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
“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

Kristu Jignasa
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 Jignasais 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 Call for Committed Partnership

OT Deut.10:12-22          Psalm Ps. 23
I Thes.4:1-8                Mark.10:35-45
Eve.Deut.6: 1-9            I Cor.3:5-9

One year is over with the memories of good and bad; success and unsuccess; terror strikes, earthquakes, horrendous in Chennai floods and scams; refugee crisis in Germany, COP21 – climate change conference in France and so on…! There were times of celebrations and jubilations; there were times of silence. New Year gives an opportunity for us:

i) To introspect – strengths, weakness, our career, relationship, opportunities, threats, engagement; and to see where we stand!

ii) To rectify – our failures and weakness.

iii) To resolve – to reach new heights, to achieve new goals, to change / unchange, to do or undo certain things in order to become what can be.

Today’s theme opens our eyes to a New Challenge in faith that calls for a committed partnership with God.

1. God calls for a relationship through covenant: Covenant is coming together of one or two or more parties to make a contract. In the Bible the word “bond” (“berit” in Hebrew and “diatheke” in Greek) refers to a binding a relationship. Interestingly, God is the initiator of the covenant! The purpose of God’s covenant with humans is to restore human kind. God wants his creation to be whole; to own Him and to serve Him. Covenant refers to a binding agreement. In the Bible we see that Abimelech and Isaac decided to settle their land dispute (Gen.26:26-31), Joshua and Gibeonites made a covenant to live in peace together (Josh.9:15). Also Solomon and Hiram made agreement to live together (I Kgs. 5:12). David and Jonathan made a friendship band (I Sam.20:36; 16-17). Vividly, covenant was bilateral and always implied equal privileges, responsibilities and assigned roles. But when it comes to covenant with God; God initiates the covenant and invites people to keep the covenant! God always postulates certain stipulations for the covenant. When God made a covenant with Abraham that he would bless his offspring; and Abraham would possess the land (Gen.17); the stipulations God laid were that (1) he should walk before God (remain in fellowship with God constantly) (2) ‘be blameless’ – (to live uprightly) (3) ‘Circumcise the male child’ was an act of obedience (perpetual reminder) to the covenant (II Cor.3:6). In Deut. 10:12 we read that “And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you? Is it to (1) Fear the Lord your God (2) Walk in all his ways (3) to love Him (4) to serve Him with all your heart and your soul. Here the outward sign is replaced by the inward circumcision in the hearts (v.16). The outward circumcision is to do social justice such as (1) To execute Justice to the fatherless and widows (2) to love those who are aliens / sojourners. (v.18, 19). They are vulnerable for exploitation. God calls us for a committed partnership that we become his hands to touch, his feet to walk, his eyes to see the agony, his ears to hear the cries of the victims, his mouth to speak justice. In Isaiah 1:17 we read that we have to do good, to seek justice, to correct oppression, bring justice to the fatherless, plead the widow’s cause.

2. God calls for moral / ethical living:
In I Th. 4:1-8 we understand that we have to live a life pleasing to God. Verse 3 speaks of abstaining from sexual immorality, controlling our body in holiness and honour and doing no wrong to our brother. In v.7 we read that God has not called us for impurity but in holiness. Holiness is the

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distinct quality of a child of God. As God is holy, we the image bearers of God are expected to live a holy life. Holiness in personal, however, its effects are seen not merely in the individuals but also on the people with whom he/she comes in contact with. While holiness is a distinct life style as against the worldly, it actually challenges us to partner with God to annihilate to darkness and evil forces which negate life. Holiness is the exemplary ethical life that respects the other as they are.

3. God calls for kinaesthetic service (Mark.10:35-45):

When we are in covenant relationship with God and live worthy of God’s calling, we are expected to do a self-emptying service expecting nothing in return. If we are selfish, you give what is left-over, but in kinaesthetic love – we share what we have. In Mark 10:43-44 we read “whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all”. We also see that the “Son of man came not to be served but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many” v.45. Kinaesthetic service is risky for it requires the self-denial. In Risking life for Christ’s sake we have to 1. Establish an inclusive community 2. Raise a prophetic voice against injustice and corruption 3. Strive for reconciliation and peace 4. protect God’s creation. May God help us to respond to God’s call for a committed partnership to affirm God’s creation that declares his glory. May the New Year usher-in God’s choicest blessings and his guidance to be an agent of peace, reconciliation and change we want to see around us!

Rev. K. James Cecil Victor
Director, DPC, CSI Synod
Revelation for Salvation

Ex 3: 1-14; Acts 16: 6-10; John 12: 20-32

Revelation is usually defined as the divine or supernatural disclosure to humans of something relating to human existence. All the three given passages speak of divine revelation experienced by different people in different times. While the passages in Exodus and Acts of the Apostles tell us of revelation targeting for the liberation of the people from earthly bondages, John presents Jesus as the ultimate revelation who came to the world to provide salvation to all creations. One could easily find the use of the message salvation and liberation as synonymous in these passages. For our purpose, we shall concentrate on Exodus 3: 1-14 keeping John 12: 20-32 as background.

1. Revelation invites us to engage in mission

Exodus Chapter 3 introduces a significant change in the drama of the deliverance of the people of Israel from the bondage in Egypt. One can see a transition from God’s providential dealings in the life of the nation Israel to God’s direct intervention through Moses. The chapter begins with the revelation of God to Moses from the midst of the burning bush, and continues with the commissioning of Moses to go back to Egypt and the Pharaoh, and to deliver God’s people from their oppression and bondage. It finally ends with the beginnings of Moses’ reticence and resistance toward the task which God has given him.

The revelation experience of Moses mentioned in the chapter 3 is the basis for all that is to follow in the exodus event. It is the foundation for Moses’ obedience, as well as for the entire Israel. It is also the basis for all of God’s actions with regard to Egypt and to God’s people. In many ways, the incident of the burning bush is critical to our understanding of God.

The revelation to Moses was a divine call given to him to participate in God’s plan to deliver the people of Israel from the bondage in Egypt. It was an invitation to involve in God’s mission and to fulfill God’s purpose of liberation of God’s creation. The Lord says “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians…” (Ex 3: 7-8). It was God’s will that the People of Israel should be liberated from the bondage of the oppressive structure of Egypt. The revelation given to Moses was a call to partake in the ongoing mission of God. God’s call to Moses also included an explanation of God’s work. This drove Moses to speak in the name of the Lord to Pharaoh saying, “Let my people go” (Exod. 5:1). God asked Moses to lead God’s people out of Egypt in order to bring them into the Promised Land where they could settle, live, and develop. God wanted them to experience freedom from all kinds of bondages. Therefore the ultimate aim of the revelation given to Moses was the liberation of people of Israel from the hands of Egypt and to lead them to freedom, a good life.

The liberation of the people is pictured as salvation. According to Ex 6: 7b “you shall know that I am the Lord your God, who has freed you from the burdens of the Egyptians.” It talks about an ongoing and everlasting relationship between God and the people. God has chosen Moses and invited him to partake in the mission of liberation of the needy. God is extending

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the same invitation to us today. As God’s people, it is our responsibility to respond positively to the invitation and help those who are oppressed and marginalized in their struggle to achieve justice, freedom and salvation.

2. Revelation invites us to be crucified for giving life

The burning bush made not only a profound impact upon Moses and the nation Israel, but it also continued to serve as one of those key events in the salvation history. The significance of the revelation was not lost on Israel in the generations that followed. The account of the “burning bush” was central to the thinking of the gospel writers, especially to Mark and Luke, that they came to call this section “the bush” passage (Mark 12:26; Luke 20:37).

John 12: 20-32 speaks of another revelation, Jesus Christ the ultimate revelation of God. There Jesus talks to his dear ones and followers about his imminent inevitable death. He makes it clear that unless he dies, his ministry will not bear much fruit. This was the very purpose of his incarnation, Jesus declares. He further clarifies that those who sanctify God’s name might also be required to die with him. The mission of God involves risk. Therefore, revelation is an invitation to be crucified and died for giving salvation to many.

In the Old and New Testaments God’s people are called “light of the world.” Through the revelation to Moses, what God intended was to form a godly community, God’s own people who follows God’s path in all situations. We can see it clearly later in “I will take you as my people, and I will be your God” (Exod. 6:7a). Similar texts can be found in the New Testament too. So, it is the responsibility of the new community to function as the guiding light in the darkness to the nations in all circumstances.

Conclusion:

These passages show that revelation is an invitation to partake in God’s mission to liberate those who are in need. It also gives an invitation to die for giving salvation to all. The new understanding of revelation leads us to a fresh knowledge of salvation. These passages also reveal that salvation encompasses the whole of a person’s life and is more than simply a moment when he/she is converted. It is ongoing process and is mediated through creation, history and people by God’s saving grace. This way of understanding salvation or liberation includes from physical conditions and social exclusion as well as the spiritual aspect and focuses on the poor and needy. God through the saving action of Jesus Christ, who died for the whole of humankind, freely gives universal salvation. God through revelations extends an invitation to all to partake in the mission that is to provide salvation to all creations.

Royce M. Victor
Holiness if the essence of God:

Holiness is the attribute of God. His name is holy, His laws, Commandments, His service and everything he does is holy (Rom 7:12). His holiness is acknowledged in praises of the Seraphim and the four living creatures in the heaven who never cease to sing, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord God of hosts.” (Isa. 6:2, 3). The Holy God says to His people, “Ye shall be holy: for I the Lord your God am holy” (Lev19:2). The promise that God made to His people in the beginning of Exodus “ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation” (Ex 19:6), declared at the end of journey, that they are a people for his own possession and He will set them high above all nations that he has made, in praise and in fame and in honour, and that they shall be a people holy to the Lord their God, provided that they should keep all his commandments (Deut. 26: 18, 19 ). In order to meet his approbation or enjoy his presence the people of God were required to be holy, separated from all defilements of the world and entirely consecrated to God.

The priests who were consecrated to stand between people and God to offer sacrifices to God, adopted the holy instructions not to marry a harlot, divorced and widow not shave their heads not gird themselves with anything that causes sweat, (Ezekiel 44:22) for the priest is holy to his God and offer the offerings by fire to the Lord, the bread of their God (Lev 21:8). They keep themselves Holy to teach God’s people the difference between the holy and the common, and show them how to distinguish between the unclean and the clean (Lev 10:10). The strong reason why God told them not to be intoxicated is that they might always be able to discern between the clean and the “unclean”, and ever pronounce righteous judgment. The lips of a priest should guard knowledge, and men and women should seek instruction from his mouth, for he is the messenger of the Lord of hosts (Mal 2:7).

