSI are going together as the Independence and the CSI formation took place in the same year 1947. The CSI Motto ‘that they all may be one’ calls for allness in oneness and oneness in allness. This is a clear a mandate for us to be united and to be one in all perspectives. Our Indian Constitution emphasizes on sovereign socialist secular democratic Republic and one of the value is Fraternity assuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation. So the Church and Nation points towards Oneness. This oneness is possible only if we are open minded to respect each other and their religion, language and culture in all dimensions. The hate propaganda, the militant evangelism, the exclusivist attitude and so on which are all opposites of harmony must be stopped. Jesus Christ loved everyone. In Mat. 5:46ff, Jesus says for if you love those who love you what reward do you have? If you only greet only your brothers and sisters what more are you doing than others? This is not oneness or unity. Jesus transcended all barriers and obstacles and proved himself that He has come for all the people in the world. He calls us to be perfect in everything as Father is perfect. Communal harmony is possible if we develop the attitude of oneness within us and beyond us.
ADMONISH EVILNESS: We are placed in a very precarious situation and context. Conflicts are on the rise. The conflicts are multi-dimensional. Religious fundamentalism is worst among them. Demolition of Babri masjid, Godhra train burning to Gujarat carnage, rise of Hindutva ideology creating conflicts in different ways and means etc are really a threat to the lives of the people. One has to admonish this evil that is prevalent and predominant in our context by educating the Culture of Resistance. The Church has to play a vital role in responding to this situation, by providing a department exclusively for Peace and Conflict Resolution. Peace centers and Dialogue centers can be opened to avoid communal conflicts. Reading materials, Documentary films can be provided as resources to Churches for the youth fellowship groups. Our young Church must be conscientized about communal conflicts, its origin and roots so that youth could tackle and be channels of harmony and peace and admonish evilness which disturbs the Communal Harmony. May God of Peace and Harmony enable and equip us to be instruments of life in all its fullness.

Rev. (Mrs.) Indira Paul
CSI Madras Diocese
Introduction

Nobody wants to die but everybody struggles to live. Dying in order to live is the uniqueness of Christian discipleship. Dying is the beginning of Christian discipleship whereas the world understands dying as the end of everything. Dying in order to be raised with Christ is a unique experience which Christian community commonly shares. Therefore Baptism is understood as experience of dying and rising up with Christ. Two important dimensions of Baptism are dying for self, to sin and Rising up with Christ.

Dying to sin: what is the meaning of died to sin? Here the epistle’s scripture portion speaks about dying to sin. When it comes to Christian discipleship baptism is considered as an act of death towards sin. Sin is simply disobeying to God’s commands and running out of relationship with God, self and community. When one believes in Christ and undergo through the baptism he/she will undergo through this death which separates a Christian from sin. As followers of Christ we have already died to sinful life.

This is not because of our own strength but because of Christ. Baptism unites us with Christ in his death and burial which he has borne for sinful humanity. By God’s grace in Christ we have this sharing privilege of His death as our death to sin and sinful nature.

Dying in order to bear much fruit

Jesus Christ’s example of ‘wheat grain’ is wonderful. Have we ever thought what happens when a grain falls down in the earth? Old form of the grain dies. With that process the fallen and dead grain comes out with newness and much fruit. Death of grain will bring new life. In same way death of Jesus Christ brought a new life to the humanity with the possibility of fruitfulness. As humans we expect fruitfulness in our gardens, in our work or services in which we engage ourselves. Jesus as a ‘wheat grain’ fell into earth and died and rose up again. His death and resurrection we share in the act of baptism. Baptism is not the end of sharing of this death and resurrection, but the beginning of fruit bearing character. This character will develop newness in us.

Dying and Raising up for newness

Death which we encounter in Baptism is a death of our wickedness. A dead person cannot engage himself in any kind of works either wicked or good. This death which we experience in baptism is death of our enslavement of sin. By baptism in Christ we have been redeemed from chains of wickedness. No need to question how to overcome wickedness as a follower of Christ. Baptism is the answer that enlightens us by revealing that we are dead to wickedness because of Christ. Christ did it for us and we are sharing his death and resurrection in Baptism.

Paul calls us as instruments of righteousness; we need to be an instrument for promoting right order where ever we live or work. Instead of running away from the relationships, we should return to God, self and community. This is a new possibility in Christ which we inherit through Baptism.
By this sharing we are raised up with Christ for walk in newness of life. We as followers of Christ should witness this newness to the community. Baptism should teach us to share our newness with community and with our neighbors. We should not limit the Baptism only to enter into the Christian community but to live as the sharing community of new character of bearing fruit for the betterment of the community. Then only we can live for God in Jesus Christ who is shared his self to us.

Rev. Baila Channakeshavalu
CSI Karnataka Southern Diocese
Sacrament of Holy Qurbana / Holy Sacrifice

2 King 4:42-44 Psalm 100
1 Cor. 11:23-30 John 6:15-59

“My flesh is real food; my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him” (John 6:55,56 REB)

The meal of five barley loaves and two fish ended with a pleasant surprise that twelve baskets of pieces left over even after five thousand men, women and children had eaten enough. People acknowledged Jesus as the Prophet who was to come into the world for the sign He performed there. They meant to proclaim Him king by force for He seemed to hold the power to provide enough to eat and drink. Jesus withdrew from the scene because His mission was not satisfying bodily appetite of eating and drinking but demonstrating the greatest value of a sacrificial life. The blessedness of the Church is that its members are called to participate in a sacramental relationship with Him who had laid down His life for the salvation of all. How do we understand this sacred fellowship with our Lord? What is the significance of the Sacrament of the Holy Qurbana or Sacrifice?

1. It is the Partaking of Spiritual Nourishment

We read in the first reading the miracle of multiplication of loaves by the Prophet Elisha. An insufficient contribution of bread for the servants of God has been multiplied sufficiently to meet their need. It indicates that God is the provider of the bread that nourishes the body of humans.

This miraculous event certainly foretells of the heavenly manna made available to the people of God through the sacred elements used in the Lord’s Supper. It is a divine grace given for the nourishment of our souls that are wearied by the stress and strain of life. The bread and wine which are produces of the land and meant to sustain bodily life are used as holy elements conveying the grace of God.

We read about a crowd that was looking for Jesus in the Gospel lesson. He said to them, “…it is not because you saw signs that you came looking for me, but because you ate the bread and your hunger is satisfied. You should work, not for this perishable food, but for the food that lasts, the food of eternal life” (John 6:26-27). To Seek God for material prosperity is not what is expected of the followers Christ.

Jesus said, ‘I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never be hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty’ (John 6:35). ‘Then he took bread, and after giving thanks he broke it, and gave it to them with the words: ‘This is my body…’ (Luke 22:19). Those who feed on Him regularly through His Word and Sacrament would get spiritually nourished and reflect the personality of Jesus in their personal lives.

At the Passover of Yahweh, People Israel had to eat the roasted flesh of the lamb or kid that was slaughtered between dusk and dawn (Exodus 12) so that they could be nourished before setting on the long journey into the wilderness. Christian journey of faith in the world requires spiritual nourishment which is provided by God Himself as we break the bread in communion with the Body of Christ, the Lamb of God.

2. It is the Renewal of Covenant Relationship

It is at the Lord’s Table that the believer gets to reaffirm his/her commitment to the Lord – ‘Sacramentum’ a solemn vow that was made, at the time of Baptism and Confirmation, to be loyal to

Kristu Jignasa
the Lord and His kingdom. The Church has given us the privilege of Professing our faith through the Apostles’ or Nicene Creed and participating in the Body and Blood of Christ, thereby reaffirming our loyalty and faithfulness to the Lord.

On every occasion of the Lord’s Supper we renew our covenant relationship with our Lord who by shedding of His Blood made that covenant with us, sinful and unworthy people. Jesus said, “For this is my blood, the blood of the covenant, shed for many for the forgiveness of sins” (Matthew 26:28). St. Paul repeats what our Lord had said, “This cup is the new covenant sealed by my blood. Whenever you drink it, do this in memory of me…” (1Corinthians11:25). Christian life is a life of covenant relationship. Strained relationships due to lack of faith, questions of life or being overwhelmed by pressures of the world ought to be rectified and renewed in the presence of God on a regular basis by participation in the Lord’s Supper.

Each time we meet at the Lord’s Table, He presides over the meal and says, “How I have longed to eat this Passover with you before my death” (Luke 22:15). It implies that He is gracious and willing to renew the covenant with us always.

3. It is the Appropriation of Messianic Sacrifice

The significance of sacrifice in the Old Testament was that man should not approach God empty-handed but with a pleasing gift/offering/sacrifice. So worship culminated in sacrifice. Sinners sought forgiveness of their sins by offering the required sacrifices. The worshipper celebrated the joy of having obtained peace with God by sharing the sacrificial meal – cooked body of the sacrificed victim with his family and friends.

Our Lord Jesus Christ “…by His one oblation of Himself once offered a full, perfect and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction, for the sins of the whole world…”(BCW). Because of what our Lord has done, the sinner’s pardon and restoration depend not on his/her sacrifice but the free grace of the merciful and loving God.

The sacraments are God given gifts of grace for us to share in the sacrificial life of our Lord. ‘Baptismo’ meaning ‘to dip’, ‘plunge in’, ‘to submerge’ or ‘to immerse’ defines the meaning of one’s commitment to a sacramental life. James and John the disciples of Jesus asked for the favour of being seated at the right and left in His glorious Kingdom. In reply Jesus asked them, “Can you drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?”(Mark 10:38b). Our Lord required their commitment to share the suffering of the Sacrificed Victim. That is indeed the ‘immersion’ of a believer into the very life and suffering of our Lord. The sacrament of the Holy Qurbana is to reaffirm our identity with the suffering Christ.

The sacrificial meal shared among the disciples of the Risen Christ is to rejoice over the victory of the Victim and to get energized to serve humanity with the same sacrificial love. In thanksgiving we pray, “…we offer and present unto thee ourselves, our souls and bodies, to be a holy and living sacrifice, which is our reasonable service” (BCW)

Rev D Justus Moni
CSI Medak Diocese
So the servants went out into the streets and gathered all the people they could find, the bad as well as the good, and the wedding hall was filled with guests. Mtt.22.10

Plurality expounds the beauty of God’s creation and the scope of God’s mission. We live in a world that filled with plurality in terms of culture, language, faith, ideology and ethnicity. As people of God who possess new humanity in Jesus, we have to encounter this pluralistic context daily and witness Christ through presence, words and deeds. Here we face a dilemma, the questions of particularity amidst plurality, the uniqueness of Christian faith with other faiths, common humanity with a new humanity in Jesus. Keeping this in mind we shall turn to today’s gospel text. This text speaks us three insights in relation with witnessing Christ in a pluralistic context.

1. God’s People: for God’s World

Eternal God in His mercy has elected us to be His household to extend His open invitation to the world to come in and enjoy the heavenly feast with Him. In OT and During Jesus’ time the servants are not merely considered as employees but the house hold of the master. Christians are not labor force for Christ rather his households. But these households are a responsible community to serve God’s world to enlarge His tent. St. John says: For God so loved the world, He gave His begotten Son”. God’s primary concern is His world not the church. The very purpose of the people of God is to serve the world, i.e. to bring the people of all walks of life to the heavenly joy. The people on the borderline or the periphery of the society, the streets, both bad and good i.e. a pluralistic community are the target group for His mission. We are God’s chosen households but God’s election is not for privilege but for service.

2. God’s Guests: Pluralistic Community with Common Humanity (wedding garments)

Both the invitee and the households are the guests of God. None of the guests were invited because of their merit, conduct or position but of the king’s grace. They are the people who accepted the gracious invitation of the King through his households. As we have seen, they were the people from all walks of life, different culture, ethnic groups, different language, different caste or faith etc. people from the periphery or margin, good or bad, a very pluralistic community. But they were made as a common humanity with the provision of wedding garment. The poor and the aliens may not own proper clothes for the banquet but the King in His mercy has made the provision, the wedding garment. By accepting the invitation of the King and wearing the gracious gift of the King, i.e. the wedding garment, one become part of the heavenly inclusive community, a community without walls or segregations. Those who extend the heavenly invitation as households and the invitees become one family or community in Jesus as His guests. This new community in Jesus is a resistant community who committed to resist the intruders who make separations or walls without having the wedding garments.