Holiness is relational:

The relation between Christ and His church is explained figuratively as that of between a bridegroom and bride. St. Paul says, “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,” (Eph 5:25-27).That the church is holy and partaker of his glory. In addition, V 18-20 talk about holiness as waling in love for one another. In fact the whole chapter is dedicated to encourage the believers to intimate Christ in relating with others. “Walk as the children of light” is the punch line of this chapter.

Holiness is being distinct:

John saw the holy city new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, (Rev 21) prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. The city is of gold and clear as glass, with twelve foundations adorned with every kind of precious jewel, and which has names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And it is the splendid and glorious residence of the redeemed, the abode of the righteous. And this is heavenly Jerusalem of hope (Heb 12:22), and where our real citizenship is (Philippians 3:20).

Conclusion:

Christ is sanctified, consecrated and devoted himself to death that there by to purchase eternal salvation for us. The word, agiazw, to consecrate or sanctify, is used in the sense of devoting to death. So Jesus, the sinless man devoted himself to die for the redemption of the world. And he calls upon all who believe in him to imitate his holiness to be a possession and to be with him in New Jerusalem.
But as he who called us is holy, and we must be holy in all our conduct; Strive for peace with all men, without which no one will see the Lord. The call of God, “Sanctify yourselves therefore, and be ye holy” is not only for Israelites, who are in the covenant, but to every person who received baptism in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Therefore, a Christian needs to be holy in order to be God’s own possession. Holiness demands a distinct life to live in the world, but live as those belongs to Christ. This becomes evident in our words and our deeds (I Peter 1:13-16).

Rev. C. Ananda Rao

Krishna Godavari Diocese
Baptism is one of the important Sacrament of the church. The sacrament is the visible sign of the invisible grace and it is one of the solemn Christian rites considered to have been instituted by Jesus Christ to symbolize or confer grace. Through this sacrament the grace of God is assured to the receiver. The term baptize (Greek *baptizein*) means to "plunge" or "immerse" into the water symbolizes the burial into Christ's death and rises up by resurrection with him as a new creature. Holy Baptism is the basis of the whole Christian life and it is the gateway to life in the Spirit and the door which gives access to the other sacraments. Through Baptism we are free from sin and reborn as children of God and become members of Christ body. So let us try to understand the importance of receiving the grace of God through Baptism and its implication to the church which is called as the body of Christ.

1. Grace of God (Baptism) is for the unity of the Church (Body of Christ)

Baptism shows the unity among the believers, especially in the context of Ephesian church, the Baptist brings the Jews and the gentiles into one body through Christ. In Ephesians Ch. 4 apostle Paul calls the church to live worthy of her calling. The primary call of the church is for the unity and he further asks the church to make "every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit" because the church reflects the oneness of God. In Ephesians Ch 1-3, the apostle has elaborated upon the reconciliation between Jews and Gentiles that God has brought through Christ. The repeated use of the word "one" in 2:14-16 (as in 4:4-8) highlights this aspect of the message: the church is "one new humanity" created by Christ. The mystery of the faith (cf. 3:9) is that, through the one body of Jesus, God has brought together two groups under one plan of salvation. While both Jews and Gentiles once lived according to the flesh (2:3), Jews were nevertheless "near" to God, while Gentiles were "far off" (2:17). Through Christ, both groups are now joined together and draw nearer to God. The apostle uses two metaphors to express the joining and the resulting closeness with God. Jews and Gentiles form one body with Christ as its head (1:22-23), and one structure with Christ as its cornerstone (2:21-22). After explaining this apostle again brings in the concept of “one” in Ch. 4 and asks them to strive for the unity and oneness and also to be aware of cunning and deceitful teachings of division inside the Church (4:14). In the life of the Ephesian church unity is seen but it is not uniformity. The mystery of God who is revealed in Christ and results in the reconciliation of Jews and Gentiles does not eliminate the distinctions between these different groups. Instead, what is made known through the church is "the wisdom of God in its rich variety" (3:10). Part of the call Ch. 4:1-16 is for tolerance, or "bearing with one another" (4:2). The appeal for the church is to grow together as one body even though there are some differences among them. The contemporary church has many dividing walls such as race, caste, class, gender and a huge gap between the generations within the church and the traditional and doctrinal differences between the churches. Only through the grace of God through the gift of Christ one can grow to the stature of fullness of Christ from whom the whole body joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly makes the body grow (4:16) With this growth and maturity one can overcome this intra and inter church differences and become one in Christ. Galatians 3:27-28 says “As many of you were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” which means among the baptized there is no division or discrimination all are same and one in Christ. So this again assures that the grace of God through Baptism brings unity in the Church.
2. Grace of God (Baptism) is for the witness of the Church (Body of Christ).

In the early days of the church baptism was a declaration that the person was definitely identifying him/herself with that group of people who were called Christians and were despised and hated. To be a Christian meant persecution, maybe death or it meant being ostracized from family, shunned by friends. When a person submitted to baptism, he/she declared to all the world that I Belong to this despised group, and immediately he/she was persecuted, hated, and despised. In baptism, therefore, the believer entered into the fellowship of the sufferings of Christ. As we read in Gal 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gives himself for me” so it is clear that baptism gives us the courage to be the witnesses by the power of the one who is crucified for us. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book The Cost of Discipleship says “Anybody living in the strength of Christ’s baptism lives in the strength of Christ’s death.” Only through the suffering we can be the witnesses of God and for this Grace of God that is the Baptism is essential. Today for us to be the witnessing Church we should be ready to face the struggles on the path of our ministry. Especially we should be ready to fight for justice and to stand against the evil forces for this will be the true living of Christ’s faithful servants in the society. And for this witnessing community (Church) the gates of hell shall not prevail against and the keys of the kingdom will be given to the church which stood for the justice and peace. (Matt 16: 18,19)

Conclusion

The present day Churches are widely divided into many denominations and some of this divisions are mainly in the name of Baptism. Lack of understanding, wrong teaching, misleading, selfish motives, ego clashes, to show strength- power-status, laziness in learning are some of the important causes which leads the Church into chaos. But what actually this sacrament of Baptism meant is to bring unity and witness. So let us try to understand the important concepts of Baptism and why it was instituted by our God? And try to practice it in a meaningful way. Amen.

Rev. M. Belshiya Ruth
Presbyter, Diocese of Madras.
Every year, the ‘Ecumenical Sunday’ is observed on the Sunday falling between January 18 and January 25, which is known as the ‘Unity Octave’ or ‘Week of Prayer’. While January 18 is celebrated as the ‘Feast of Confession of St. Peter’, January 25 is celebrated as the ‘Feast of Conversion of St. Paul’, and special prayers for unity are jointly prepared by the ‘Pontifical Council for Christian Unity’ (Catholic Church) and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches (umbrella body of Orthodox churches, Anglicans, Baptists, Lutherans, Methodists and Reformed churches, as well as many United and Independent churches). The theme proposed for the Unity Octave or Week of Prayer - 2016 by the ‘Pontifical Council for Christian Unity’ and the Commission on Faith and Order of the World Council of Churches is ‘Called to proclaim the Mighty Acts of the Lord’.

In India, during this Sunday, which is also observed as the National Council of Churches in India Sunday (NCCI Sunday), pulpits are exchanged, and special ecumenical worship services are celebrated. The ‘Commission on Unity, Mission and Evangelism’ of the National Council of Churches in India encourages the Indian Churches to come together for prayer, fellowship and witness during the Week of Prayer. At the same time, the Communion of Churches in India (including the CSI, CNI & Marthoma) observes the Ecumenical Sunday falling in this week with much importance and includes it in the Common Lectionary. For this year’s Ecumenical Sunday, the theme according to the Common Lectionary is ‘United in Love’ which is very relevant in the present Indian context, where hatred and hegemony, injustice and inequality, fascism and fanaticism, seem to be gaining anchor in all realms of life.

The Church of South India, which is the biggest Protestant Church in India with more than 4 Million members, and which is a member Church of the World Council of Churches, National Council of Churches in India and the Communion of Churches in India, has a very specific role to call churches and the nation to be united in love. In fact, ‘unity’ and ‘love’ are two of the core messages of Jesus Christ. He taught us to ‘love each other’, ‘love our enemies’ ‘love our neighbours’ and He also prayed for unity, ‘that they all may be one’. But, what does it mean when we say we are called to ‘unite’ and called to ‘love’? How do we understand unity and love? Are they merely two nouns or verbs, challenging us toward actions of unity and love? Let us explore the depth of these concepts on the basis of the Scripture Portions that have been read to us.

1. THAT YOU MAY LIVE IN OBEDIENCE (Deut. 4: 1-10)

This passage deals with Moses’ call to the Israelites to keep God’s law so that they would live and

i. Enter into the promised land of Canaan: In the broader sense, Moses tries to tell them the importance of obedience to God, in order to live to see the Promised Land. In fact, the disobedience of Israel to God and His chosen ones, had already caused many causalities in the wilderness as what had happened in Baal Peor. (v. 3 He encourages them to live in obedience, saying, “But you who held fast to the Lord your God are alive today, every one of you.” (v. 4).

ii. Witness the greatness of God: Verses 5-10 explains another significance of living in obedience to witness the greatness of God. Moses reminds that Israelites life in obedience to the divine statutes and judgments would attract many others to them and ultimately to their God. The

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people around would say, “For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him?” (vv. 7-8). He further urges them to teach this to their posterity, in order that they too may live fruitfully. (vv. 9-10). The word, ‘Ecumenism’ comes from ‘Oikumene’ (Gk.) which refers to ‘house-hold’, the basis of which is a spiritual union with the One who has called us. Ecumenism cannot take place at the cost of the spiritual statutes and commandments taught in the Bible. For the sake of ecumenism, God does not expect us to get united with ‘Baal’, rather for the sake of mission, He expects us to relate with all, witnessing the true God. It is about a missiological ecumenism that is referred here, where our life in relation with others would attract many to the living God. This is our call as a pilgrim community, called to live and witness God, through Christ, who came to give life in abundance. (Jn. 10:10)

2. THAT YOU MAY LOVE BY GIVING (Jn.15:11-17)

Jesus came to give abundant life, and He did that by loving us to the extent of sharing and giving His own life for us. Through this He has given us a new name from being called as ‘servants’ to be known as His own ‘friends’.

The nature of God is love, and it is in love that He has created us, redeemed us and sustains us. In fact, there is no religion that does not speak about love. For eg., Quran speaks about even ‘righteousness’, in terms of love; “Righteousness is not that you turn your faces toward the east or the west, but [true] righteousness is ..in giving wealth, in spite of love for it, to relatives, orphans, the needy, the traveler, those who ask [for help], and for freeing slaves; [and who] establishes prayer and gives zakah. (2:177). Hinduism too teaches about ‘Nishkamakarma’, meaning, ‘doing karma (including loving others), without any selfish agendas.

The main cause for almost all the problems that our world, our communities, our families and our churches face, is that we are unable to foster a culture of love. What seems to be primary for us is to accomplish our own agendas than accomplishing the divine agenda, for which we subscribe to a relation of alliance than inter-relatedness. In the process, we even tend to promote hostility and hatred, becoming agents of breaking than building relations. Ecumenism cannot happen without loving each other, even our neighbours and enemies, and for this, let our paradigm be our Lord Jesus, who gave His life so that we may live.

3. THAT YOU MAY UNITE IN MIND (I Cor. 1:10-18)

In the Corinth Church, there were devotees of Paul, Appolos, Peter and Christ, leading the Church to different factions. While the devotees of Paul might have been the ‘Gentile slaves’, the devotees of Appolos, the scholar, orator and teacher from the great university city of Alexandria, might have been the intellectuals. Those who followed Peter might have been the conservative Jewish Christians and the Jewish proselytes (so called gentiles who were converted to Judaism) before converting themselves to Christianity. And lastly, since the Corinth Church was a ‘charismatic church’, the devotees of Christ might have been the believers who claimed above all these groups, who claimed the gift of prophecy and other charismatic gifts. In fact, as we read through the Epistles to Corinthians (1st & 2nd), we see that there were divisions that led to the discrimination and marginalization of the ‘poor’, ‘widows’ and ‘gentiles’, affecting even the very worship in the Church.

Hearing about different factions claiming their allegiance and loyalty to him (Paul), Appolos, Cephas (Peter) and Christ, Paul asks, “Is Christ divided?” (v. 13). He urges the Church about the importance of unifying in mind and thought in order to sort out the divisions. For this, he emphasizes the need for the Church to affirm the centrality of Christ, in and through whom we are baptized. The verse 10, explains three tenets of this unity, and they are:

i. Paul calls all of them ‘Brothers (and sisters)’

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ii. Paul appeals in the name of Jesus Christ
iii. Paul urges for a PERFECT unity in mind and thought

This message urging us to an ecumenism within our churches is very relevant in a context where our own churches are divided in the name of doctrines, traditions, legacy, gender, casteism and racism. The constitution and even the Bible are used to justify the domination of certain groups over the other. The centrality of the Church is often shifted from Jesus to our own egos leading to hegemonic domination of some individuals and groups over the other. When this happens, the world would say, ‘Christ is divided’, and we lose our ecumenical vision.

CONCLUSION
Ecumenism is often understood as coming together of the churches alone and we claim to be ecumenical, once our leaders are able to share the same platform. We often forget that the call is for a wider ecumenism, which includes our unity to our creator and all His creations, including the nature, which we often exploit. In ecumenism, there is no space for exploitation, domination and discrimination. It urges for a **unity with the divine**, **charity by sharing** (giving) and **humility in accepting** each other.

May the God Almighty help us to realize His call for us to live an ecumenical life, within the Church and outside the Church, bringing glory to Him and promoting a culture of life and love. Amen.

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Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground. (Genesis 2:7)

1. Human beings created from the earth:

God created us from the earth. Adam from the adama. Humans from the hummus. When God created human, he invited them to till and protect the ground. He created the greens which grow from the ground to nourish (protect) the human beings. When the human beings die, they go back to the earth. So human come from the earth and go back to the earth. Human will protect the earth and the earth will protect the human beings. A perfect cycle of interdependence came into being from the time of creation.

Four rivers flow in the Garden of Eden. They provide water to the human beings. The garden is full of trees and they provide food for the human beings. God created the animals and birds who will be the companions for the human. The human will have relationships with the trees and animals. He will call them by the names. There was a harmonious relationship between the human, animals and plants. They cannot survive without each other.

The flood story is a counter story to the creation story. Earth disappeared. Trees and animals vanished. Human beings perished. Noah and his family along with the species of all living beings became the survivors of the holocaust. They survived only because the earth reappeared along with the flora and fauna. This was to warn the human beings that their survival depended on the survival of the nature (creation).

The book of Genesis is a story of the natural catastrophes. It narrates two global calamities. One was the universal flood. Noah helped the survival of humanity. Second was the severe famine in Egypt. The land refused to bring forth the crops. Joseph helped the survival of humanity.

1. Human beings as living beings (Nephesh hayyah):

And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (ruah) and the man became a living being. He was created as an aesthetic being to see “every tree which is pleasant to the eyes” and taste the fruits which will be “good for food”(v.9). “God formed every animal of the field and every bird of the air and brought them to the man to see what he would call them”. “And whatever the man called every living creature, that was it’s name”(v.19). The man must know how to relate with the ‘tree of knowledge of good and evil’ and ‘the tree of life (v.9). God endowed him with feelings and so he was sent to ecstasy at the time of making the woman from his own body (v.21). He was full of love when the woman was brought to him (v.23). In every detail, the story explains that the man was created with very special qualities.

As the man found an intimate mate in the woman, so God found the human as intimate with Himself. Adam and eve would e conversation partners for God. God teaches them what to eat and what should not be eaten. The center of the garden was overflowing life symbolized in the ‘tree of life’. The
flowing rivers was a great expression of life. The changing seasons and the time showed great harmony. The alternating of day and night, ruled by their respective luminaries, divided the space for man and the animals to work, man to work in the day time and the animals to work in the night. Human beings are very special in the whole creation. They will have dominion over the (stewardship to ) order of creation.

Human soul, or human life, is defined by the surrounding objects of creation. Human relationship to God will depend on how they relate to the nature. When human beings cross the boundaries to eat the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, it will affect their relationship with God. If man eats the forbidden fruit, he may not be able to continue to live in the garden. He may have to become afraid and ashamed. He may have to wear dresses to cover his nakedness if he eats the fruits from the tree of the fruit of good and evil. It is human destiny to live in relation with the created order.

3. In the day that the Lord God made the heaven and the earth:

In the first story, God made the man and woman together on the same day. So they are inseparable. They will cling together even to the extent to forsake the father and the mother. Man and woman are interdependent. In the second story, man and the nature were created together on the same day. So, man and nature are inseparable. Heaven, earth and human beings are intimately bound together.

However, we are rapidly destroying the nature. If we continue along the way we are going, it may lead to the destruction of the earth and humanity. We know that the path we are on as humanity is not sustainable. We are aware of climate change which is a real and a persistent threat. We live in a world where war is preferred over peace. We live in a world where we don’t serve and protect, till and keep humanity and the earth.

We have a choice to make. Are we going to continue to accept that this is the world we live in? Or are we going to return to the garden and our sacred calling as gardeners?

Thankfully, there is a roadmap back to the garden. Jesus came to show us the way back to Eden. The kingdom of God he kept talking about! That’s the garden God wants to lead us to. Jesus shows us the way back to Eden and gives us the tools to serve and protect the garden.

From the beginning, God’s greatest desire for us is to be in relationship with God and with all of the creation. It gives God great delight when we are back to the garden. We have been invited and called to be co-creators with God, breathing life into creation and humanity.

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We live in times where we have experienced the effects of the disturbance of ecological balance and have faced the brunt of nature’s fury. We hear the constant clamor in the media about these inconvenient truths of environmental degradation. It is therefore appropriate for us to reflect on the corruption in creation in the light of the traditional broader theme for the eighth Sunday before Easter on the fall of human. In this meditation a sincere attempt is made to justify (from the scriptural passages) that corruption in creation is the result of a direct and an indirect corrupted life style of human beings. These passages portray the privileged position and the preferential care offered by God as against the indifferent response of the human beings thus helping us to understand the disappointment of God and his inevitable judgement.

1. Corruption in Creation: The Parable of the Unproductive Vineyard

In a direct parable God expresses his disappointment over the unproductive vineyard. Note the care with which God provides the best for the vineyard to flourish. (v.2). God invests everything for its productivity, protection and sustained preservation. But unfortunately the yield was low (v.4). The parable (God is speaking about the people of Israel) doesn’t give reasons for its unproductive state but we can infer that such situation arises largely out of a sluggish and selfish mindset. It reflects a condition in which the vine fails to live up to its full potential. This condition is further explained when we consider the mindset of the servant in the parable of talents who never put to use the one talent he received (Matt 25: 24,25).

An unproductive state in any created order causes an imbalance in the sustenance of the creation. It forces us to ask a pertinent question as to whether we live up to our full potential. Whether as stewards of creation we provide context for every created being to bring out its full potential? Do we flatter to deceive as in the parable of the fig tree? (Mark 11:12-14). Responsible stewardship is the biblical mandate to all humankind. The disappointment of God is a cause for serious introspection.

2. Corruption in Creation: Impact of an Insensitive Lifestyle

Corruption in Creation is also caused by our irresponsible and arrogant lifestyle. He expresses his disappointment with the lifestyle of the people whom he chose to be his representatives in the world –a community through whom God wanted to usher in change. Note the evaluation of God (vs 5-7). God’s evaluations are indicative of the fact that a right relationship with God as reflected in our lifestyle will certainly contribute to a responsible stewardship of creation.

In the second part of the prophetic oracle, the judgment of God on the people is listed. In these verses three areas of concern have been identified.
a. Exploitative materialism is condemned (vs8-10); these verses describe the presence of rampant materialism among the Israelites and the anger of God in destroying them.

b. An uncontrolled behavioural mindset is severely indicted since they have no regard the work of God’s hands. (vs.11&12).

The subsequent verses from vs.13 also point out that an irresponsible lifestyle causes corruption to creeps into creation. Hence there is a need to realise that our failure to establish a good relationship with God is not healthy for the world we live in.

### 3. Corruption in Creation: Solution in Sight

How do we arrest further corruption in creation? Two passages guide us in providing solutions.

a. Psalm 8. This psalm impresses upon all the humankind to consider our condition in the sight of God. What is man? Who is he/she that God is so concerned? Yet why should he give him the dominion over all the creatures’ of the world? A silent reading of these verses helps us to understand the extent to which God continues to trust us! Ths privileged position calls for a response.

b. The passage from the gospel is an expression of the disappointment of Jesus Christ who regrets performing miracles among his people. Had I performed these miracles elsewhere the responsiveness of the people will be more! The pain of Christ calls us to respond with repentance.