The common humanity that we have in Jesus is a prophetic community of witness that heralds God’s judgment. There is a possibility that at any time the intruders may come in without respecting the invitation of the King and His terms. The wedding garment, the personal encounter with Christ is not
a matter for them. Self-centered personal agendas, profit motives and ignoring the grace of God are their remarks. They will create tensions, segregations and walls of separatism in this new community. But the King will cast them out. As the households of the King it is the duty of the church to resist the intruders from the church and keep the common humanity in Jesus till He come again. The Church must be in His terms and agenda and announce the judgment of God to the intruders by words and deeds. It is the duty of the church to keep the new humanity in Jesus and expel the intruders who don’t have wedding garments and remain as a prophetic community who heralds God’s judgment both in and outside the church.

Our God is the God of all, He is gracious to all. In Him no separations. He made us all as Children of God – a Common new humanity in Jesus- an open community without walls- announcing God’s judgment on those who reject God and His values – who still want to maintain divisions among God’s people and in His world by implementing self-centered agendas.

Rev. Dr. P.T. George
Principal, KUTS
**Jesus the Guru**

Proverbs 4:1-19 Psalm 141  
E: 1 Samuel 3:1-10 Col. 1:24-29

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**Introduction:**

The term ‘*patristic*’ from the Latin word: ‘*pater*’ (father), designates to early church fathers. The age which is considered to be the period from the closing of the New Testament writings (c. 100) till the definitive Council of Chalcedon in (c. 451). *Patristics*, usually understood as the branch of theological study, which deals with the study of ‘*patres.*’ Later on, it was consolidated, alleviated and continued to be called as: ‘*Patristic Heritage*’ or ‘*Legacy*’ or ‘*Tradition.*’ They were assigned to preach, teach and enlighten the people. Similarly, ‘*Apologetics*’: the reasoned defense and justification of the Christian faith against its critics, and those defended faith were called *Apologetists*. This patristic panorama spread over the teachings of early church doctrines and dogmas.

In Greece during the third and fourth centuries before Christ, the Greek philosophers and thinkers like Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were concerned with how people could live a virtuous life that was in the harmony/accord with their city, their culture, and the natural world. Disciples of these great teachers did later form a number of schools of philosophy. Socrates used the method of ‘*dialectics*’ i.e., the dialogical form. Plato, a student of Socrates around 348 b. c. started a school called the “Academy,” which continued for more than 900 years. Aristotle, a student of Plato, began a school called the “Lyceum,” where he taught that the knowledge of a thing requires an understanding of what caused it. Aristotle’s teachings recorded by his students, cover many fields including: ethics, logic, natural sciences, politics, physics and poetry. So, third and fourth centuries are very much important as far as dictation of methods and early teachings were concerned. Letter to Ephesians highlights that ‘it was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers’ (*Ephe. 4: 11*) Few only substantiate preaching or teaching as Vocation (*Titus: 2:1*) explicates that ‘you must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine), but few call it a profession but many as ‘vacation.’ That’s why the servant of God warns the Jews who are in dispersion that ‘not many of you should presume to be teachers…we who teach will be judged more strictly’ (James: 3: 1). Even St. Paul declares that ‘we proclaim Him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ’ (Col.1: 28). This summation facilitates us to ponder on the given theme: Jesus - the (Ideal) Guru.

‘*Thus Says (teaches) the Lord God*’: *Prov: 4: 1- 19.*

Long before the Bible was ever written, its stories, teachings, lists of ancestors and poems were passed on to next generations by word of mouth in story telling gatherings. This is known as ‘the oral tradition.’ The OT revolves around one single word i.e., ‘thus says the Lord.’ This is clearly explicated in the Pentateuch, and even in the Prophetic Literary content. Thus, the intention of YHWH is to teach Israelites the right paths and ways. Psalmist states: ‘He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the people of Israel.’ In Exodus 33: 13 it reads: ‘…teach me your ways Lord so I may know you.’ OT lesson Proverbs clearly depicts that God is a teacher. Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings originally included in Hebrew Scriptures along with Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs and Book of Job. Few chunks of the book are similar to style and language to an Egyptian collection known as ‘Instruction of Amememope.’ Other wisdom sayings are similar to Mesopotamian wisdom literature. The motif of the book of Solomon is quite evident in 1: 2 onwards “to teach wisdom, self-control, to understand sayings with deep meanings and above all wisdom is respecting and obeying the Lord God. Here it reads: ‘Hold on to instruction, do not let it go; guard it well, for it is your life.’(V: 13) here, wisdom is portrayed as a feminine character. May be like our mothers, wisdom here teaches the ways of life.

Kristu Jignasa
Christ Jesus: The Commander over demons: St. Lk: 4: 31- 44

Vengal Chekkarai is one of the commendable Indian Christian theologians. In his works, he combines the Hindu mystical approach to god with the historic Incarnation (avatara) of Christ. He asserts again and again that avatara of Jesus is not trivial one for a temporary purpose. The Indefinite God, the Paramjyothi has really become humanized in Jesus who is the Original mind of God, which is in other way may be understood as Missio Dei. Therefore, He is purushothama. His advent is not an ordinary one, but has a specific vision and mission, as it is quite clear in the Nazareth Manifesto (St. Lk. 4: 18). Here in given text it reads V:35: ‘Jesus said sternly, come out of him’ and the demon came out. And they were amazed because his message had authority and power as in V:32 & 36. Word of God gives us the power to dictate and determine, when we have powerful prayerful life. That’s why disciples urged ‘Lord, teach us how to pray’ (St. Matt) ‘For word of God is living and active, sharper than any double edged-sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart’ (Heb: 4:12).

Resurgence happened as God intervened into human history. Similar rejuvenation can happen, when we intervene into human history as the agents of God to respond to the needs of the lost, last and least of the society. Jesus Christ, when He was in this world as a frail human being, he was an agent of restoration and revival. He gave life to the lifeless, hope to the hopeless, liberation to the oppressed and healing to the sick. He was bold enough to stand against the imperial powers, religious authorities and traditions at that time, in order to take the side of the oppressed, even at the disbursement of His own life at the end. Today, we have such similar task: to lead them to Light. Therefore we receive the fruits of Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5:22, 23). I would like to conclude with the last words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, one of the greatest teachers: “ We in silence still prepare, till Thou call to days more fair, till the storm and flood Thou still, working wonders through Thy will.”

Rev. Diamond Michael. R.
CSI Krishna-Godavari Diocese.
The theme ‘Partners in God’s Liberative Act’ calls to remind us that God is the initiator of the liberation of His people from all kinds of bondage. Bondage of slavery and bondage of sin are the biggest issue in the history of humankind. After the fall of humankind God himself makes a promise to redeem the world from the bondage of sin in the words He spoke to Eve: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” Gen. 3: 15. Even in that promise God makes women as partners in the work of salvation that He is going to bring through His son Jesus Christ.

The story of liberation of people from the bondage of slavery tells us that God planned it to be achieved through Moses. But the life of Moses was in danger as Pharaoh had ordered two Hebrew midwives to kill all male babies at the time of birth itself. The process of God’s liberative act is further continued here after the promise to Eve. Shiprah (Shif-ruh) and Puah (Pew-uh). It seems almost impossible to find any two commentators to agree on whether these two midwives who were summoned by Pharaoh were Hebrews or Egyptians. On one hand, why would Pharaoh ask Hebrew women to partake in the annihilation of their own Hebrew race? That doesn’t seem to fit. On the other hand, if these two women were Egyptians, why did they fear God? (Ex. 1: 17) and not carry out the orders of their own King? Meanwhile, both names Shiprah and Puah appear in the ancient scrolls, and in the list of the names of Hebrew slaves from the days of their captivity in Egypt. So, it is very clear that the two midwives are Hebrews and they feared God. They feared God and God used them as His partners to deliver the deliverer Moses. Shiprah and Puah knew God personally not just they knew God, they feared God. Fear of God led them to obey Him and show disobedience to the power (Pharaoh) that commanded to kill.

They ‘feared God’ seems the key word here. The Hebrew word for ‘feared’ is ‘yare’ which means ‘fear’ or ‘revere’. The word ‘yare’ is used to of a person standing in awe, not a simple fear but reverence whereby individual recognizes the power and position of the person revered and renders proper respect. In that sense the word may imply submission to a proper ethical relationship to God. That is to say that these two women were not afraid of God in a way that creates dread and terror but rather complete submission to an awe inspiring God who is capable of being in control of their situation. That is how they were able to be partners in God’s work of liberation. They chose to do what is right even when they knew what the consequence would be if Pharaoh came to know what they were doing. The deed of Shiprah and Puah may not appear as a great work but what God has planned would not have been accomplished without their partnership with God. Partnership with God means taking risk and saying ‘yes’ to God and ‘no’ to the earthly power.

Mark. 15: 37-41: The passage is about the women at the Cross. They are the powerful witnesses of God’s Liberative Act through His son Jesus Christ. These women followed Jesus till the cross. They are the eye witnesses who were the narrators of the happenings at the cross (suffering, death and resurrection and ascension of Jesus) to the early church and by doing so they became partners with God to spread the good news as eyewitnesses. Rom. 16: 1-16: There is a big list of women and men who were instruments in the ministry and mission of God.

Rev. Jessey Ranjan

Kristu Jignasa
Collect: Almighty God who transforms our weakness into strength, our despairs into hope. We thank you for your promise that our sorrow shall be turned into joy. Encourage us by your word to love the truth and peace; by your Spirit to become agents of Peace and reconciliation in this world of pain and suffering; anguish and hostility, through Him who is the prince of peace, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy spirit, one God, now and forever more. Amen

PEACE is not an outward depiction but an inward being. Some philosophers and religious leaders called it “inner” Peace. In the attempts to KNOW PEACE in every instance of NO PEACE, the meditation today has a topic from the words of Jesus Christ saying, “My Peace I Give to you”. The meditation also concludes to know that a right peace is obtained only from JESUS as an inner peace.

Today’s meditation is based on three thought provoking scripture lessons designed as follows: primarily, the Old Testament lesson proposes, Truth to render as an inner peace, Sathyagraha in Indian understanding. Secondly, the epistle lesson, a Hope to hold for an inner peace. And finally, the gospel lesson concludes Jesus as the only giver of peace.

1. Peace as speaking truth and rendering true judgment

The primary task of a human personality to acquire inner peace with God and Human is to speak the truth. The one who speaks the truth is always honored and could be a good leader to lead others to the truth. The prophesy that was given to Zechariah for Judah and Israel to bless them abundantly was with a demand to speak truth and render true and sound judgment in the courts of their community. This was to bring transparency in the community as a respect to each other. Speaking truth to each other is giving respect to each other. A leader or the community that does not speak the truth to each other do not help each other and respect each other. MK Gandhi could follow Jesus in speaking the truth and proposing the community to have this good habit. Finally with this habit he proposed Sathyagraha as a weapon and this also made him a leader to be the father of the nation.

2. Peace as holding hope in suffering for the truth

The second task of the human personality for inner peace is to live with hope worked out from the sufferings of truth. This is the reason Paul writes to Romans, that tribulations proceeds to patience and patience proceeds to test and test proceeds to Hope. And this hope shall not put us to shame and so we rejoice in tribulations. Without suffering truth one cannot tolerate tribulations to proceed for a patience and test and hope. This is a grace of God and one shall have an access to this faith to suffer by submitting oneself to truth. One can kill a person and suffer and one can say a truth and suffer. And those actions and life in tribulations bound with truth matters for an offering of hope within us to hold peace.

3. Peace is not in the world but in Jesus who won the world

The last word of the gospel reading Jesus says “I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.” The very words say that the world will never have peace but trouble. One in this world should be prepared for

Kristu Jignasa
this trouble to suffer in it with truth. Suffering is not to be submissive oppressed and depressed as a coward. To suffer tribulation is to resist and question and stand for the truth. Jesus stood for the truth to forgive us in this world and provide salvation. Therefore we need to joyfully suffer as Jesus suffered. The peace in Jesus was the greatest hope of resurrection and that peace we take it to suffer for the truth.