Conclusion:

These passages clearly explain that human failure cause corruption in creation and thereby incur the wrath of God. The disappointment and pain of God with our unproductiveness and our irresponsible lifestyle necessitate a genuine repentance both in word and deeds. In spite of our failures God still engages us in the restoration of the creation through Christ Jesus. Will we wake up?
Christmas was a time of learning to be faithful to the signs of the time. It was a time to re-look at the greatest sign God have to human kind in the form of his son, Emmanuel. Jesus was born not in a castle but a cattle shed to associate himself with the marginalized and also to be accessible to both the rich (Magi) and the poor (Shepherds). Phillips Brooks had written “How silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given”. Yes, Jesus is the gift to the humankind, particularly who are awaiting to be liberated and be recognized of their worth. Though Mighty God, Prince of Peace, Wonderful Counsellor and Everlasting Father he fulfilled the law for he came not to abolish the law but to give new meaning to the law.

Luke 2: 21-40 describe the events that followed the visit of the Magi and the Exuberant Shepherds. At the end of eight days, the child was circumcised and was named Jesus. Verse 22 onwards we see the fulfilment of the law concerning the purification of the mother and sanctification of the child through offering sacrifices. Jesus’s presentation in the temple was a ‘divine encounter’ for Simeon, the prophet who was waiting for the consolation of Israel. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death until he had seen the Lord’s Christ. As he grew older, his faith also must have grown strong. Every day, he spent time at the temple waiting and watching for the messiah. The irony is that he was unaware of the messiah’s age or personality. Whether he should look for somebody from the higher crust of the society or lower rung of the society! He did not have a sign to look for. Suddenly, Simoen’s heart leaped within him and immediately he began to sing a song of praise, perhaps ‘the climatic song of Christmas’.

1. **My eyes have seen your Salvation (v.30)**: Simoen’s eyes could see the saviour in Baby Jesus and he could also see the salvation of God’s people who were sincerely waiting for the liberation from the social, economic, political and religious oppressions. People who were exploited and marginalized. God’s partiality with the broken humanity was vivid to the eyes of Simeon when he beheld Jesus. Today, even after more than 2000 years of Christ’s event, we still wait for a sign to believe in him and in his saving power. It is important to re-affirm our faith in the midst of persecutions and unrest in and around us. Christ, the saviour the world is uncontested truth for the believers. But how do we make it appropriate for those Jesus is still a God of the oppressed and downtrodden! After all, salvation is for all.

2. **A light for revelation to the Gentiles (v.32)**: Jesus, presented in the Temple was identified as the light to the Gentiles. Affirming Jesus as the light to the Gentiles needed courage and prophetic vision to Simeon. Gentiles were considered as outcasts or outside the salvific plan of God. Hence affirming Jesus as the saviour of both Jews and Gentiles was the manifestation of the messianic mission of Christ that involves breaking the barriers of discrimination and establishing justice and peace.

3. **Glory to the people Israel (v. 32)**: All the fears and hopes of all generations are met in Jesus Christ. The socio-economic and politico-religious “consolation” was all about the kingdom of God where there is no more tears and no more greed. Since the Saviour had come from the Jews, it is considered a thing to be proud of. But the saviour and the salvation is universal. Inclusive community is the hallmark of God’s kingdom.
While we recall the presentation of Christ in the temple, it is appropriate on our part to emulate the values of Christ that became evident at the auspicious time of his revelation as the saviour. We need to have the urge of Simeon to seek and find him. He surprises us by being available in most unexpected corners of the world. While we find him, let us also strive for the broadening of Christ’s community that lives in peace and solidarity with each other. Let us learn to live by loving, giving and serving, not as lords but as Christ who came not to be served but to serve.

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Lent: A time of Redemption

Isaiah 58:18 1-14    Psalm 6
Rom.2:1-13          John.5:1-9
Eve. Psalm 130      Eph.1:3-14

Introduction:

Lent is not only a period of forty days of fasting before Easter, but also a period of “spring” for spiritual renewal. Redemption is a concept derived from one of the most basic features of human life in society, the urge to exchange something in one’s own possession for something possessed by another. All kinds of objects have been exchanged, normally with the conviction that what was received was equal to or even more valuable than what was given. The terms redemption, redeemer occur frequently in the Old Testament. From its basic meaning to buy back by paying a ‘ransom’: the term was extended to cover major deliverances of any kind whether or not a payment is involved. This term is suitably coined in the context of liberation of the Hebrew tribes from the bondage of their Egyptian oppressors and further from Babylonian captivity. In the New Testament as Peter describes, that it was a costly process involving the precious blood of Christ (I Peter 1: 18 – 19). Paul agrees with the costly price, as freedom from bondage to sin, the law, demonic powers could now be appropriated by faith (Romans 3: 24) and it would be enjoyed in part by the redeemed would receive its fulfilment in the age to come (Rom 8: 23). Paul confirms this fact when he writes, “you are not your own for you have been bought with a price, you were once the slaves to Satan but you now belong to Christ and so you are truly free” (I Cor. 6: 19 – 20). The price that Satan demanded for our release was the blood of Christ, a ransom for many. Jesus’s use of the ransom illustrates two main points – the great power of sin and of Satan and the terrible cost of salvation. The most eloquent celebration of Christian redemption is found in Ephesians 1: 7, 14 & 4: 30. The author of Epistle to Hebrews also says that all earthly deliverances are but types and models of the eternal redemption which Christ has obtained for us (Hebrews 6: 4). With this background in view let us reflect on the theme of this day with the appointed scripture portions.

Redemption from Religionism:

The Old Testament portion for this day Isaiah 58: 1 – 14 contains the classic voice of prophecy as in Micah 6: 8 and James 1: 26 – 27. God does not desire sacrifice of material things. He asks us to be just and merciful to our fellow human beings and to live in humble obedience to God. Prophet Isaiah vehemently condemns the false religion as well as religious fundamentalism. A heart that is pure toward God cannot be indifferent toward other human beings in delivering others’ in Christ’s name; we ourselves are delivered (Isaiah 58: 9 – 12). Jesus also proclaims the same message (Mathew 22: 36 – 40). Jesus also teaches the right way of observing fasting (Mathew 6: 16 – 18). In the last two verses (Isaiah 58: 13 – 14), prophet Isaiah reminds the readers of the importance of the Sabbath not in legalistic terms but in loving terms. If we claim to love the Lord we should also love the Sabbath day. To the Jews Sabbath was part of God’s original plan for every one as well as an integral part of the law.

The observation of Sabbath takes a new dimension after the resurrection and it moves from the last to the first day of the week. Danger of neglecting the union with God’s people which results in the failure to encourage each other (Hebrews 10: 25) must be avoided. We are not expected to use the day of rest merely for our pleasure, rather we should use it for God’s purpose in us including rest and worship. This makes the redemption we got in Jesus Christ meaningful and pure. Let us challenge the society at large with the words of John Wesley the founder or Methodism “There is no holiness but social holiness”.

Redemption from Legalism:

According to John 2 : 1 – 11, the gospel portion of this day, the redemptive act revealed through the transformation of Jewish legal system into the supply of good wine out of water. Jewish legal system
typified by the ceremonial jars was partial and imperfect. The renewal of life and salvation to which all religious ceremonies point could not be achieved by legal means. The real meaning of Jewish religious customs is fulfilled and made new only by Jesus, who transforms the old ceremonial system into something which human could experience. Jesus’s command to the servants to fill the jars with water was His first step towards remedying the situation. What we do know is that the transformation was done by Jesus and the servants proved their loyalty, trust and obedience. Here the focus is on Jesus, the source of life and joy. As in India the most important guests were seated in such feasts in Palestine too. Accordingly they drank the good wine, and later poorer wine was served to insignificant guests. Jesus overturns the human tradition and supplies the latter wine for those who are supposed to get inferior wine. Here we are reminded of God’s favour to less privileged in society. The insignificant ones get the best wine. The joyful good wine of the gospel has replaced the water of Jewish legalism. The Church as a redeemed community tends to empower others particularly the weaker section in the Church and society to enjoy the privileges equally or even more than what they enjoy every day. The so called legalism should not hinder the Church in its ongoing mission. Only with the presence of Jesus we can turn the world upside down. Jesus marvelled at the faith of centurion (Mathew 8: 8) who was an oppressor, yet had a liberative faith.

Redemption from Moralism
The Epistle portion for this day Romans Chapter 2, verses 1 – 13, gives a picture of God’s righteous judgement, not only to the Church at Rome but also to all. Jews had the habit of judging other people; they especially judged non-Jews, the Gentiles. They were proud of their history and the law given to them. But they were not loyal to God who chose them as special people. They counted themselves righteous. But God’s judgement is impartial. He judges according to truth, deeds and the light the person has. Hence, there arises no discrimination between Jews and Gentiles. His judgement is inescapable and righteous. We tend to judge others for the very sins we are committing ourselves. Paul warns that God’s patience is not tolerance of sin but a period of truce that gives us chances to repent.
Morality is common to all and many moralizers are blind to their own wrong doing. The truth is that all of us are involved in sin and no one is excluded. God judges those who would judge others. Hence, we as human beings, the redeemed sinners are liable to look only at our own sins and leave judgment to God who alone is righteous.
Conclusion
Redemption wrought for us leads to the Liberation we have achieved in Christ our liberator. The liberated one is called to liberate his people. The local Church is endowed with leadership for its own context. Leadership is not a reward but a task entrusted. The leadership in bringing redemption does not consist in exploiting this role and being served by others. “The son of Man did not come to be served, he came to serve and to give him to ransom for many” (Mark 10: 45). It is worth remembering the striking statement of the former Moderator Victor Premsagar who said: “Servanthood should not be interpreted as an exercise in domestication and hearing with Status quo but an active participation in the struggle”. Let our observance of Lent redeem us from being ritualistic victims of religionism, legalism and moralism.

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Cross: A Call to Vicarious Suffering

1 Kings 17: 12 – 24
Phil. 2:1-11
Psalm 102
Mark 8:31-38

Introduction:

Though Cross of Christ is central to the theme of vicarious suffering, it is neither the first nor the last example. In the biblical history there are many examples of vicarious suffering. It is important to recollect some of them.

1. Examples of vicarious suffering from Biblical History:

   **Joseph:** The first and foremost is the story of Joseph. From childhood he suffers at the hands of his brothers, sold to Ishmaelites, rescued by the Midianites out of a pit, who in turn sell him to the Egyptians. He lands himself in jail because of his honesty to himself and to his God. It is there miracles happens that he comes out of the jail through his interpretation of the dreams and his genius makes him to land in the palace as Prime Minister. All his suffering thus far was a means to save his family and also the Egyptian nation from famine. He stood faithful to the end. He is one of the finest characters in the Bible.

   **Moses:** Then, let us look at the story of Moses. He was born in utter poverty, raised up in plenty in the king’s palace but decides to be with his people in their suffering. God calls him at the age of 80 years to lead the people of Hebrews out of Egypt, the house of bondage. For the next 40 years it is a life of suffering leading the people in the desert. He suffers more for the stubbornness of the people rather than anything else. The climax of his suffering comes when the Lord prohibits him from entering into the Promised Land. Having led the people thus far 40 years and being on the verge of entering, he is stopped from entering. What must have been his suffering! But he obeys the Lord God. He played his role as a faithful servant of the Lord and earned the name as the faithful in all the household of God.

   **Jeremiah:** Another finest example. Jeremiah one of the foremost prophets along with Isaiah can be also considered as an example of vicarious suffering. A contemporary of Isaiah before the exile into Babylon seemed to have suffered a great deal at the hands of the authorities religiously and politically. Isaiah who himself wrote about suffering servant of the Lord, we do not know whether he was referring to himself or the Israel as a collective community or of a future messiah who suffers for sake of others. The NT interpretation of the suffering servant passages referring to Jesus has found a common acceptance. However Jeremiah who is depicted as the prototype of Jesus, suffers a lot for sake of his people. He decides to stay with the suffering people in Jerusalem rather than accept the invitation of the king of Babylon to go over there as a royal guest. What an example of humility and vicarious suffering!

   **Jesus:** Now, Jesus of Nazareth, an example par excellence in vicarious suffering. He even describes his mission as one of suffering. The Son of Man has come not to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many. St. Mark 10.45. He was thirsty, he was hungry, he had no physical comforts whatsoever. He demands his followers also to do same. “He who wants to follow me must take up his cross and follow me”.

   All the Apostles who were his disciples do the same and it is commonly accepted that all of them died being persecuted.

   St. Paul, a later apostle does suffer and die for sake of the gospel of Christ. All this is well known to the church. But I want to point to some important examples from history who suffer vicariously. Let us look at Bishop Polycarp.

2. Examples of vicarious suffering from Church History:

   **Polycarp** AD 69 – 156) was a 2nd-century Christian bishop of Smyrna. In the Martyrdom, Polycarp is recorded as saying on the day of his death, “Eighty and six years I have served Him, and He has done...”
me no wrong”, which could indicate that he was then eighty-six years old or that he may have lived eighty-six years after his conversion. Polycarp goes on to say "How then can I blaspheme my King and Savior? You threaten me with a fire that burns for a season, and after a little while is quenched; but you are ignorant of the fire of everlasting punishment that is prepared for the wicked." Polycarp was burned at the stake and was pierced with a spear for refusing to burn incense to the Roman Emperor. On his farewell, he said "I bless you Father for judging me worthy of this hour, so that in the company of the martyrs I may share the cup of Christ."

**Joan of Arc:** After some centuries we have the story of a girl called Joan of Arc in France. **Joan of Arc** c. 1412 – 30 May 1431) nicknamed "The Maid of Orléans“ is considered a heroine of France for her role during the Lancastrian phase of the Hundred Years' War, and was canonized as a Roman Catholic saint. She gained prominence after the siege was lifted. She was responsible for several additional swift victories led to Charles VII's coronation at Reims. This long-awaited event boosted French morale and paved the way for the final French victory.

**John Huss:** Around the same time we have the story of John Huss, a reformer who lived much before the actual Reformation in the 16th century. **Jan Huss** (1369 – 6 July 1415), often referred to in English as **John Huss** or **John Huss**, was a Czech priest, philosopher, early Christian reformer and Master at Charles University in Prague. After John Wycliffe, the theorist of ecclesiastical Reformation, Hus is considered the first Church reformer, as he lived before Luther, Calvin and Zwingli. Huss was a key predecessor to the Protestant movement of the sixteenth century, and his teachings had a strong influence on the states of Europe, most immediately in the approval of a reformist Bohemian religious denomination, and, more than a century later, on Martin Luther himself. He was burned at the stake for heresy against the doctrines of the Catholic Church, including those on ecclesiology, the Eucharist, and other theological topics. What an example for the sake of the freedom of expression.

**William Tyndale:** There is the story of the English scholar who was put to death for translating the Bible into English, namely William Tyndale. Today we all enjoy reading the Bible in English, but a great prize had to be paid by his life for doing the translation. **Tyndale** was then strangled and burnt at the stake in the prison yard, Oct. 6, 1536. His last words were, "Lord, open the king of England's eyes." This prayer was answered three years later, in the publication of King Henry VIII's 1539 English “Great Bible”.

**Archbishop Romero:** Óscar Arnulfo Romero Galdámez (August 15, 1917 - March 24, 1980) was a prominent Roman Catholic priest in El Salvador during the 1960s and 1970s becoming Archbishop of San Salvador in 1977. After witnessing numerous violations of human rights, he began to speak out on behalf of the poor and the victims of repression. This led to numerous conflicts, both with the government in El Salvador and within the Catholic Church. After speaking out against U.S. military support for the government of El Salvador, and calling for soldiers to disobey orders to fire on innocent civilians, Archbishop Romero was shot dead while celebrating Mass at the small chapel of the cancer hospital where he lived. The archbishop had foreseen the danger of assassination and had spoken of it often, declaring his willingness to accept martyrdom if his blood might contribute to the solution of the nation's problems. "As a Christian," he remarked on one such occasion, "I do not believe in death without resurrection. If they kill me, I shall rise again in the Salvadoran people."

**Graham Staines:** (1941 – 22 January 1999) was an Australian Christian missionary who, along with his two sons Philip (aged 10) and Timothy (aged 6), was burnt to death by a gang while sleeping in his station wagon at Manoharpur village in Keonjhar district in Odisha, India on 22 January 1999. He had been working in Odisha among the tribal poor and lepers since 1965. Some Hindu groups alleged that Staines had forcibly converted or lured many Hindus into Christianity; Staines' widow Gladys denied these allegations, and continued to live in India caring for leprosy patients until she returned to Australia in 2004. In 2005 she was awarded the fourth highest civilian honour in India, Padma Shree, in recognition for her work with leprosy patients in Odisha.

3. **Reflection: 'CROSS; A CALL TO VICARIOUS SUFFERING'**

The cross continues to stand as a symbol of suffering and in reference to Christ as a symbol of vicarious suffering. Many have suffered in history for many reasons but a few have suffered for the sake of others, which is vicarious suffering. We have seen a few examples from biblical history and

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also from church history. What does it mean for us? One of the early church fathers/theologians has said that the church is built on the blood of the martyrs. How true it is? The church does not live by its money or administration or its wealth but church lives by its faith to the extent of losing one’s life for sake of it. Joseph, Moses, Jeremiah and others in OT times, Jesus of Nazareth, his disciples/apostles, later St. Paul and others and in church history saints like Bishop Polycarp, reformers like John Huss, bible translators like William Tyndale and modern saints who stood for justice for the poor like Archbishop Romero and Graham Staines stand as shining examples of inspiration.

Church is a comfortable zone for many. Church is a shelter for some. Church is a rescue home for others. But church is also a place of suffering for a few for the sake of the faith. In the journey of faith, we recite the various experiences of Jesus on earth. During the season of Lent his time of suffering and death is recalled, some by sentiment, others by practice and some others by routine doing. Can we experience first-hand what it means to suffer for the sake of others like that of the examples we have seen in this meditation? Do we ever suffer for the sake of others? Do we ever think of suffering for Christ? Do you ever risk forsake of Christ? Fasting for spiritual purification rather than calling for justice (Isaiah 58), judgement and self-criticism rather than seeking Gods righteous judgement (Romans 2) and healing of body rather than blaming others (John 5) may have become our practices of Lent. But God wants that we may take a share of his suffering. “For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, ... in order that I may gain Christ, ... that I may know him and the power of his resurrection and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead”. Philippians 3.8-11. What an example that St. Paul sets for us! And listen to what St. Peter says, “... rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.” 1Peter 4.13. Amen.

The Rt. Rev. Dr. P. Surya Prakash  
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Being with outcasts and Marginalized

Esther 4:1-17    Psalm 43
Acts.15:12-21    Mark 1:40-45

Introduction

Caste practices constantly create outcasts and centers are sustained at the life-expense of the margins. Even in the development and much hyped democratic era of post-globalization seems no exception for this tendency. In every age people and communities are invented by the dominant and powerful social systems as outcasts and marginalized. Outcasts are socially excluded individuals or communities on the basis of stratification. Society can be stratified by many means. The system with its religio-cultural censorship power sets certain standards of living mostly justifying the privileged position and ongoing status of the dominant. They sanction regulations and rules both for the adherents of the system and also for the segregated of the system. These dominant-defined requirements in fact put much pressure on the already thrown-outs to maintain any system of oppression. By sanctions and subsidies the system controls the marginal lives of the outcasts and tries to suppress any attempt for rebellion and protest. People with mental and physical ailments are often seen and considered as the burden of the developing humanity and therefore they are not counted as individuals with intrinsic worth. Religions played a notorious role in ostracizing such communities as bad omens and they many a times kept away them from the public practices of rituals and festivals. Communities are deprived of their fundamental rights of life with dignity and equal access to resources. Even in a nation like India, the largest democracy in the world, in this era of postmodernity too, communities are being targeted and tarnished publically because they hold a different life perspective in the society. Religious fanatics who crept into the political arena defame the dignity of minority communities and people are being brutally killed by mobs for just being a Dalit or an Islam or for eating beef. Outcast and marginalized communities are people who are religiously and politically oppressed for being different in their life approaches.

The scripture portions for today’s meditations are evidence for the dominants’ attempts to marginalize certain people for having their ideas of life. In Esther 4:17, we see Haman by skillfully tricking the King Ahasuerus to obtains a royal decree to annihilate all the Jews from the kingdom only because a Jew, Mordecai, the uncle of Queen Esther hesitated to pay obeisance to him. But there we see the Jews, with Esther and Mordecai as their leaders, though they were in exile and in their limits, attempts to abort the plot of Haman by invoking the guidance of God. Acts 15 is the context of the first Christian council at Jerusalem where the early church debate on the challenges of Gentile Christianity. And some in the council, especially believers from the Pharisaic background objects the inflow of the gentile to the faith and they insist on the practice of circumcision. We know this has become hardcore issue in the early church and the certain people were ousted from the faith fold for not conforming to the dominant standards. Mk 1:40-45 presents the leper as the outcast and marginalized in the text and his encounter with Jesus sets a liberative paradigm for “being with the outcast and marginalized”.