**Illustration:** one day Raju’s father left five 100 rupee notes on the computer desk and left the table for his son Raju and his friends to play games. After an hour, Raju’s dad remembered leaving his five hundred rupee notes on the desk and came to take them. To his surprise there was not even a single note left on the table. Dad asked Raju and Raju said he hasn’t seen them. Dad searched for the money all the places and could not find anywhere. So he brought a cane and started punishing Raju very ruthless before his friends. The friends were so badly offended to see Raju being punished in their presence. Slowly all of them took out the five notes of 100 rupees stolen by them and gave them to dad saying sorry and not to punish Raju for their sake. While dad was angry with the friends, Raju went to his dad and said dad forgive them after all they are all my friends. And it was good you punished me than punishing them in our house. Dad hugged Raju and felt sorry for his son and also could love the friends for loving Raju and accepting the truth. Now Raju could give peace to his friends with his dad as he suffered for the truth.

**Rev. K. Devanand Subuddy**
CSI Rayalaseema Diocese
Today we remember the formation of The Church of South India and its faith journey after Sixty Eight years of long ministerial witness in The Indian soil. The church of India came into existence as a result of a deep desire on the part of Indian Christians to come together. The Indian church leaders as well as the missionaries working in South India were convinced that division was the greatest hindrance to more effective evangelization of the country. By the providence of God, the four historical traditions namely Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian and Congregationalist, united into one body by offering their respective heritage unimpaired for the common good. Each member church brought its own distinctive contribution in to the spiritual treasury of the Church of South India. Grater peace, closer fellowship and Fuller life are the basic union characters of our Vibrant, and uniting Church of South India. As we celebrate the formation day of Church of South India we should remember the contribution of the leaders of the past and present.

Church is a worshiping community. Worship, the Christian Church affirms like the Hebrew peoples, as the highest form of service to God. Jesus participated in both temple and synagogue worship but taught that the true worship was the love of the heart towards God and which was also offered to God in terms of personal care for others. (LK : 10:25 ff). Through the worship we could feel the sense of God’s greatness and also offering ourselves as sacrifice. In this context the reflections on united worship is very ideal at the back ground of remembering the formation of Church of South India.

I. United in worship gives an inspiration for our action

Nehemiah was a bright man at the Persian court. His official position was a cup bearer. The sad news from Zion was that its rampart had been breached and its gates destroyed in flames. Nehemiah wanted to reconstruct the walls of Jerusalem. He was elevated as a governor of Judah and worked for the reconstruction of Jerusalem. He rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem and did many religious reformation. Torah was read by Ezra in front of people and people wept. (Neh : 8) The reading of the scripture gave inspiration and new direction in their life.

Preaching and worship are integrally related to each other in our church Ministry of C.S.I. When we read in the Book of Acts about the pattern of worship in the early church, we find that there is a total integration of preaching and worship. They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers (Acts : 2:42). When there is no proper relationship between life and liturgy, such liturgy fails to transform the life of the Christian Community. Hence the worship gives inspiration or direction into our life through the preaching and reading the scripture in the corporate worship. As worshiping community how much important do we give for preaching and reflection in order to lead a meaningful Christian life?

II. United in worship helps to face challenges in our day to day life

In Romans 8th chapter, Paul explains the work of the spirit in human life. The Christian life is essentially life in the spirit, a life which is animated, directed and enriched by the Holy spirit. Without the Holy Spirit true Christian discipleship would be impossible. In Rom 8:31-39 Paul emphasizes the steadfastness of God's love, as he works in all things for the good of those who love him and promises that nothing will ever be allowed to separate us from Christ’s love.
Christian worship should bring the anxieties of the people before God, rather it seems to be irrelevant for daily life of believers. The content of worship should be liberative, it should bring wholeness and fullness to people. In this context worship can help people to face challenges in our day today life. Being motivated by God’s love, worship is expected to bring an assurance of liberty, fullness, wholeness and right relationship.

III. United in worship gives us an inspiration for Missionary enterprise.

In Luke 9:1-6, the Gospel writer explains the event of Jesus sending out the Twelve. Jesus commands them to follow extreme simplicity, which goes beyond both the normal requirements of a journey and the dress of the cynic wandering preacher. Healing and preaching indicates that the kingdom of God is not simply a spiritual enterprise, but one that looked forward to the full renewal of human in both body and Soul. On the whole this passage strengthens us our Missionary motivations and involvement to communicate the Gospel to the world.

Worship is the central act of the life and mission, witness and service of the Church. It is the way in which women and men, rich and poor, able and otherwise abled, share in God’s grace and seek forgiveness. It is the liturgical, sacramental and public realization of the unique act of Jesus Christ for the life of the world. Hence the worship is a public act which aims at communicating the good news revealed to us in and through Jesus Church.

As we celebrate the formation day of the Church of the South India. Let us re-dedicate our self for the growth of our unity, worship and witness in our Indian context.

Rev. W. Stanley Jones
Kanyakumari Diocese
This best-known and best-loved Psalm 23 invites us into a world of deep trust and lean desire. It is shaped around only two explicit mentions of the name of Yahweh. In Ps. 23:1, Yahweh is mentioned as the premise of the psalm, the “bottom line” assurance on which everything is based; in v. 6, Yahweh is mentioned as the long-term goal, expectation, and aspiration of the speaker.

The opening word of the psalm is the name of Yahweh, with whom this speaker has a long and intimate acquaintance, is identified with a simple epithet, “shepherd.” The term “shepherd” means not only herder of sheep, but in the ancient world of Israel it also refers to the king who actively intervenes to protect and secure the poor and needy who lack resources to guard their own lives. Thus the term is at once pastoral (bespeaking caring attentiveness) and political (bespeaking power).

The second phrase of the psalm is “I shall not lack.” The conventional translation, “I shall not want,” misleadingly sounds like a future and suggests “wanting” as a desire. But the term is rather a present-tense assertion that Yahweh’s protective attentiveness assures that the speaker has everything needed in order to live a full and whole life. The shepherd-king has anticipated and supplied all needs.

Verses 2 and 3 play out the pastoral dimension of the shepherd metaphor. Though Yahweh is not named explicitly, the series of assurances make Yahweh the subject of four decisive verbs. It is the shepherd-God who causes safe rest (“lie down”), adequate water (“still waters”), restored vitality (“restores my soul”), and safe paths (“right paths”). The trusting sheep who speaks here has everything needed for an uninterrupted life of tranquility and safety, exactly the kind of life both sheep and shepherd intend. The shepherd is attentive to provide for every lack and to ward off every threat. All of this is done, moreover, “for his name’s sake,” that is, to maintain God’s identity and reputation.

Read according to the pastoral image, the shepherd escorts the sheep through valley pastures that are filled with shadows, rocks, and crevices where may lurk threatening scavengers (v. 4). But the shepherd is there attentive and resolute, in order to keep the sheep safe. The image, however, may as well be political. On that reading, “rod and staff” are emblems of political power. Whichever way the images are taken, we may notice that the double line of trust and confidence, “I fear no evil; for you are with me” is a restatement of God’s own assurance voiced elsewhere. It may be observed in a classic “salvation oracle” of Isaiah 43:5 that God announces to endangered Israel “Do not fear, for I am with you.”

“Comfort” as the outcome of God’s attentive solidarity does not mean simply solace or pastoral comfort, but active intervention that effectively transforms the situation. Thus the “God of all comfort” is one who keeps safe and heals life (cf. Isa. 40:1; 2 Cor. 1:3–7). The political dimension of the metaphor becomes more certain in Ps. 23:5. Now the image concerns the “enemy.” The “enemy” is no doubt an actual political adversary who threatens and diminishes life. But this powerful shepherd-king will not permit the “enemy” to threaten. The shepherd-king, by way of countering the threat, provides food, the oil of well-being and safety, and a cup abundantly filled with wine. The trusted shepherd-king simply refuses any diminishment of life and satisfies the beloved object with abundance, an abundance that is unexpected in an ominous wilderness situation.
But then, God’s overpowering generosity is often incongruous with our perceived situation, for God overrides our assumed circumstance. God does not act in vacuum. He acts in the lives of people and his creation. He uses priests, prophets and the ordinary young and the old, men and women for his liberative purposes. In I Samuel 25:14-28 we read the intervention of Abigail, wife of Nabal who was an ill-natured man. But for Abigail’s intervention, as we read in vs.34 “there would not have left to Nabal so much as one male.” Abigail prevented bloodshed and became a channel of peace and reconciliation.

Parable of the good Samaritan is another classical example of how one can be part of God’s mission without the prejudices or inhibitions. Samaritan was moved with compassion and extended his help voluntarily. Humans and creation in pain and suffering become our neighbor. The good shepherd calls us to follow his model of caring the needy. Laity have a great role to play in the mission and ministry of the Church. Being the stewards of resources, and steering the decisions aright and protecting the dignity of our faith and order are the major challenges today. While the Church affirms the ministry of the laity in varied forms, it is the responsibility of the lay to take up the challenge with conviction and commitment.

Adv. Robert C. Bruce
Hon. Treasurer, CSI Synod

Kristu Jignasa
1. Reaffirming the Image of God: Exodus 4: 10-17

Exodus 4:10-17 reaffirms that God is the creator of human beings. It was necessary for Moses to receive this reaffirmation. Moses had understood human image from human standards and limitations. Moses was reminded that God is the creator. In Genesis 1:26, states “Then God said, ‘And now we will make human beings; they will be like us and resemble us’”. So human beings resemble God in every aspect. Market industry today has standardized human image based on certain qualification and criteria. If anybody does not qualify to the market standards they are considered unfit and incomplete. The perfect human image described by the market industry does not include the complete image of God. Every human being has been rightfully proved with complete dignity in the image of God.

2. Regain the Image the God: Acts 3:1-10

The story of a lame person at beautiful gate is a familiar picture which we witness every Sunday after Church service. It is a similar sight at all the worship centers irrespective of any religion. The story also reminds Beggar’s Mafia in present day context how; differently abled are abused and treated as a commodity to make money. The passage Acts 3:1-10 describes the miraculous healing of a lame person. The story begins as following, Acts 3:2b, “Every day he was carried to the gate to beg for money…” When a person is differently abled people take the liberty to decide for him/her. The lame person near the temple was unwillingly brought to the gate for begging. The lame person was judged as disabled and was denied of his dignity as a complete person. Peter and John helped the lame person to regain his dignity by strengthening his legs. The lame expected a temporary favor but the apostles have granted a lasting favor, that is, the restoration of the dignity.

3. Re-living the Image of God: Matthew 17:14-21

Matthew 17:14-21 narrates the story of Jesus healing a boy from the Demon. The narrative concludes with exhortation on faith where Jesus used a mustard seed as a metaphor. In all the healing incidents Jesus centralizes the faith aspect. The mustard seed is a life giving seed. Life sprouts when the seed is buried in the soil and when the seed breaks. For life to sprout out it’s necessary for seed to break. If the seed is not planted in the soil it will remain “disabled.” The ability of seed comes out only when the seed is dependent on the soil. Mustard seed has become life supporting element. Amos Yong, a Theologian states, “…the ‘weaker’ members are accorded more honor by God and therefore are more central to the identity of the body of Christ”. The sign of resurrection is the dismantled body of Christ. It is a challenge for all of us to recognize the sign of resurrection among us, enabling the differently abled to live in dignity and make them life supporting dependents.


Psalm 103 beautifully begins with, “Bless the Lord O my Soul and all that is within me…” The verse teaches us to praise and thank God with our entire being. “…all that is within me” signifies our present status with all our infirmities. We need not be ashamed of our physical, mental, emotional, intellectual differences as “God knows what we are made of…” Ps 103: 14. We need not hide or be ashamed of ourselves but participate fully with the image which God has formed. May the Holy Spirit

Kristu Jignasa
guide and strengthen us to fulfill the mission that incorporates every human being and all God’s creation and brings in perfection.

Rev. Hemalatha John
CSI Karnataka Central Diocese
The youth of today are characterized by inquisition and enquiry. They are always curious to search and re-search for those things which concern their life like new gadgets, new movies, new role models or new applications, new bikes or cars and so on… which can make their lives more productive and dynamic. The desire to touch, hear, see, taste and experience is ever growing in this globalized world among the youth. In this context of fast-moving world and ever-changing ideologies, the search for deeper meaning in life is always a concern. But, are the young people who are oriented into the process of enquiry and inquisition concerned about a meaningful life is a question which needs to be pondered upon.

Looking at our young people in our churches, we see that they are entangled between the web of tradition and modernity, spirituality and secularism, and individuality and corporeality. They are always at the crossroads looking for guidance and direction in choosing avenues which can create a better life for them. In this kind of a scenario, looking at our Holy Scripture as a tool of guidance and inspiration is very important.