The Requesting Leper- Search for a Space in the Society

Mark 1 depicts Jesus as God’s messenger of the Reign of God. The gospel narrative directly presents Jesus of Nazareth as the embodiment of the liberative mission of God and as he begins his public appearance at the Synagogue in Capernaum on a Sabbath confronting and healing the demoniac. This episode of Jesus healing the leper follows his preaching ministry through the region of Galilee. Mk 1:39 concludes by mentioning the location and nature of his ministry by stating that “...he went through out Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons”. Therefore his healing exorcisms have to be theologically seen as the process of sanctifying the lives of the people by chasing out evil forces that enslave them. The geographical location of the situation is not specifically informed in the text. Surely, it is not in the synagogue, because a person who is declared
by the religious leaders as a leper cannot enter a public place according to the Leviticus codes. Leviticus 13:45 specifies that lepers are to wear torn clothes, let their hair hang loose, and cry out “unclean, unclean” when approached. They are to live outside the city or village because leprosy was considered as the contagious, communicable disease and any contact with leper will contaminate the other and they will be regarded as religiously impure. However, they were allowed to beg at city gate during the day time (2Kings 7:3-9). All these assumptions on the disease of leprosy and of leper points the context of the narrative in Mk 1:40-45 to a street near the boundary of the city or town. This location is in fact a social situation of marginality.

This leper is declared as the outcast and marginalized because of his contagious disease. But we see him as struggling and fighting leper. He approaches Jesus, kneeling and requesting not his technical mercy in terms of money or anything else. Rather he request Jesus to declare him clean and make him whole and restore him to the social fabric. In antiquity, leprosy was considered as an incurable epidemic and healing was almost improbably other than the intervention of God. The leper approaches Jesus to wish him to make him clean and restore his identity to the larger society, perhaps because the priests who are religiously assigned to preside over the ritual of religious cleansing might have rejected to do it so. Hence this action of the leper has to be seen as the highlight of the event and his drawing close to Jesus, kneeling and breaking up the silence and safe area of contact must be interpretatively acknowledged as the “body language of faith”. He also challenges Jesus to use his divine prerogative to “choose to heal him and declare him as a normal human being like anyone else.” The outcast, poor and marginalized are searching ways and means to find a definite space in the social realm. It is the responsibility of the church, as the community of Christ to be with them in their struggles for liberation.

The Healing Jesus- The Body Language of Compassion

Jesus really considers the challenge of the leper. He not only dare to heal the leper and make him whole, rather engages in a radical body language to hold the leper close to him and explicit his will to declare him clean. The leper might not intend this action. He just wanted a declaration by someone that he healed of his leprosy and therefore no longer an outsider of the community. He needs a representative from the other side or a person from the side of the society who stigmatized him as unclean because of his skin disease, to publically proclaim his as a human with self-worth and dignity. The statement “Jesus simply moved with pity” may not be the right way to present what Jesus really did at that point. Jesus was infuriated, not because leper has challenged him or he has a wavering faith, but rather he is upset and therefore angry with system that throws the people out from their own living situations. Just pronouncing the words of healing could be enough to fulfill the purpose of healing, but he surprises even the leper by touching as symbol of the presence of the age of divine salvation. He feels the pain of the leper as an outcast and a socially dead and invalid body, and therapeutically shares the declared uncleanness of the leper. The leper experienced a touch after a long time. A human touching the other human as an act of solidarity and love. If it is in right and loving intension every touch has healing power. It is imperative for the church to descend from its holy and clean places and moves to the margins of the society and identify herself as the community of Christ and therefore of hope.

Proclaiming Leper- The Celebration of Liberation

Jesus sends the leper back to the religious authorities to present him as testimony against them. It means that he is physically restored and therefore able to perform his religious responsibility. But the leper responds subversively. He began to the message of his healing. For him this experience cannot be kept a secret. It has to be celebrated commonly. He in fact celebrates the touch of the healer. Jesus by his action cast him to the priests to testify against them. Jesus’ mission with the outcast and marginalized challenges the religious centers to change their attitude towards the people at the margins. Jesus sends him to the Temple with deep groaning and snorting and growling. The system
again exploits the poor with further religious sanctions. However, the leper chose not to comply with the religious requirement, rather goes out to celebrate the liberation at the margins. He experienced the savior at the margins. The church is the proclaiming community like this leper who experienced the touch of the liberator and this proclamation is the continuation mission of Jesus to touch and feel the outcasts and marginalized.

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[KUTS]
Healing in Sickness

Exodus 4:10-17  Psalm 103:1-10
II Cor. 12:1-10  John.9:1-7
Eve.2 Kings 20:1-11  2 Cor.12:1-10

The vile of sickness is prevalent in the whole creation of this biosphere. Every living thing is affected with it at some point of lifetime. What is sickness? Is it the temporary or a permanent loss and the absence of health? How does it affect the creation of God? When it comes to a human being, how are they disturbed by the sickness? How do human beings cope up with it? What are the measures they take to get rid of it and be restored back to health? As the “called out community of Christ,” the immediate reaction to sickness is to seek God’s intervention. This is because, our God, both in the Old Testament and Jesus Christ in the New Testament is depicted as a “Healing God.” Therefore, the belief of health and healing in God is so strong and vital for a Christian.

The Biblical scripture being the source of the faith journey is replete with narratives on sickness and healing in the lives of individuals and communities. The scripture points out the root causes of sickness and disease as disobedience to God, curse of God, retribution (or punishment) from God, testing of one's faith, source of refinement, unworthy participation in the Holy Eucharist and so on. Moreover, we have acquired much knowledge about all that is related to sickness. This knowledge is primarily received through the advancing medical research. The same God also brings healing through God’s Word, his presence and his compassionate touch. We also receive God’s healing through the “Broken Body of Jesus.”

How do we see the whole concept of the experience of health? Is it about wholeness in the body alone? Sickness basically affects the physical body, be it one organ or organ systems. The body is a composite of constituents of the hot bed of emotions, desires and there are people living with unhealed sickness too. How do we respond to the thoughts, actions, and behaviours which exhibit sickness? Sickness affects the whole person of the individual. Also, it disturbs the environment in the family and friends. Nevertheless, the God we see in the scripture heals, restores and brings Shalom or wholeness to the individual and those in the circle.

The texts for this Sunday explain God’s attitude towards the sick and his purpose in afflicting with sickness at times.

The narrative of God’s demonstration of healing virtue in and through Moses in Ex. 4: 10-17 is, firstly, to lead him to dedicate himself to God’s mission. Secondly, to redeem God’s people from Egypt, and finally, to overpower the social, political, cultural and religious powers in and of Egypt.

The essence in the Psalm 103: 1-10 is healing in its wholeness, from sin, the eternal damnation and weariness.

The healing of the Person with congenital visual impairment by Jesus in St.John 9:1-10 is, firstly to reverse the disorders that are naturally acquired by/from birth. Secondly, to restore him to the mainstream of social and religious life, and finally to overturn the doctrines of sin-sickness.

St Paul’s experience of perennial sickness in 2 Cor. 12: 1-10 asserts the truth that there are sicknesses that are permanent. In such a situation, what is underlined is the ever abiding accompanying grace and the presence of Christ.

Having reflected on the prescribed texts, taking the current context into consideration, healing can be received through many ways. We must accept the truth that it is the same healing God that has made provisions for God’s healing virtue to flow through many channels. Therefore, accessing the healing virtue of God is our prerogative.

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The mandate on our Church is to become God’s Channel of healing presence and touch. We as the body of Christ shoulder the responsibility to render our Accompanying Presence to the sick. When sickness is permanent, it becomes the responsibility of both the family as well as the church to accept the person and accompany him/her with the compassion of Christ. Soothing words and empathetic presence can bring inner healing that is visible only to the afflicted.

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Stephen the first Martyr

II Chronicles 24: 17-22            Psalm 31: 1-5
Acts 7: 51-60                       Matt. 10: 16-22

Introduction:

In the early history of the church, from the 1st century of the Christian era to the present time persecution and martyrdom are central to the experience of Christianity. The people of faith have suffered persecution in different form as a result of their faith. They shine as bright light in the darkness of this world. As Tertullian observed, ‘the blood of the martyr is the seed of the church’. The word “Martyr” is a transliteration of the Greek word for “Witness”. The martyrs have borne witness to “Jesus Christ” (Rev.1:5) by their lives and by their deaths. Stephen has the distinction of being the first to ever sacrifice his life for the cause of Christ. So he is known as the first Christian martyr of early church. As Jesus said that you will be my witnesses….. to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8), we are called to be a true witness in this world for Christ. Let us discuss the characteristics of a true witness through the life and witness of Stephen.

Stephen was one of the seven chosen by the early Christian church to deal with a dispute over the distribution of food to the needy and poor widows, while the apostles devoted themselves for their spiritual tasks of prayer and securing the word (Acts 6:1-6). He was chosen for having good reputation among the people.

1. Stephen the braver defender of faith

Stephen was known for his great and unshakable faith (Acts 6:5). James 2:17 says that faith by itself, if it has no work, is dead. So faith with work is the fundamental characteristic of a true witness. Stephen was not only exercising his faith by working for the poor and needy but also defended his faith courageously even as the stones were crushing his body. Nothing could stop the witness and faith of Stephen. His commitment to Christ was unwavering and his devotion was unending. According to Matt. 10:22, “the one who endures to the end will be saved”, Stephen fought a good fight, finished his race and kept his faith till the end of his life in the midst of suffering and saw the glory of God.

2. Stephen the powerful proclaimer of the word of God

Stephen came to know Christ through Peter the apostle. Though he had not seen Jesus Christ, he knew the one in whom he had put his trust. So boldly he spoke to the world around him through his dynamic proclamation of the God’s word. In Luke 21:15, Christ promised his followers, “For I will give you words and wisdom that none of your opponents will be able to withstand or contradict”. He did that just with Stephen. Stephen preached a longest sermon in which he charged the so called leaders of high council of Sanhedrin the Scribes and Pharisees for persecuting the prophets of God that had been sent to them just as their fathers. Stephen went on to say ‘you have betrayed and murdered the Messiah too, because you are deaf to God’s message of coming of Messiah, though you had a great privilege of receiving God’s Law, yet you have not obeyed it’. As Stephen let us raise our voice against the existing problems of money, power and positions which dominates and corrupts the holiness of the church today and challenge the church to take stand as a true witness for Christ in this world.

3. Stephen the forgiver of persecutors

To err is human, to forgive is divine. While the Jewish leaders gnashing their teeth and stoning against Stephen to death, he looked into the Lord as he was dying. And he prayed for them and for their forgiveness, just like Christ had done on the cross. Stephen had the heart of forgiveness because

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of the Holy Spirit that filled his heart with God’s love. Stephen confidently faced his end, and committed his spirit into the hands of God and received the crown of glory as promised in Rev.2:10.

**Conclusion:**

Stephen lived a short life and made great impact on Christianity through his life and witness for Christ. After his death the gospel scattered into the ends of the world. So let us recall the Stephen’s unwavering faith, powerful message and the heart of forgiving enemies, and recommit ourselves to do God’s ministry effectively.

**Rev. Pramila**

**CSI Coimbatore Diocese**
Releasing from the Burden of Sin

The act of true introspection and confession, in the light of God and victimized human (cosmic) agencies, commences the journey of "the self" to be released from the clutches of sin. This journey engages in faith dynamics and its correlativity between the subjectivity and the objectivity with the discipline of doing "theology". "Theos" becoming the center of "Demos" and "Demos" becoming the apex of "Theos’ is the essence of Christology and this mystic reality is overwhelmed at the CROSS of Jesus. "Amartia" the Greek word for sin, means "missing the way of the mark"; i.e. missing God’s way or God’s will which webs in the just and equal life for all men and women with mutual respect and mutual consensus. The un-even socio economic political and cultural world systems explicit the multiple predicaments in the life of individuals and particularly in the pathos of the margins of every society. Most of the time we rustle with “God’s Will” and misunderstand it with our own vested interests and aspirations. The parochialistic and imperialistic ideologies always contest with the’ Will of God’ (which is good, righteous and love (Romans 12-1, 2)). “Turning to GOD’ is the constant call God to human kind to visualize his purpose of creation to live in peace and justice with its totality. Even though God is a God of Individuals his care and concerns accepts every one equally in his folder of fellowship and celebration with its cosmic plurality, dignifying the uniqueness of all creation and denying the monopoly of the powerful. Thus we Pray” Thine is thy Kingdom power and Glory” Amen!

The act of adultery by KING David coasted a life of his own devoted loyalist; Uriah, and exploited Uriah’s Wife Bathsheba, a voiceless and a powerless woman, and killed an innocent new born child, as an aftermath of his own immoral and unethical attitudes. When we microscope the cause of decease of the infant on the psychological accounts, the possibility of hermeneutics suggest the Phobia of the mother, (on the king was the murderer and an exploiter) would have caused it. This periscope translates the operation of power and authority of an irresponsible king and his extreme abuse of authority blind the life of a Good Committed, Sincere Citizen.

“Authority matters”, per se the prophetic voice of Nathan “ YOU ARE THE MAN” reveals the Condemnation of God to David and to all those who abuse power. For, leadership is nothing but the cohesive authorization of people (Majority who exercise their franchise) in a democratic set up to govern with true values of care and cooperation for one other for their welfare. Even though democracy is a government of, by and for the people, the representatives (the legal proxies), square them like monarchs is an ongoing challenge. This story dictates how women are being subjugated by “the Powerful” and also the death of Infant, previewing the dangerous lifelessness for the future generation when power being abused.

Everyone has a power and authority at different realms, but the common demand for a theological praxis is setting our faith trajectories, in depowering the negative constructs such as hatred culture, pessimistic attitudes, jealously, pride, ultimate individualism, selfishness, etc. and to forward the obligatory agenda for all, by introspecting our usage of our power in building healthy relationship to realize the presence of the Body OF CHRIST. The Immediate options to care and empower the marginalized and the transformation from the roots of Self will be an exuberating act of spirituality during lent.

Acts 8:4-8 reveal that there is overwhelming joy to the individuals and people around when a person is healed and also released from the burden of Sin. Simeon the magician’s episode reminds that when

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a person sins, he/she loses the spirit of God. “Repent, therefore, of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity (v.22 & 25) indicate the burden of the guilt of sin which not only calls for the wroth of God but also points to the necessity of repentance. Gospel portion Mt.2:1-12 is a clear evidence to the fact that God helps those who seek him sincerely from sinning. God would rather like us to be partners with him in serving the needy and protecting his creation than being partners with the wicked. Let us strive for the joy that comes from the redemption and being partners with God.

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Boundaries are set and created. Boundaries can be altered or removed. Often the boundaries are created to make divisions within, among, and beyond relationship or dealings with people, nations and so on. Acknowledging something, which is beyond the boundaries, can be blissful or doom. However, it has to be shaken and removed in order to experience what had been hidden behind it. Faith is the essence of belief. Bible is full of faith experiences of people, nations, and groups. Finding faith within the boundaries is an easy task whereas, finding faith beyond boundaries is a courageous act; it calls for attention, proof and credibility before it is acknowledged and affirmed. The theme given for today’s meditation is a call, an invitation, or a challenge to acknowledge faith beyond the boundaries. The act of acknowledging involves a conscious effort to see, understand, and affirm things in a different way. Jesus’ ministry involved recognizing and responding people, cultures, and nations beyond the boundaries. Christians, the followers of Jesus Christ are called to emulate Jesus’ model of acknowledging faith beyond boundaries in order to make the Kingdom of God realized here on earth. Acknowledging faith beyond the boundaries involves the following:

1. Affirming God’s works in faith beyond the boundaries. (Isa. 44: 28 - 45: 1-8)

The Old Testament passage foretells of the favors God designed for his people, the Israel long before they went into captivity. These favors are definite although it involves great difficulties in the way of their deliverance from captivity. By Divine power, all the difficulties were removed. The Deliverer of his people from the captivity is appointed or chosen by God. In the passage, we read that the Spirit of the King Cyrus of Persia was ‘Stirred up by the Lord’ so that he liberated the people of Israel, who were then in exile in Babylon and enabled them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild the temple and the city of Jerusalem (Ezra. 1:1). King Cyrus was called as ‘God’s anointed’, he was designed and qualified for this greatest service by the Spirit of God, though he was not a Jew. It was the greatest honor to be employed as instruments of the divine favor.

As we read the Chapter 45:1-8, it unfurls the divine design that God had made for the deliverance of His people Israel. The gates of Babylon that led to the river were left open that the King Cyrus marched his army into the empty channel. The Lord went before him, showing the way to the cities to be besieged. He gave his treasures, which had been hidden, in secret places. The important truth to be noted here is, the God who used King Cyrus as an instrument in his Divine Design is true God who the King Cyrus not know, yet did God foreknew him and called him by his name. The exact fulfillment of the prophecy enabled Cyrus to know and affirm that Jehovah was the only true God and it was for the sake of God’s people Israel, King Cyrus had been prospered What we need to learn is that, God works out His plan for His people, one of the ways could be through secular leaders who had nothing to do with the faith of the people or the church. In the great deliverance story of Israel from the Pharaoh’s bondage, God through his mighty works enabled both the children of Israel and the enemy-Pharaoh and his people to understand that God is above all. Human beings are called to acknowledge God’s mighty and mysterious ways and have faith in him. Acknowledging Faith or God’s works always involved crossing religious, cultural and physical boundaries. Unless one goes beyond these boundaries, it is not possible to acknowledge the best behind it. In this passage, the Israel was called to do this act of faith, trusting God and God’s works beyond the boundaries for His people. Exo.14: 13-14 says “be still and know that I am the Lord.” This slogan led Israel from the Pharaoh’s bondage into the Promised Land and from the Babylonian captivity into liberated life in Christ through Jesus the redeemer. As the faithful, it is our responsibility to affirm God’s works in the midst of the cross - cultural boundaries with faith and have courage to discern the divine design for our lives and for the Church on the Earth in order to experience the liberative salvation in Jesus Christ to all who come to Him in faith. Faith crosses the boundaries with courage and confidence and experiences happiness and deliverance.
2. Responding to the challenges in a creative manner (Acts. 10: 23-33)

The Epistle reading talks about the fact that God’s attitude to people is not determined by any external criteria. The intention of separation between clean and unclean is to uphold the identity of Jewish religion and community. Thus, the social contact between Jews and Non-Jews ceased to exist. Therefore, Peter in his address says it is unlawful for the Jew to associate with other nation (Vs. 28). The charge brought against Paul was that “he also brought Gentiles into the temple and has defiled this holy place. (21:28). Jesus consistently kept hostile towards such racial approach sanctioned by religion; hence the Jewish authorities came in conflict with Jesus. (Luke. 4: 26-27; 6: 1-11; 11: 37).

On the other hand, Jesus always emphasized that it is not the ritual cleanliness that is important but moral sensitivity, ethical life and social justice are required. Through the vision at Joppa, the Holy Spirit led Peter to grasp the fullness of truth. There is nothing naturally unclean in the world created by God and sanctified by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. No man or people are ritually impure, unclean, or defiled. By the vision and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, Peter confirms the conviction of his inner consciousness. All human beings are created by God and in the image of God and are bestowed with divine grace.

At the same time, Cornelius being a non-Jew, invited Peter, the Jew to his home and it was a challenge posed to Peter by a gentile. What did Peter do? When the messengers of Cornelius were at the door, knowing the Jewish viewpoint, they did not go further, but Peter asked them to come in and gave them hospitality (vs. 23) When Peter came to Caesarea, Cornelius met him at the door and Peter came in (vs. 27) by accepting each other amazingly the barriers were transcended. Thus, a new society in Christ was created based on the truth that ‘God does not show favoritism’ (vs. 34). It was possible to Peter, the early church leader, because of his faith in Jesus Christ and the lesson that God taught him through the vision that the Lord is the Lord of all cultures. We as the Church has no liberty to make distinction based on anything because God does not make distinctions. Today the distinction between clean and unclean has crept into the tradition of the Christian churches also. It distorts the Christian understanding of humanity. The Christian churches are not entirely free from color prejudices, nationalism, casteism, social and cultural snobbery, sexism and so on. In such context, Peter’s vision at Joppa is a classic example and yet plays a decisive role. God saw the world he created is good; so all that is in it is good and recreated in Jesus Christ. God accepts all who fear him and do what is right. This we need to promote to the grassroots of the society and the church so that the purpose of new community created in Christ through the redemption is realized (Col. 3:11; Gal. 3:15). God accepts all who fears him and be righteous and do justice, such attitude has to be inculcated in our minds and accept and enjoy the privilege of being children of God.