**Life of finding oneself in relation to Christ:**

The Gospel text John 1: 43-51, speaks about the call of Philip and Nathanael. Philip after being found by Jesus tells Nathanael that ‘we have found him of whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.’ The joy and excitement of Philip sharing the news of Christ to Nathanael conveys to us that they were already waiting for the messiah to come. Their search for the messiah culminated when Jesus calls them by name. Initially, though Nathanael was a bit skeptical about something good coming out of Nazareth, still comes to see Jesus, and is surprised about Jesus telling him that he saw him standing under a fig tree (v.48). He is amazed at the answer of Jesus, admits and believes in his messiahship.

The awaited search and being found by the messiah fulfilled a great purpose for Philip and Nathanael in their lives. They found in Jesus a new sense of direction and guidance for their life. A new journey is initiated with Jesus as they follow him. A life with no purpose is suddenly transformed into a life with meaning and purpose after the encounter with Jesus. In the context where there are role models emerging in every field, knowing Christ and conforming to abide in him can certainly add meaning and purpose to the lives of our young people today. Our attempt in longing for Jesus, results in revealing himself to us as he found Philip.

**Life of Faithfulness in midst of Enticement:**

The Old Testament passage from the Genesis 39: 1-23, gives us the narrative about Joseph and Potiphar’s wife. A brief look at the chronology of Joseph’s life will enable us to gain a better grasp of what takes place in this above mentioned passage. When Joseph was sold by his brothers he was 17 years old (37:2). When he was elevated to a position of power by Pharaoh, he was 30 years old (41:46). Thirteen years thus elapsed between his arrival in Egypt and his promotion to the second highest office in the land. Joseph’s rise to power was therefore not achieved quickly or easily. In this success story there were also pains, sorrows, disappointments and tears. Joseph dealt with this persistent pursuit in all faithfulness to God.

In this passage, we see that joseph explained to Potiphar’s wife that he had come to a position not only of power, but also of privilege and trust. To possess his master’s wife and satisfy his own personal desires was to violate the sacred trust which was committed to him. Furthermore, she was a...
married woman, and as such their relationship would be adulterous. For both of these reasons the act which Potiphar’s wife proposed was one that would be a great sin against God.

‘Real integrity is doing the right thing, knowing that nobody is going to know whether you did it or not’-Oprah Winfrey. Joseph here portrays a great depth of integrity and high character. He could have very easily given in to the enticement of Potiphar’s wife. Giving in to that kind of a lure could have brought him more riches and money in a very easy way, but he remains faithful to God by not indulging in that act. Many young people today are going after the mantra of ‘Success’ in pursuing this so called Success, they are enticed to do many things which can cause dishonor to God. But Joseph, in his young age stands as a true example of being faithful to God in midst of enticement. Mother Teresa once said that “God does not require that we be successful, only that we be faithful” therefore when we are faithful to our calling then surely success will follow us in our lives.

**Life of Endurance for the sake of the Gospel:**

Hebrews 12:1-11 speaks about the necessity of endurance, the source of endurance, and the outcome of that endurance. The author of Hebrews in this section urges his readers for a life of endurance. Jesus is not only an example of suffering and endurance but as we “fix our eyes” on him, we will find him also to be the “perfecter” of our faith. He brings maturity and fulfillment to us. Athletes competing in a race must keep their eyes fixed on the goal. The goal of faith is not triumph over others, but serving others and building the community.

Verse 7 says that it is for discipline that you have to endure. Allowing ourselves to be disciplined by God is the mark of his sonship /daughtership that we share. The process of God disciplining us might be a tough task for us to take. We might have to forego certain things we love the most; yet yielding ourselves to such kind of discipline is to bring the best out of us. As verse 11 says for the moment all discipline might be painful and not pleasant but only later bears the fruit of righteousness. Jesus endured the cross for the sake of promoting Justice and preaching peace. Today we are called to endure suffering and disciplining for the sake of the gospel because it adds purposive meaning to our lives.

Looking at the above mentioned passages we see that the search for a meaningful life begins with one’s quest for God and following his precepts. A life which faithfully follows Christ and patiently endures suffering for the sake of God’s justice and peace has more purpose and meaning to it.

Youth Director, CSI Synod.
Church: Reformed and Reforming
The protestant reformation was a broad movement in sixteenth century Europe. When the reformers sought to purify the church of unbiblical doctrine and practice, they often spoke of the need to “reform” the church according to God’s word. Although this was a reaction against the Roman Catholic Church, it was also an embrace of the Scriptures’ unique authority, a return to the doctrine and practice of the apostolic church, and an outgrowth of various reforming currents in the medieval church. While many of these changes took place at the hand of Martin Luther and his German colleagues based in Wittenberg, a much more geographically diverse collection of Protestant theologians, ministers and congregations came to agree upon doctrinal creeds, liturgical (worship) reforms, and characteristics of church polity which became known as “Reformed”. While the Reformed expression of Christianity has roots in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, it became an enduring form of Christianity through written creeds and the churches which embraced them.

The battle cry of the reformation was a return to the Scriptures and most notably to its teaching of justification by faith, priesthood of all believers, understanding of the sacraments and worship and observance of Sabbath on Sunday by Apostolic command due to the resurrection of Christ falling on that day (Acts 20:7; I Cor. 16:2; Rev. 1:10).

Zwingli's first thesis in 1523 reads: "All who say that the Gospel is nothing without the approbation of the Church err and slander God”. And the first thesis, that led to the Reformation of the city of Bern in 1528, proclaims: "The holy, Christian Church, whose only Head is Christ, is born of the Word of God, abides in the same, and does not listen to the voice of a stranger.” In this wonderful, typically Reformed thesis, we hear the confession that the church is a creature of the Word of God, born out of it and living from it. The Word of God stands above the church, and the expression "Word of God" is identical to "gospel" or "Holy Scripture." The gospel is not dependent upon the approbation of the church, but with an allusion to the Gospel of John, chapter 10, the church is characterized as the flock of sheep that listens to the voice of the Good Shepherd and does not listen to the voice of a stranger.

With this background of the nature of reformation and the concept of the Church, we need to further understand that the Church is not a static institution but a dynamic body of the people of God. The church continues to de-learn and re-learn from the continued revelations of God in order that all people would experience the fullness of life here and now. Reformation is an on-going process that affects both inward and outward life of the Church.

First lesson Dt. 26: 4-11 talks about a distinctive nature of the reformed and reforming church. Recalling the mysteries of God and his favour upon individuals and the community is a distinctive mark of the church. Being cleansed of ritual impurity or misconceptions alone doesn’t suffice but witnessing to God’s grace becomes crucial while thanksgiving is central to this act of remembering. While ‘Ghar Waapsi’ and ‘swach Bharth’ echo the religious intolerance of the majority in our country, witnessing becomes a great challenge. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for the church to undergo, withstand and triumph over the difficulties for the Church belongs to God. As we read in Mat.13: 35, “the church needs to proclaim what has been hidden from the foundation of the world”.

Epistle lesson Acts 2: 43-47 presents another unique nature that is the sense of an ideal human society. Here a society was founded, not on the law of self-interest and competition, but on sympathy and self-denial. They had all things in common, not by a compulsory abolition of the rights of...
property (see Acts 5:4), but by the spontaneous energy of love. The gift of the Spirit showed its power, not only in tongues and prophecy, but in the more excellent way of charity. Today while the world is after consumerism, life, including that of the flora and fauna is not spared from being abused. The whole world is groaning due to human exploitation. The environmentalists’ statistics are so alarming that life seems to be impossible after few decades. Church, while praying for God’s intervention, must also correct the wrongs and become a pro-life agent in the hands of God. ‘Borderless communities’ are possible only when people shed their divisions based on caste, class and gender. Christ invites all into his kingdom that is beyond human imagination. It is a community where equality, justice and peace reign. Reformed Church must continue to reform herself and the world around till the mission of God is accomplished.

Rev. K. James Cecil Victor
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Children in the Church

Exodus 2:1-10 Psalm 47
3 John 1-15 Luke 18:15-17
E: Deut. 28:1-6 Matthew 21:15-17

Children are a joy but many are also looked upon as problems and tragically children are sometimes neglected, ignored, oppressed and even abused. The Bible teaches us that children are important. Psa 127:3 tells us that they are God’s blessing; Lo, children are an heritage of the Lord and the fruit of the womb is his reward. Not only are they a blessing but Isa 8:18 says the children whom the Lord hath given …are …signs and … wonders. The Psalmist in Psa 128:3 says children are like olive plants round about thy table. They are referred so because i) the olive plants have a long life ii) it beautifies the house just like cottons iii) it is a medicine, which brings healing iv) it is a sign of victory. So also the children manifest the characteristics of the olive plant in the families.

1. Children are Important

In the incident in Lk 18:15-17 the parents were bringing children, and letting their toddlers run up to Jesus so that he would scoop them up and pray for them. But the disciples did not allow it to happen. Jesus was about important business -- teaching and healing so they couldn't allow this work to be interrupted by mere children constantly running up to him. They began to stop the little children. Why did they rebuke/stop the children? This question of how children are viewed in Jesus’ time is important if we are to interpret this passage correctly. The disciples rebuked the parents because children were viewed as unimportant in Palestine in Jesus’ day.

But why does Jesus let them come on this occasion? It doesn't seem like this is his normal practice. However, Jesus used this occasion to make a point, to teach his disciples an important lesson about the Kingdom of God. Jesus called the children to him and said, “Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these” Lk 18:16. They are important because of their innocence, openness, trust, receptivity and humility. Today children are being neglected due to varied reasons. How are we making them feel important. In Ex 2:1-10, we read that Moses was taken by the Pharoah’s daughter to care for so that he might grow up to be the liberator of the people of God from the bondage of Egypt. Are there Pharoah’s daughters today to nurture the children to become future leaders to lead others to Kingdom of God. Jesus said don’t hinder the children they are important.

2. Children are Invited

Lk 18:16 and Mk 10:14 Jesus says, Let the little children come unto Me. Jesus let the children come to Him. They may have been too small to understand but He was gracious enough to bless them. Being invited by Christ they become very important in a society which regarded them as unimportant. Now that they are invited they become part of the community through which

i) They learn that they are loved. Jn 3:16, God loved the world….., which includes children also. I remember a song which I learned in the Sunday school and it goes like this, ‘Jesus loves the little children, all the children of the world, red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in His sight, Jesus loves little children of the world.’ When Jesus has loved them in all their struggles and discrimination why should we not love them. They are innocent they are loveable.

ii) They learn about God’s power and triumph. They come to know that God helps them in their trials and failures. Ps 29:4…the voice of the Lord is powerful. They learn according to Zech 4:6 which says, “Not by might, nor by power but by My Spirit” that one needs to depend on God.
iii) They learn to have hope and faith in God. No matter what happens, they learn to trust in God. As we read in Prov. 3:5, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.”

iv) They learn to live in peace. In a world filled with terror for little children they need peace. Isa. 9:6 teaches them “For unto us a child is born, unto us a Savior is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” When the Prince of Peace is in their midst they need not fear any kind of trouble. They can boldly and courageously say with the Psalmist in Ps 91:3 “Surely He shall deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the perilous pestilence.”

Therefore children need to be invited to the church. They are part of the body of Christ. But today, just like the disciples, we always rebuke them. The disciples were rebuking the parents from bringing the children to Jesus. They looked upon children as others did. They felt children could contribute nothing to the adult world. They were useless; unimportant therefore should not disturb the adults. Even today how many of us regard children as a disturbance in our church worship. Instead of treating like the disciples, let us teach children the disciplines of the church.

3. Children are to be Involved

The children who are important and invited by Jesus are to be involved in the body of Christ (Church). In the Bible we see many children who have ministered to God and the people. They were involved in the service of God. David the small boy killed the giant Goliath and saved his people from the Philistines. Samuel served Eli the priest by staying in the sanctuary, Naman’s servant maid, though small in age and status told great things to her master and brought healing in his body. The boy who offered to Jesus the five loaves and two fishes and satisfied the hunger of 5000 people.

Yes though children are small they have a great desire to know God and to serve. They come to Jesus freely, openly, and humbly. They come to God with no posturing of worthiness, like the Pharisee in the preceding parable (Lk 18:11-12). Rather, they come because Jesus calls them to him. They come in simple faith, like the tax collector (Lk 18:13). Lack of pretension, openness, humility -- these are the qualities of children that Jesus seems to be holding up as necessary for entrance to the Kingdom. Having a nursery, Sunday school and children's church are important but a ministry to children is important since children are spiritual beings and can learn from an early age the truths of the Gospel. Even today Jesus loves the little children He makes them feel important, invited to be part of the body of Christ and to be involved for Jesus to bring glory to His name.

Rev. Ruby Lawrence & Mrs. Rebecca Azariah
CSI Madras Diocese
Introduction

We live in a world of change. We are living in an environment that challenges us to continually evaluate what it means to live the Christian life. In the present context the world is undergoing a rapid change in all spheres- social, economic, cultural and political. Today there are lot of things happening such as reconversions, terrorism, ethnic conflict, hatred between one community and another community. In this changed and changing context the Lord Jesus challenges us, His chosen people to be a light on the lampstand. He uses the powerful metaphor to help His people to live in this world through the Sermon on the Mount in Matt 5:14. He calls us to be the light of the world, and also tells us in Matt 5: 15 that no one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but on a lampstand. The lampstand is an instrument to give the light to all. But the lampstand which Jesus mentions in Revelation to John (Rev 1:20) is the seven churches. Thus He tells us that we are to be light to the world which means that the church is called to be the light and we who believe in Christ, need to dispel the darkness we find all around us.

1. A Light of Purity

Ex 25:31 the Lord said to Moses, “Then you shall make a lamp-stand of pure gold…….” Gold is a pure metal. It is expensive and precious. So also the church, a called out community is to be pure. She has a divine calling. The light which the church gives should be pure rays of the divine love of God. Ephesians 5:25-27 records that Christ loved the church and gave Himself up for her, so that He might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, that He might present to Himself the church in all her glory, having no spot or wrinkle or any such thing; but that she would be holy and blameless. Colossians 1:22 says that He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach. Revelation 19:7-8 Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready. It was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen are the righteous acts of the saints. We see the tares amongst the wheat, but God sees the good seed that He has sown, growing to maturity. In John 3:21 Jesus says he who practices the truth comes to the Light, so that his deeds may be manifested as having been wrought in God. Light Conquers Darkness – Wherever there is the least bit of light, darkness is forced to flee. The same is true in the spiritual realm. Psalm 119:130 says, the entrance of thy words give light; it gives understanding unto the simple and Psalm 119:105 says thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path. Jesus said that His people are “the light of the world.” Not only should our presence dispel darkness but it should also cause the world to be more colorful and beautiful place. There is nothing like meeting a Christian who is reflecting the light of the Savior.

2. A Light of Unity

Unity is born out of suffering. Glory is always born out of suffering. Romans 8:17-18 Paul says, that “if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him. I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Jesus was bruised and we have the privilege of sharing His sufferings – that is how the Church is forged. Sometimes, it is adversity that drives us together for unity. Tribulation reveals our allegiance. As Christians we who are called to be light of the world have to be united. When we work in unity we
can do much more for the extension of the Kingdom of God. The Church is the body of Christ. Though there are various kinds of people with different attitudes, we need to do away with our differences and be hammered together in to one body of Christ and bring glory and honor to His name.

3. A Light of Duty

The twofold duty of the church is our mandate recorded in Mark 16:15, and our mission, recorded in Acts 1:8. This insight is drawn from Is. 11:1-5 that talks about the promised child, the messiah. “A shoot will spring from the stem of Jesse, (that is Jesus the Branch) and a branch from his roots will bear fruit. The Spirit of the Lord will rest on Him: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. And He will delight in the fear of the Lord, and He will not judge by what His eyes see, Nor make a decision by what His ears hear; but with righteousness He will judge the poor, and decide with fairness for the afflicted of the earth; and He will strike the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips He will slay the wicked. Also righteousness will be the belt about His loins, and faithfulness the belt about His waist.”

The Church is called to reflect the light of God through varied activities which empower and enlighten the poor, the needy and the oppressed. Let our Light not be hidden under the bushel of fear, apathy and leisure but let it shine before others as a light of purity, a light of unity and a light of duty bringing glory to God. Amen

Rev. Ruby Lawrence & Mrs. Rebecca Azariah
CSI Madras Diocese
The situation of the girl children in India has reached an appalling state. The Child sex ratio continues to show a decreasing trend of girls to boys, particularly in the 0–6 category children, indicating prevalence of infanticide and increased mortality due to other unfavourable social and cultural factors.

Instances of excesses committed against girl children, young girls and women, in most cases violent excesses, is on the increase. Values of equality, liberty and dignity are abysmally low. The print media is replete with such stories in every page, but sometimes without consideration to the person whose dignity is violated. The projection of such instances in some sections of the visual media leaves one to wonder whether such instances of violence are used as ‘capital’ to increase its reach.

In recent past the courts (and legislatures) have come to the rescue of this hapless section of God’s creation providing strict guidelines of conduct and protocols for supervision and monitoring. Thanks to this judicial activism, at least some of the instances of such violation are now coming to light and justice done.

Churches have begun to relay Jesus in these missional contexts. CSI’s commitment to the Girl Child, both on the theme ‘Little One, Arise!’ (2000 – 2010) and “Assure my future” (2014 onwards) are examples of the seriousness with which Church is committed to the ‘little ones’ and vulnerable girls and women whom God had created in God’s own image, and just as God was ‘helper’ to Israel (and not vice-versa).

The scripture portions appointed for the day help us to understand some ways in which we can also be part of this great process of salvation that we as Christians pattern after Jesus, and as also captured in the life and teaching of his disciples.

Acts 16: 16 – 18

In this story the writer introduces the ministry of the disciples of Jesus, Paul and Silas, that went to the root of the problem in releasing the spirit of divination from the ‘female slave (or slave girl in some translations)’ who probably landed in the hands of her masters because of the market manipulation of the families’ impoverished vulnerability, or that the family could not handle the ‘power’ in her or were too embarrassed by her ‘forthrightness’ (after all the girl spoke the right thing about Paul and Silas that “these men are servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to you the way of the salvation”). Paul addresses the situation in a way that ‘her masters’ will no longer have dominion over her, and thus she could transform to be ‘prophetic’ as a disciple of Jesus and not just a ‘fortune-teller’ with a spirit of divination.

Matthew 15: 21 – 28

Matthew superimposes the exclusivist and patriarchal mindset (and thus probably the tendency to commodify women and favour ‘men and their sons’ – read Psalm 45: 8 – 15) of an average Jew of the time on the person of Jesus the Jew and juxtaposes the same against the best practice of a mother from a non-Jew setting who came seeking healing for her ‘daughter’. Jesus’ response by extending healing therefore is a challenge to be taken by communities as the Jews (as also several Indian communities) to learn from the practices of such other cultures that hold girl children, young girls and women in high esteem by seeking after their health and wellbeing. In India too we have communities, their culture and religion, rich with such examples of holding girls and women in high esteem. The Church is blessed with a potential to be a community with such exemplary value, since such high values are only naturally akin to the values of the Gospel of Jesus.
Go therefore . . .

Join and promote, as local congregations, the philosophy and activities of the Girl Child Campaign of our Church (the Church of South India) – “Assuring the future of the girl child”.

Affirm as families the complementarities of sexes, celebrating diversities of gender and human sexuality

As individuals promote child protection policies in our places of work and study

Popularize statutory and other such bodies as the National and State Commissions for Protection of Child Rights in society, even through networking with similar life affirming and conscientious communities and groups

As responsible citizens link with the ministries of Child welfare of the State and Central Governments, and

Through programs of the UNICEF (and similar ecumenical and international bodies) in the grassroots neighborhood link to and work with the global community resonating ours with the voices of the vulnerable and the weak in our own contexts and with such vulnerable communities and individuals the world over.

In ministering thus affirm that suffering is the common lot of all – the ‘righteous’ included (cp. Job) and act with prophecy to set things right so that the ‘unrighteous’ repent, and the ‘righteous’ together with the repentant rejoice affirming life for all - girl children included, where vulnerabilities decrease and capabilities increase.

For further study and information:

www.ncpcr.gov.in
www.ncw.nic.in

 Discrimination of female children in Modern India: from conception through childhood, UNFPA_publication-39865.pdf

Rev. Asir Ebenezer
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Christian Response to Poverty

Amos 8:4-7 Psalm 145
E: Amos 2:4-8 2 Cor. 8:8-15

The present world is filled with disparity, injustice, violence and hatred. Who created all these? Some believe that these things are part and parcel of the society which are helpful to balance and control the world order. But we should be aware of the source of this kind of propagation. The unjust and unethical commercial lobbies always used the poor so that they become richer. It was and is the poor who always suffer under the domination of the rich. Profit oriented enterprises and world never bothered and bothers about the welfare of the society and of the poor. It is much worried about increasing their incomes rather than being concerned about the consequence of their policies. For example: According to Military Spending findings, the arms and ammunition market crossed over 1.5 Trillion US Dollars all over the world. This large amount itself shows that how our world orders and leaders are spending huge sum towards security of the society! Yes we can defend ourselves by saying that in the militarized world, our country should update arms and ammunition so that they meet the international standards and enemy threats. At the same time, the irony is that we never agree to use even a quarter of amount in spent for militarization to eradicate the poverty or for the betterment of the poor. For several centuries, attitude of the “have’s” towards the “have not’s” always is a negative one.

Poor, needy and destitutes are the result of the human greed. God created human beings in His own image, but they destroyed the order which was set by God in the beginning. Falling to their selfish and greedy goals human beings disappointed God and created disparity in this world.

It is not surprising that, Christian mission activities are established on the basis of charity. The Christian attitude towards the poor and the poverty is the result of it’s ever transforming character. However it is not enough to stand for the poor, there is a need for eradication of entire unjust structure that used poverty as a tool to enjoy power and resources. What is the best solution? It is simple, as Jesus says: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Perhaps, we admit that it is very difficult task!

What would be our response towards the poverty? Today’s theme calls us to respond to the core issue which is poverty, rather than merely relating it to the situation of the poor. It is the poverty which caused to expand the miseries of the poor from age to age. For this reason, we should aim to respond to this issue.

Prophetic Response towards the Poor to Establish Justice: Amos 8:4-7

Amos is known as the champion of the poor. Being a prophet of the 8th Century BCE, he condemned the society for neglecting the destitute, along with his contemporaries. He clearly brought out the realities of fellow human beings who were treated like dust of the ground by the dominant. During the time of Amos, societal relationships were turned into commercial relationships. The dominants used conditions of society to pervert the justice and trample the poor. In this process, they conscientiously planned to increase their wealth by misusing the counterfeit balances. "When will the new moon be over, that we may sell grain? And the Sabbath, that we may offer wheat for sale, that we may make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances, (Amos 8:5 RSV). Affluent merchant’s regard towards religious customs might be merely a requirement of the tradition. Especially, Sabbath was a forceful burden. It was a barrier to increase their weekly business.

In order to increase their profits, they trampled the poor aside and trampled the norms of the covenant also. If they really had high regard towards the covenant, definitely, they would have never crushed
the poor to the ground. The law of the Israelite community protected the poor and marginalized. But those laws were cornered and kept aside from practice. By forgetting these laws, merchants planned to buy the poor for the silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. In this regard, Amos heavily came upon his contemporary affluent community where it deprived the morality of the society.

It is evident in the socio-economic criticism of Amos that poverty was purely creation of the greedy of his times. The whole system was corrupted so that powerful can enjoy the resources of the society at their fullness. Prophet voice of Amos not only raised the concerns but also proclaimed the judgment of Yahweh unto those who trampled the poor. Our response should be the prophetic response. Prophet condemned unjust structures and brought God’s judgement to uphold the equality and egalitarian values of the society.


The Epistle of Saint James also excoriates the attitude and the lifestyle of the rich in the Church. Though readers of the epistle had faith in Christ, they failed to comprehend the gospel teachings of Jesus. The Early Church also witnessed the disparity in its structure and formation. The place of liberation has now turned into the place of division. Injustice, divisions, distinction, dishonor were a big threat to the Church. In this regard, the author of the epistle writes to bring an awakening. Especially, James who wrote the Epistle to Diaspora urges to bring radical changes in its faith and work. He stresses the importance of the poor in the reign of God which Jesus taught (v.5). He uses the word “brothers” which signifies equality of all Christians. According to him, the poor are very rich in the faith. Being the followers of Christ, we must sacrifice our selfishness and pride which may affect our lives. As Christ sacrificed himself for us we ought to sacrifice ourselves for others. “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich” (2 Cor. 8:9 RSV).

See the People Underneath Your Table: Luke 16: 19-31

It is no doubt that Jesus was born and grew in a poor family. Indeed, Jesus was well aware of the struggles of poor in Palestine and his contemporary world. He reached the poor through his message of love and sharing and he expressed very vividly that poor must get their right in the society.

In the parable of the poor Lazarus, rich person symbolizes the attitude and the life style of affluent of the society. Rich man had all the resources to fulfill the needs of a person who was longing for his daily bread. Lazarus who represents the poor class of Palestine, wanted to feed himself by what has fallen from the rich man’s table. There is no evidence to prove that rich man was the reason for Lazarus’ condition in the society. But his selfishness, life without concern towards others, improper use of the resources caused the rich man to prosper while the poor suffered. Though he had all the necessary laws that were directing him to extend his hands of support towards the poor like Lazarus, especially “love your neighbor”, he did not heed to them. Rich man was not mindful of the person underneath his table. Perhaps the poor Lazarus was treated like a dog! Today, we are called to open our eyes to see the misery in the world, hear the cries of the poor and extend our hands to affirm their life and dignity.

Conclusion:

The Church has been called to be prophetic in its mission and vision. It has been established to follow the path of Jesus Christ who himself is the head of the Church. Indeed, the Church should stand for the poor just as Jesus stood. Unless Church give justice to the poor in its structure it will be difficult to witness the justice in the society and the world. Church is the place of redemption and Christianity should carry God’s redemptive mission into the world. The poor are amidst us, so that we share our resource with them, not grab what belongs to them.

Rev. K. Sagar Sundar Raj

Kristu Jignasa
Christmas is all about celebrating the good news of the arrival of the savior, who continues to redeem the humanity, heal the sick, bind the broken hearted, release the captives and preach the good news to the poor. The scriptures reveal the nature of this celebration.

**Good News to the Oppressed Israel: Birth of Moses (Ex 2:1-10)**

The context in which Moses was born brings new hope for the people of Israel who were oppressed under the cruel task masters of Egypt. Exodus Chapter one describes the fulfillment of Yahweh’s promise to the patriarchs and matriarchs of progeny and of land has made a threat to Pharaoh. He controls their birth rate and makes them remain in Egypt as slave labourers. The task masters were ‘ruthless’ in all the tasks that they imposed on them (Ex 1:15). In spite of this ‘ruthless’ oppression, Israelites multiplied and spread forcing Pharaoh to issue a decree that every boy that is born to the Hebrews should be thrown into the Niles.

It is against this background Ex 2: 1-10 speaks of the divinely guided origins of a great leader Moses. The mother and sister of Moses obey Pharaoh’s command literally and throw the child into the Nile. Like the midwives, they also do not let the tyrant’s commands limit their hope. In the second half of the narrative, Pharaoh’s daughter discovers the child and arranges to bring him up in the royal court. He names him Moses which the writer relates to Hebrew Masa, which means to draw out. The actual form Moseh is an active participle ‘one who draws out’ implying the prayer of the actual mother, ‘may the Lord draw out His people.’

In this entire narrative women seem to be playing a major role in safeguarding the child Moses. The midwives, Pharaoh’s daughter, Moses’ sister and mother, all these women become agents of liberation for the people of Israel in God’s hands. Moses’ survival is important for the deliverance of this groaning community. God’s intervention in the lives of the marginalized in response to their painful pleas is an occasion to celebrate and rejoice in the Lord and Moses, a type of Jesus grows up with this sense of saving his own people (Ex 2:11-15).

**Good News to the Non-Jews: Conversion of Paul (Acts 9:15-20)**

R V Peace holds that “no single event, apart from the Christ-event has proved so determinant for the course of Christian history as the conversion and commissioning of Paul.” This episode of Saul’s conversion is one of the most significant events in the beginnings of Christianity which projects him as an Apostle to the non-Jews. In the description of Ananias, Saul is a ‘chosen-vessel’ who will bear the very name he persecuted before the Gentiles, Kings, and the peope of Israel and will suffer for its sake. At the beginning of Acts 9 Paul is presented as the persecutor of the church, but after his encounter with the risen Jesus the persecutor becomes one of those he persecuted. The commissioning statement in Acts 9:15-16 captures the spirit of Luke’s worldwide missionary theme in Acts 1:8. Paul’s dramatic reversal to be apostle to the gentiles is certainly good news of celebration to the persecuted church and fulfillment of God’s commission to Israel to be a blessing to the families of the earth (Is 49:6) and to be a light to the nations (Is 42:6).

**Good News to the Margins: Annunciation to Mary (Luke 1: 46-56)**

Elizabeth having recognized Mary to be the mother of the Messiah was overjoyed and filled with prophetic inspiration and burst into a benediction. The child (John the Baptist) in her womb leaped for Joy. Mary’s poetic reply is known as the Magnificat. This can be divided into 1:46-50 and 1: 51-55. The first stanza deals with Mary, and the second universalizes from Mary’s experiences to reflect upon God’s dealing with all humanity.

In 1: 46-50 Mary extols God for what God is doing for women and men through her child. The word extols goes with the theme of rejoicing in God’s fulfillment of promise. Mary is rejoicing at the way God has chosen her, the lowly slave woman who will be hailed by all in the new era of salvation begun by God in her son Jesus. God is holy and mighty because of his choice of lowly Mary. V 50

Kristu Jignasa
concludes the first stanza and leads into the second: What God has done for Mary is universalized into what God does for those who fear God.

In 51-53, God is described as the one who rejects the rich and scatters the proud. On the other hand, He lifts the lowly and fills the hungry. For J A Fitzmyer, the poor are the physically poor in Israel plus the unfortunate people, lowly, sick and downtrodden; the rich are the physically rich as well as the proud, the arrogant and those who experience no need of God. Luke agrees that the God whose powerful arm (v51) has created a new exodus does show a preference for the downtrodden; the preference will be manifested in His son Jesus and in the mission of Jesus’ disciples. Mary prophetically envisions that there will be a reversal in the situation of the downtrodden for which she is the witness.

Conclusion

Just as the birth of Moses ensures the hope of the deliverance to the oppressed Israel, the birth of Jesus heralds a new era in which there will be a reversal of the order in the society. There is a hope for the hopeless and God’s justice is extended to the downtrodden people like the outcastes and the Dalits in Indian context. Women who are discriminated gain acceptance and will be exalted. By the advent of Jesus the savior-there is celebration in the hearts of the marginalized communities.

Rev. Shanthi David
CSI Rayalaseema Diocese
Calvin Institute of Theology, Hyderabad
Word of God: Inspired to Inspire

E: Psalm 33:1-12 Jude 6:11-24

“Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path” Ps 119:105

Our Christian life and ministry are totally dependent upon the word of the living God, the Bible. We are committed to the Word of God as absolutely true, as having come from God himself. We come to know God and His will through the Bible very succinctly.

This Word of God has inspired millions of people to come to faith and follow the path of Christ. As the psalmist says, ‘your Word, O Lord, is eternal; it stands firm in the heavens’. Ps 119:89. It is the divine power, the LOGOS, which dwells among us, at all situations and at all time. The process of inspiration is not instant; rather it is gradual, like a seed that takes time to sprout and germinate. The above Bible passages helps us to look at some of the instances that inspired the legends to inspire others. In other words, the word of God has transformed their lives to become the instruments or channels to influence others to come to faith, and lead a life worthy of calling.

Word of God: Inspired to Rejuvenate

The Old Testament reading recalls the cry of Prophet Elijah. It was a cry in depression and fear. He pleads God to take his life, for he considered himself as useless. God’s word was rather confusing for him but he was touched by an Angel, and he was fed and finally rejuvenated. The soothing word of God sometimes helps us to just relax, rejuvenate and to restart afresh. Later we read in the Scriptures that Elijah becomes a powerful instrument in the hands of God. (the anointing of Hazael, Jehu & Elisha) 1kings 19:15-16. The Word of God inspires us to inspire others, by transforming our lives. When we live by example, the world around us emulate the values in us; and adhere to the word of God.

Word of God: Inspired to Rejoice

The episode of Mary visiting Elizabeth as described in Lk.1:39-45, has inspired not only women all over the world but also men to rejoice in God. Here again the word of God to Joseph & Mary were through an Angel. Mary could not resist for she was told that even her relative Elizabeth was conceived. The excitement of the good news inspired her to rejoice and to share that joy. After their meeting and greeting, Mary’s song recalls how joyful and thankful she was. Besides, Mary’s song illustrates how God extends His mercy to those who fear Him and are humble.

Word of God: Inspired to Revere

The book of Revelation helps us to introspect and apply to our life situations. In Chapter 10 of Revelation we come face to face with several mysteries that have confused many from time to time. I suppose there are millions of people on earth struggling with the mystery of a silent heaven. The symbolism of eating the word is a way of indicating that the truth written on that scroll becomes personal. It is to individually assimilate and respect the Word of God.

The Word of God has the power to inspire, because it is the living word, it is active, sharper than any double edged sword, Heb.4:12. Lives of those who heeded to the word of God are never the same. The weak become strong; the insignificant become significant. Above all, since the word is truth, and word is God’s revelation it is to be read, meditated and followed in our everyday life. It soothes us, comforts us and challenges us. We are called to preach, practice, and proclaim this word of God so that we fulfill the will of God. May the good Lord, who has called us, help us to become the

Kristu Jignasa
instruments for the extension of His Kingdom. Let us be inspired by this living word so that we may inspire other to experience the same inspiration. Amen.

Rev. S. Sujeeth Kumar  
CSI Karnataka Central Diocese
Deliverance from the Bondage of Sin

Exodus 14:1-14 Psalm 37:1-12
Romans 8:1-11 John 8:31-38
E: Matthew 8:1-17 Acts 3:17-26

Introduction

"Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains. Those who think themselves the masters of others are indeed greater slaves than they." (Rousseau). There are many forms of bondage everywhere in the world. There are different forms of structural system which enslave the people. Any form of bondage, whether it is personal or structural, is sin. Many are knowingly or unknowingly living in bondage without feeling the need for deliverance. The Gospel (good news) is the proclamation of the freedom from bondage of sin.

1. God will Deliver – We Stand firm (Exodus, 14: 1-14)

God delivered the people of Israel from the land of Egypt. The act of deliverance itself is the proof that God, the Liberator is their deliverer. God wants to affirm this truth. At the same time Moses has two tasks to accomplish. Firstly, to believe and make others to believe the fact of intervention of God in the act of deliverance. And secondly Moses tried to deliver the people of Israel from the fear of Egyptians. The advice given by Moses to the people is that, the only thing they have to do is “stand firm” and understand that God will fight for them and they only need to “be still.” There is no point in anxiety, fear or murmuring. There is nothing to be added by the people in the act of deliverance. Deliverance is the act of God. Human participation is by faith and by action. As the leader of the faith community, Moses, mediated the deliverance, with a responsibility to nurture the people in faith. In any kind of bondage, the liberation is assured. We need to believe, and stand firm in the faith that God is able to deliver us. How much we can ‘be still’ and wait for the kairos (God’s appointed time) of God? Stand still does not mean no participation from the people. Stillness is to affirm God’s intervention in their bondage, and to overcome the fear of the forces of bondage.

Jesus is the Truth – Truth will set us Free (John 8: 31-38)

Mahatma Gandhi says “Search for truth is search for God. Truth is God. God is because truth is”. Jesus says the real disciples are those who hold the teachings of him. His teachings are true. The role of the disciples is to know the truth well. Knowing truth means knowing Jesus the truth. We cannot separate Jesus from Truth, who says I am the truth. Jesus will set us free. No one can hide the truth forever. This is evident in the passion and crucifixion narratives. The truth was killed on the cross, buried in the tomb but on the third day truth raised and proved that no one can destroy the truth forever. Truth is a means of deliverance. Truth never changes. But there are half-truths and untruths, which cannot set any one free. Truth is transparent. There is a saying, “if you tell the truth there is no need to remember to whom you told”.


There are two choices to choose in one’s life. Live according to the desire of flesh and be a slave of flesh or live according to the Spirit of God and live a liberated life. The mind governed by the flesh is hostile to God and it cannot please God. And such a life which is under the control of flesh is dead. Those who live according to the flesh have their minds set on what the flesh desires. The law of the world became a bondage to those who are controlled by the desires of flesh. On contrary to this, those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. Deliverance is required in our life. If anyone belongs to Christ, the Spirit of God lives in him/her. And Paul further says, even though your body is subject to death, Spirit gives you life. The choice is ours. There are two ways before us. One is the way to death controlled by the desires of flesh and the other is
controlled by the Spirit of God which gives us freedom and liberation from all kinds of bondage in the world.

Rev. T. I. James
CSI North Kerala Diocese
Introduction:

Maranatha is an Aramaic word occurring only once in the New Testament (1 Cor. 16:22). It is transliterated into Greek rather than translated. This word can be translated in two ways: if one chooses to split the two words as marana tha, then it can be translated as a command to the Lord to come. If one decides to separate the word like maran atha, then it may be interpreted as “Our Lord has come.” This confusion of meaning primarily emerged because of the ancient practice of writing words without giving gaps between them. Maranatha became an important concept in the faith of the early Church. The word was even used for greetings, replacing the Jewish greeting shalom which means “peace.” It may be argued that the use of the greeting agrees with the understanding of the word “O Lord, Come.” The CSI Lectionary of this year has also opted to go for the command option to read “O Lord, Come.” Let us look at this concept through the eyes of John 1:1-14.

1. The Hope in Eternal God Encourages to Invoke Maran atha

John 1: 1-14 explain to us the entire picture of God’s salvation plan for humankind. The passage vividly speaks about the Lord who has already come and lived among the creation. The writer concludes the narration of the incarnation of the Savior, saying “And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (v. 14). The passage clearly shows God’s strong desire to communicate with human beings in order to save and lead them to eternal glory. It further says that God and God’s Word are eternal. They had been there from the beginning, even before the creation of the universe. While the creation accounts in the book of Genesis tells us what God did in the beginning, John takes us further back than the book of Genesis. John provides us a picture of God before God created anything. The passage speaks of Jesus Christ as God eternal, infinite and uncreated. He is the Creator and “through Him all things were created.”

John presents Jesus Christ as the Lord who has already come to this world as part of the saving plan of God. This is the Creator visiting the creation. Even though he has been rejected by his own people Jesus was received by others and “to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God” (v. 12). The writer shares his experience of the presence of the Creator among the creation with the believing community.

This passage can also be seen as an expression of hope in the Creator God who will continue to visit and save them from all kinds of persecutions and bondages. This was the time of persecution of the Church under the Roman Empire. The writer provides his readers a hope in the midst of all agonies of oppressions and segregations. Though the world rejected the Creator, God is still active in the history and shows God’s aspirations to save all creations. The call maran atha becomes relevant in this situation. When people were in utter distress, living without hope, the passage gives a new hope in an eternal God who still has keen interest to save all creations. It tells us that though creation rejected it’s Creator, the Creator never rejected the creation. This very fact provides a new hope to the faithful to call God maran atha.

2. Maran atha Encourages to Face the Life Realities

Kristu Jignasa
The passage gives new understandings about of God, Jesus and creations. It provides a new worldview. In the midst of persecution and anguish, the first century believers were looking for a helping hand who would potentially protect them from their adversaries. Their strong belief in an imminent *messiah* may be read along with this thought. The passage provides answers to many of their burning questions and encourages them to face the challenges of the day. It ultimately gives needed fuel to move on with their lives with new hopes in an eternal God. Just as the life after death, life in this world is also important because God is in control of everything in this world and the world to come. The image of an eternal God presented in the passage helps them to look at life with a unique perspective. Invoking God Immanuel *maranatha* becomes an expression of hope, which encourages them to face the life realities of their time.

The passage gives a hope in a God who meets us wherever we are, at the point of our need. When the life realities bring darkness into our lives, when we were lost in darkness, the eternal God brings light to us because God is the ultimate light as the passage points out (vv. 4-5). The passage is never intended others to believe only in the future world, but it invites everyone to believe in a God who is always there to help us. Here the invocation of *maranatha* is not a cry for a God who resides in a faraway place or who is going to come, but it is a faith expression in a God who has always been with us in our faith journey. This expression is well evident in I Corinthians 16: 13-24, where Paul wishes the believers in Corinth with the expression *maranatha*.

**Rev. Dr. Royce Manoj Victor**  
**Bishop in Malabar Diocese**
Peace on Earth
(Christmas Eve)

Isaiah 52:7-10 Psalm 96

Collect: O Most loving and compassionate God, we thank you for your bountiful grace in creating the world in your wisdom and love. In Jesus Christ, the prince of peace you have redeemed the sinful world on the cross and granted us Eternal Life. We pray for the guidance of the Holy Spirit to become true agents of your peace, through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God now and forever. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: We are celebrating the birth of the Christ child, the prince of peace. This is a time of celebration of the hope that God offers in the little manger of Bethlehem. The song of the angels enthralled the shepherds who kept their flock at night. Is this merely a song? It is more than a new song, it is the announcement of God’s involvement in the world of sin, pain and destruction. It is God involving in the affairs of humanity to bring about the peace which remains elusive to human kind.

THE CONTEXT OF THE BIRTH OF JESUS TODAY:
We listen to the song of the angels like the shepherds with great joy and anticipation. We are used to hearing the song of humanity now which is so contrasting that it is not pleasing but the blaring of discordant voices of a sinful and a suffering humanity. It is so contrasting because we hear shouts of jubilation due to economic prosperity of the affluent and along with it the cry of millions who are in poverty, hunger and disease. The music of economic prosperity is stifled by the cry of the poor desperate for work and other basic facilities. Economically, we hear the song of wealth, the celebration of the wealthy and yet there is the agonizing sounds of fear and the desperation for life of the poor and oppressed communities. Socially there is the song of a new awakening the melody of this new awakening is marred by the genuine legitimate cry of the religious and political minorities, the blood of the victims of honor killings and the caste conflicts. Ecologically there is the sound of alternate energy, reducing carbon foot print and this music is so soft as the blaring of a consumer market seeks to exploit and plunder the creation and there rises the lament of the groaning of all creation. The voices of religious fundamentalism is no song as religion which should foster peace and harmony now becomes demoniac and divides people, oppresses people terrorizes people. It is in this discordant world that the birth of Jesus brings to life the message of peace which God offers to a troubles and confused world.

It is in this context we are looking at the manger at Bethlehem where Jesus Christ was born as the Prince of Peace and as the hope of the world. To understand the peace that God offers in the birth of Jesus we need to take a look at the meaning of Peace in the Old and in the New Testaments.

PEACE IN THE OLD TESTAMENT
Peace in the Old Testament refers to a state of wholeness in people either as individuals or groups, which may be health, prosperity, security, or the spiritual completeness of covenant. In the OT no particular distinction is made among these categories; military or economic peace is similar to the bodily and spiritual health of the individual. In the OT, peace of any kind is a wholeness determined and given by God. The word Shalom refers to peace in the lives of individuals and amongst individuals and amongst societies and nations. At the individual level it refers to good health and good life. Restoration to health is restoration to peace (Isa. 38:17). The man who returns in safety from battle has preserved his health and is at peace (Josh. 10:21; I Kings 22:17; II Chr. 19:1; Ps. 55:18–H 55:19); The individual's peace is synonymous with his good life, for it involves his healthful sleep (Ps. 134:11; 139:13-14; 145:19). The absence of any of bodily health, then, is a reflection of spiritual incompleteness as well as of alienation.

Kristu Jignasa
Peace in the Old Testament is also communal. Just as the peace of the individual is his health and safety, the peace of the nation or of the family is its prosperity and security. Peace is often seen as economic prosperity (I Chr. 4:40; 22:9; Ps. 37:11; 147:14; Isa. 54:13; 66:12; Zech. 8:12). Peace is also seen as the reverse of strife (Jer. 12:5; Zech. 8:10). It may also be simply the absence of war (Judg. 21:13; I Sam. 16:4-5; 29:7; I Kings 2:5; 4:24--H 5:4; Ps. 120:7; Eccl. 3:8; Jer. 14:13; 28:9).

PEACE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In classical Greek the word is used to describe the cessation or absence of hostilities between rival groups. In the New Testament, however, the word carries a far wider range of meaning. In Greek the word to denote peace is εἰρήνη. The Hebrew word came to be used as a common greeting, both on meeting and on parting. This greeting is found on the lips of Jesus, as "Go in peace" (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50), or "Peace be with you" (John 20:19, 21). It is clear, however, that as he used it, and as he expected his disciples to use it, it was much more than a merely conventional salutation. With the word of peace went the actual bestowal of peace, and if this proffered gift was spurned, the peace returned to him who had offered it (Matt. 10:13; Luke 10:5-6).

In these greetings the peace which is offered comes from God (Gal. 1:3; Eph. 1:2; Rev. 1:4). It can, therefore, elsewhere be described as the "peace of God" (Phil. 4:7; Col. 3:15); and God himself is the "God of peace" (Rom. 15:33; II Cor. 13:11; Phil. 4:9; Heb. 13:20), since it is from him that peace comes to man. In John 14:27 it is the gift of Christ.

We can see three precise meanings for Peace in the New Testament:

a. The first follows the usage of classical Greek and indicates peace, as opposed to war or strife. This is found in its ordinary secular sense in Luke 14:32; Acts 12:20. In I Cor. 7:15 it refers to "domestic peace" between husband and wife, and in Matt. 10:34; Luke 12:51 to harmonious relationships within the whole family. In the sense of happy personal relationships with others, especially one's fellow Christians, it is set forth as the goal of a Christian's endeavor (Rom. 14:19; Eph. 4:3; Heb. 12:14; I Pet. 3:11).

b. Since the NT is so greatly concerned with the restoration of right relationships between God and man, it is not surprising to find the word "peace" used to describe this restored relationship. Before his conversion man is "alienated" from God (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21), an "enemy" of God (Rom. 5:10; Col. 1:21). But after restoration, there is peace.

c. In the NT the word may also mean "peace of mind" or serenity.

JESUS OFFERS THE PEACE OF GOD

The birth of Jesus is the culmination of God’s never ending effort to restore the broken humanity which has chosen to bruise itself by its political and economic ideologies and preferences. God is constantly offering peace to such a broken world. People do not notice the peace that God offers because they are used to seeing a disfigured self and a disfigured world so distant from God’s purposes. Jesus Christ comes into the world as the Prince of Peace who brings about healing and restoration of people’s lives, of relationships of economies and of life in general. As we saw in the biblical understanding of the word peace and the message of peace in both the Old and in the New Testaments, God shares God’s self with humanity in offering God’s peace to the world. One very amazing picture that portrays the Peace of God is the work of God in creation. Every part of creation is so interconnected and each part also depends on the other. There is an inbuilt scheme of inter dependence and peace is possible when such a pattern becomes a reality and a dependence on God is established. Peace is the nature and being of God and human well being is possible only nature and people share in this reality of God. Jesus as the word that becomes incarnate is actually God’s peace incarnating in the world, to diffuse hostilities and to help the world become a new creation.

Kristi Jignasa
**JESUS OFFERS PEACE WITH GOD**

This reality of peace is not possible without establishing peace with God. God has chosen to reconcile a broken and a sinful world to himself through Jesus the prince of peace. Jesus brings us closer to the mind of God. Jesus Christ offers us peace with God by liberating us from ideologies and the ignorance of peacelessness which has become so normal to people. People get used to peacelessness and they do not suffer because of this painful reality but they would choose to preserve a scheme of peacelessness. In fact, Peace appears a difficult choice and it is something good but nevertheless something that people will avoid. Jesus the child of Bethlehem opens our minds to a new reality of God, a God who invites us to share in his being and thereby share in his peace. The birth of Jesus brings the shepherds and the wisemen together, it brings human beings to dwell in the abode of animals. Peace with God necessitates a change of nature to be able to respond to God’s invitation to peace. In coming to Christ Jesus there are other human associations that are renewed and restored.

**JESUS OFFERS PEACE ON EARTH**

Christmas is a season of Joy only with the peace of God transforming people’s lives. The Birth of Jesus Christ, the Messiah is taking place in a context of violence as we hear in the Gospels. In this context the Prince of Peace is born to transform the world. Jesus brings about a new kind of Peace that will be endless peace. Peace as a normal state of being. Jesus looks at a violent world and exhorts his disciples. Blessed are the Peace Makers for they will be called children of God. Being at Peace and enabling peace. Being Channels of God’s Peace. In a context of violence, this approach helps us to face issues and this could be frightening because people would not like to face the truth and therefore the causes of violence are covered up and adjustment is preached. Turn the other cheek: is not a sign of meekness but for Jesus it is the courage not to retaliate but to shame the aggressor. In Christ we treat each other with respect equality. No human being has the right to inflict pain on another human being since all of us are created by God and that every human life is precious. Involving in Peace making could be a very difficult process and it could be agonizing as the Peace maker is often misunderstood and is drawn into the problem or made as the problem in a way to distract oneself from the original problem. Peace making is a commitment to the cross to bear the pain but be careful if people who are not for peace are making peacemaking itself as a distraction.

Fred Khan’s prayer can inspire us to desire true peace!

Put Peace into each other’s hands  
And like a treasure hold it,  
Protect it like a candle flame,  
With tenderness enfold it.

Put peace into each other’s hands  
With loving expectation;  
Be gentle in your words and ways,  
In touch with God's creation.

Put peace into each other’s hands  
Like bread we break for sharing;  
Look people warmly in the eye:  
Our life is meant for caring.

Give thanks for strong -yet tender hands,  
Held out in trust and blessing.  
Where words fall short, let hands speak out,  
The heights of love expressing.

Put Christ into each other’s hands,  
He is love’s deepest measure;  
In love make peace, give peace a chance
And share it like a treasure.
Fred Kaan© 1989 and 2001

Rev. Deborah Premraj
CSI Madras Diocese
Christmas: A New Dawn
(Christmas)
Isaiah 9:1-7 Psalm 98

Collect: God the Immanuel, who at the fullness of time, sent your only Son to this world to be among us full of grace and truth; sanctify us with your radiance to receive your revelations; enliven us to be channels of your love; So that we may sing the new Song of joy and gladness; rejoice in being your children and share good news to all people around us to the ends of the earth. In the name of Jesus Christ the Immanuel, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God now and forever. Amen.

Christmas is the good news of great joy. We search for joy in negative places, in wrong priorities and wrong concepts. This can be seen in the way Christmas is celebrated today. It is more commercialized than internalized. It has become a festival of buying and selling. Most often we try to express and experience the joy of Christmas in mundane things.

A story of insecurity: In the first Christmas we see that it is a story of insecurity. Mary had asked "how can this be"? Joseph wanted to silently desert Mary, but ultimately they find each other as being called for a divine task. They start off from Nazareth to Bethlehem on a donkey's back. Joseph was a stranger there, though he had historical connection to Bethlehem. He had none to accommodate even in that momentous time. It was an anxious; stressful moment. Therefore it's a story of insecurity and stress.

Celebrating the space where there is none: There was no space in the Inn. But the manger provided a space. Those days, usually the mangers were the caves outside the village. We can very well learn that nature gave space where animals shared the space. Therefore it is celebrating space and place where there is none. Evidently we see a space in the impossible. Our thinking can provide a space to others. It is the openness to accommodate the stranger or 'outsider' to find security and space where there is none is called salvation. That is the joy beyond expectation, the joy of the new dawn. In Isaiah chapter 9 we read "People who walked in darkness have a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined". This is in a way, receiving the hospitality of God. Hence experiencing space and hospitality leads to the foretaste of salvation and redemption. This is the true meaning of Christmas.

Saviour from the creative space of the margins: Secondly, we see that the shepherds in the field were fearful. They were in the margin but in that margin they could see a creative space evolving. They were liberated through the creative power when the angel said to them "Fear not for behold I bring you the good news of great joy that will be for all the people". The shepherds were comforted and at the same time challenged. They got up and embarked on a journey of discovery. The words of the angel and choir empowered them for the journey of discovery. They were inspired to move forward in the midst of fear and uncertainty. When we are challenged to embark on a journey in search of answers, the creativity in us evolves. The shepherds found the Saviour of the World, the God incarnate, in an unexpected or least expected place. He was wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger. The shepherds found the realization of good news of great joy at the creative space of the margins.

Margins enriching the center: Thirdly, the Shepherds of the margin come to the center and they proclaim the good news to the center. They shared the joy of new dawn along with Mary and Joseph. In this, they connect their experience of sharing space in times of insecurity, fear and estrangement. Mary and Joseph shared their space with shepherds who were empowered by the angel. Mary kept
these things in her mind. She meditated and internalized the experience of the new dawn. But the shepherds in their journey of discovery found Christ and "Kristanubhava" (experience of the Christ) and then they became a ‘movement’ of proclaiming the new dawn. They went back telling every one of God's great and marvelous deeds they experienced. By this, the shepherds of the margin became the harbingers of the joy of the new dawn. Therefore Christmas is the movement of new dawn that challenges and encourages the people to move from margin to the center to share their experiences of hospitality in Christ. The center receives light from the margins and is challenged to embark upon journey to find creative space that accommodates the 'other'. In this both the center and the margin experience the salvation of God, the good news of great joy!

Rev. Dr. D. R. Sadananda
General Secretary, CSI
Marriage and family are the oldest and most resilient institutions. From the beginning of human life, people have grouped themselves into families to find emotional, physical and communal support. Families are the basic and foundational social units in all human communities. In the first place, it is important to affirm that it is God who ordained marriage so that the human society may have a firm foundation. Consequently, every family is built upon the value systems. There are basically two factors that influence the values in the family. First, the culture in which the man and woman have been brought up. Two, the culture which surrounds them today. Most people tend to build their own family and make it like the family in which they grew up. So if their family life depends on the world views and values that are shaped as part of their brought up. They follow certain patterns which could build the family or destroy it. Our upbringing will determine how we solve problems, and how we relate to one another in the family! Whereas, if the family is influenced by the culture around them, they allow the media or the standards of the so-called celebrities of the time to serve as the basis for their own standards. They allow the culture to determine how they will behave in their family. The whole idea of mocking morality and belittling the institution of marriage and the family is what we hear/see today.

Space to experience God’s presence and healing: Mother Teresa was right when she said “The way you help heal the world is you start with your own family.” Genesis 33: 1-11 is a beautiful imagery for the healing space that family can provide. From Genesis 25: 29-34 we learn that Jacob compelled Esau to sell his birth right when Esau was famished. Jacob took undue advantage of Esau’s hunger and starvation. Secondly, from Genesis 27 we learn that Jacob stealthily received the blessings of his father Isaac, posing himself as Esau. Being doubly deceived, Esau must have been waiting for an opportunity to avenge. Now when the time has come, we read in Genesis 33 that Esau dealt favorably with Jacob and Jacob too expressed his guilt and made efforts to reconcile with his brother by offering gifts. As a result, there was joy instead of sorrow; peace instead of violence. If we don’t strive for peace within our own families, we cannot expect it outside. Michael Bridge says, “when our eyes see our hands doing the works of heart, the circle of creation is complete inside us, the doors of our soul fly open and love steps forth to heal everything in sight”. It is important to call to our mind what St. Paul writes in his epistle to Ephesians Chapter 6, concerning the values we should have in the family front.

Space to affirm mutual respect and dignity: In Ephesians 6, the apostle proceeds in the exhortation to relative duties of children and parents, and of servants and masters (v. 1-9). The great duty of children is to obey their parents (v. 1), parents being the instruments of their being, God has given them an authority to command and guide children in the right path. The obedience which God demands from the children is an inward reverence, as well as the outward expressions and acts. Whereas the duty of parents is that they should not provoke their children to wrath. Though God has given them power, they must not abuse that power. When parents caution their children, counsel them or when reprove them, they must deal prudently and wisely with them, endeavouring to convince their judgments and to work upon their reason. Thus, the respect and dignity of children and parents is affirmed both inside the institution of family and also outside in the society. While correcting children when they wrong, it is crucial for the parents to set a model for the children to emulate. Most often children are caught up in a contradictory life style of parents. Ethos they expect and exhibit do not correspond. There is a great need to realize that the family space affirms mutual respect and dignity.
Space to embrace and comfort each other: Luke 15: 11-24 depicts the theme more succinctly. The parable reminds us that no two are the same in their attitudes despite similar upbringing under the same roof. It also reminds us that hurts and conflicts are bound to happen in the family. But it also reminds that there is a healing space in the family. Departure of the younger son might have caused tension and disturbances in the family. But the focus of the parable is not the wickedness of the son, but his turning back to the family and the father’s warm embrace. The father has no idea why the son is coming down the road; he does not even speculate about his son’s motive. He simply sees the son coming, and he “runs” to meet him (15:20). In ancient times, a dignified man does not run! This is a feature of the parable that is easily missed, but it is highly important. The father does not act like a normal father. He was moved with compassion towards his son. It is true that ‘our sorrows and wounds are healed only when we touch them with compassion’. There is no place like home. One is upheld in prosperity and adversity; in victory and defeat; in health and sickness. At the end of the day, it is home that rejuvenates and refreshes. The embracing and comforting space should be created and maintained in the family. Our choices and attitudes sets it all.

Conclusion: Marriage is a divine institution hence, the family. The goal of family is oneness, togetherness and unity. When God said, you shall leave your father and mother and cleave to your wife, God is not saying that one must sever the relationship with parents and family. God is saying that when a person gets married and has a family, he/she is putting together something which is brand-new, something which has never existed before. It's his/her family. The goal is unity in that new family and that new marriage. Despite indifferences, people in the family work it out and develop compatibility. There could be conflicts and misunderstandings at times, yet in the family atmosphere the hurts and wounds are healed.

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INTRODUCTION: As we bid farewell to the old year, we generally introspect the year past and make new resolutions. Our intentions are good, but as the year progresses we find that most resolutions fall by the side. If we analyse our daily life, we realize that we are mostly dealing with people, material things and situations or events. Everybody has to respond to various situations or events. Life can be defined as perspectives and our responses to them. Though we know what we should or should not do, we are unable to act in accordance to the divine will of God. This is because we have not been able to respond to the call of God.

JOY IN TRIBULATION: The adverse situations in Philippi were used by God to lead Paul and Silas to preach the gospel to a needy jailer. In the Acts of the Apostles 16: 19-34 Paul and Silas were imprisoned in the jail by the Romans. When they were in the prison the jailer heard the Apostles singing and praying. He had already been saved from Roman justice, now he wanted to be saved from the divine justice. He asked the question of the ages, "What must I do to be saved ?" The answer was short and simple, "Believe" - Trust with all your heart. He brings his family to meet Paul and Silas. The way of salvation was presented, accepted, believed and the whole family were led to the Lord and they all rejoiced. The jailer became a "Prisoner of Jesus Christ". The prison becomes a home filled with joy, a place of new birth and a new life.

THE SPECTACULAR SALVATION: In the gospel according to the Luke 19: 1-10, Zaccheaus was redeemed with great salvation. He is curious and wants to see Jesus but he doesn't want Jesus to see him. Jesus was deeply concerned for his salvation because he loved him. What was true of Zaccheaus is equally true for us. Every aspect of our life and every sin we have committed need to be brought into the light of forgiveness. And the only one who can forgive our sins and heal us of our brokenness is our Lord Jesus Christ. Salvation is freedom from the power of sin. The major sin that Zaccheaus was trapped in was materialism. When Jesus met him, he was liberated from his sinful life, received God's salvation and he rejoiced.

GOD'S FINAL CALL: The ministry of prophet Isaiah was a difficult one. His message was given in a time of great crisis both politically and religiously. The message of this prophet is amazingly relevant to our own needs today. We know that God wants all to come to Him and be saved. One day God will give His last invitation. This could be the last day, no one knows the day or hour when Jesus will return. We need to be mindful that this may be the last time that you have an opportunity to come to the Lord. People today are rebellious, everywhere we see violence. Pick up a newspaper or turn on the T.V news and we can read about the sinfulness of man. No area of our world is exempt from this wickedness. God will not force an invitation upon us. He promises great blessings for those who come to Him. When you give heed to God's message you will receive His salvation and you will rejoice.

Conclusion: St.Paul defines human condition in one of his epistles, "Thus passes away the glory of the world". What is the force that makes us face challenges even though we know that the glory of the world will pass away? It is the impulse to search for the meaning of life. When we stand before the Creator, we will understand each opportunity that was offered to us, which we either accepted or rejected. The final test of religion is not what I have believed, not what I have done, not what I have achieved but how I have discharged the common charities of life. When we respond to the call of Jesus Christ we will experience the power of God in our lives. He will direct our lives when we follow Him. God guides us in all circumstances of our lives. Ultimately, we find true peace and joy.

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HAVE A JOYOUS NEW YEAR

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