3. Honoring faith that is beyond the Boundaries (Mt. 15: 21-28)

The Gospel reading affirms how Christ blessed a woman, healing her demon possessed daughter instantaneously. God honored her faith in Christ. The faith of this woman of different tradition was expressed in three verses Mt. 15: 22, 25 & 27, where she addressed Jesus as Lord in spite of the discouraging response for her “cry” to heal her demon possessed daughter. Faith crossed boundaries and in faith, she came to Jesus pleading to heal her daughter. The heathen and a Canaanite woman crossed the boundaries of Jewish religion and their claim as chosen people; pleaded Jesus the master of Jews to heal her daughter. Jesus’ disciples wanted to turn away and get rid of her but Lord Jesus emphasized that he has come to help the lost. However, the woman with persistent faith pleaded for and in other words, she demanded for help though she does not belong to inner circle. Finally, Jesus honored her unwavering faith healed her daughter and restored peace in her family. Jesus’ ministry primarily hinged on the release of people from all bondages, diseases, and release from evil spirit and then only he preached about the Kingdom of God. (Luke. 4: 18-20). This healing stands as a clear example for the fact that ethnicity does not constitute God’s people but it is the believing (Gentiles) people who are included in God’s purposes. Here Jesus did not send disciples or insiders out in mission, but brought an outsider and thereby created an ethnically mixed community. Thus, Jesus worked as an agent of God’s blessing for this Gentile woman.

The Church is far away to recognizing and honoring the faith that is beyond the boundaries in its fuller sense. India is a secular country where different faiths exists and flourish but as the followers of Jesus Christ, we need to be aware of and open to the needs of the people irrespective of their faith.

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backgrounds. It is to acknowledge our diversities and stay united even with our differences. We are called to spread this fragrance of friendship across all barriers. Let us realize that we are nothing without the other.

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Introduction: the present humanity faces many challenges as new forms of oppressive structures emerge and oppress the humanity. These oppressive structures creep into the church and the society, in various forms and the oppressed community many times fail to recognize these oppressive forces. Such is the challenge that is set before us. In order to understand and know about the oppressive structures, the following definitions and forms of oppression have been

Iris Young states in his article “Five faces of oppression: that oppression is the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group. Oppression creates injustice in other circumstances as well. People are not always oppressed by cruel tyrants with bad intentions. In many cases, a well-intentioned liberal society can place system-wide constraints on groups and limit their freedom. Oppression can be the result of a few people’s choices or policies that cause embedded unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols. These societal rules can become a restrictive structure of forces and barriers that immobilize and reduce a group or category of people. In other words, oppression is when people make other people less human. This could mean treating them in a dehumanizing manner. But, it could also mean denying people language, education, and other opportunities that might make them become fully human in both mind and body. People should be free to pursue life plans in their own way. Oppressive forces seek to diminish those plans and thus those people as well.

There are five “faces” or types of oppression namely: violence, exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, and cultural imperialism. In the light of above definition and forms of oppressions, let us look at today’s scripture portions to see how the Triune God intended to transform the oppression structures and invite us to be partners with Him.

I. God The Liberator Against The Oppressive Structure Of Assyria: Nahum 1:1-15

The oppressive structure of Assyria: Here we clearly observe that the kingdom of Assyria which was at the height of its glory under their king Ashurbanipal. The Assyrian Empire was known for its cruelty. "Judged from the vaunting inscriptions of her kings, no power more useless, more savage, more terrible, ever cast its gigantic shadow on the page of history as it passed on the way to ruin. The kings of Assyria tormented the miserable world. They exult to record how 'space failed for corpses'; how unsparing a destroyer is their goddess Ishtar; how they flung away the bodies of soldiers like so much clay; how they made pyramids of human heads; how they burned cities; how they filled populous lands with death and devastation; how they reddened broad deserts with carnage of warriors; how they scattered whole countries with the corpses of their defenders as with chaff; how they impaled 'heaps of men' on stakes, and strewn the mountains and choked rivers with dead bones; how they cut off the hands of kings and nailed them on the walls, and left their bodies to rot with bears and dogs on the entrance gates of cities; how they employed nations of captives in making brick in fetters; how they cut down warriors like weeds, or smote them like wild beasts in the forests, and covered pillars with the flayed skins of rival monarchs." (Farrar, The Minor Prophets, pp. 147-148)

While the above describes the fate of the oppressed, the God of liberation and justice stood against the oppressive structure of Assyria, Ashurbanipal who boasted himself as Lion and beast master, judgment was pronounced against his reign and his kingdom and now there was no scope of repentance as it was during the time of Jonah.
Prophet Nahum prophesizes against Assyria: in 3: 1, 4.

“Ah! City of bloodshed, utterly deceitful, full of booty-no end to the plunder”. Because of the countless debaucheries of the prostitute, gracefully alluring, mistress of sorcery, who enslaves nations through her debaucheries and people through sorcery”.

God proclaims liberation for the oppressed: Nahum 1: 15

“Look! On the mountains the feet of one who brings good tidings, who proclaims peace! Celebrate your festivals, O Judah, fulfill your vows, for never shall the wicked invade you, they are utterly cut off”.

II. Jesus Christ: The epitome of Transformation of the Oppressive Structure: Luke 13: 10-17:

The two books of the Bible Luke and Acts, whose author is the same, give us a vivid picture of the intention of writing both the books. On one hand it encapsulates the prophetic proclamation and on the other hand actualizes fulfillment through the incarnation, vision and mission of Jesus Christ and transformation of oppressive structures.

This particular passage deals with powerful words of Jesus Christ: Vs 12 “Set free”, and Vs 15 “Hypocrites”. Here we clearly observe that Jesus Christ was redefining the very structure of synagogues which have been misused by Jewish leaders for their own selfish authority. He calls them “hypocrites” who in the name of religion oppressed poor people. The message that Jesus Christ gave was the value of human life, especially that of the poor, needy, suffering, the marginalized sections of the society. He was the lover of humanity. Always sided the victims of exploitation, powerless, marginalized, silenced, victims of violence, He said you are “set free” from every bondage that “bound” them. Jesus Christ also redefines that whoever bind any human being from their full functioning and oppress them, they are not of God.

The result was vs. 17 “when he said this, all His opponents were put to shame; and the entire crowd was rejoicing at all the wonderful things that he was doing”

III. Holy Spirit, The Conscientizer: Making Us Instruments Of Transformation:

Acts 4:32-37:

The book of Acts is popularly known as the book of Holy Spirit, as it deals and emphasizes and explains the work of the Holy Spirit and the transformation of believers and making them instruments of transformation. The present passage deals exactly with this notion. A group of people whose life together is so radically different, so completely changed from the way the world builds a community. Karl Marx claimed that “Nearly every human attitude and action could be traced to economic sources”. Luke was not a Marxist, but he was enough of realist to know that there is a good chance that “where our possessions are our hearts will also be”.

Four important things we observe as a result of conscientizing, which leads to transformation.

Vs. 32a. Unity in mind and heart.

Vs. 32b. Sharing of their possessions.

Vs. 33a. Power and witness of the Apostles.
Vs. 33b. The grace of God, which rested upon them.

As a result Vs. 34-35. There was no needy person among.

Thus, the Holy Spirit, in conscientizing every believer enabled them to be active instruments of transformation. Barnabas, (Acts-11:23-24) is a good example of becoming an instrument of transformation who conscientized every believer of their role and responsibility in standing against the oppressive structures for transformation. Today, it is our turn to become an instrument in the hands of Triune God to confront the social structures that create or perpetuate oppressive conditions; and how we can transform them.

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Cross and a New Paradigm to Discipleship

Gen.26:12-33        Psalm 92
2 Cor.11:21-31      Mk 10: 46-52
Eve. Mic.6:6-8      I Cor.1:18-31

“When we walk without the cross,
When we build without the cross and
When we proclaim Christ without the cross,
We are not disciples of the Lord. We are worldly.
We may be bishops, priests, cardinals, popes, all of this,
But we are not disciples of the Lord.”                     – Pope Francis

‘Cross,’ up to the time of Jesus never formed the basis for discipleship. But the ‘cross of Jesus’, had tremendous impact upon the whole notion of discipleship and has offered the same, a new paradigm. In Christian theological understanding, ‘cross’ having largely associated with Jesus and his passion, precisely symbolizes the set of attitudes and actions practiced by Jesus during his life as well as at the time of his suffering and death. This metaphor expresses most clearly the foundational paradigm to which God has intended every disciple to be confirmed. Discipleship, thus, requires our focusing on and being conform to these attitudes and actions exemplified in the life of Jesus. This is of paramount importance in following Jesus or in becoming like him, which is at the heart of discipleship. Therefore, ‘cross’ provides a new paradigm to discipleship. One who employs this paradigm would be able to experience discipleship and “carry the cross.” This paradigm calls for a transformation of personality, attitudes and perspectives towards the form of cross. This formative transformation can be termed as ‘cruciform discipleship’. Apart from the indications of ‘form,’ ‘cruciform’ is to be taken into the sense of action, which would inspire one to practice discipleship with crucified attitudes in his/her everyday realities. ‘Cruciform discipleship’ in fact is a paradigm put into practice by Jesus and which he exhorts his disciples to observe.

Disciple (’mathetes’) means; adherent, student, or apprentice. According to Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Disciple is a person, “who is constantly associated with someone who has a pedagogical reputation or a particular set of views.” That means, the disciple is a person, who engages constantly in learning through instructions from a teacher, and practices those in his/her life. Therefore, cruciform discipleship involves constant learning under Jesus, the teacher, and uninterrupted following of those teachings. From the given Old Testament passage, we may further explore ‘cruciform discipleship’ in the light of the life of Isaac, who was identified by his neighbours as a person of divine favour due to his exemplary life.

Cruciform Discipleship: A life-affirming Model

The events depicted in Gen.26:12-33 portrays Isaac as a person with ‘life-affirming attitudes, compared to those of the people lived around him. Gerar (means “halting place”) was a Philistine city on the southern edge of Palestine, near Gaza (Gen. 26:1; 2 Chr. 14:13). The city had a prosperous period in Middle Bronze Age, the age of the Patriarchs. However, the valley of Gerar, being part of the wilderness area of the Negev, was not a fertile land, which received only between 75 and 150 mm of rainfall yearly. Therefore, when forced to move into the valley, not feasible for agriculture, Isaac would have shifted his attention from agriculture to cattle rearing. Also, they had to find water sources for survival that brought the herders of Gerar in confrontation with Isaac’s herders. Isaac, in response, did not retaliate. But moved on, giving away the disputed wells to the Philistine herders. This happened more than once and later they did not quarrel, and later, their king Abimelech visits Isaac on a peace mission and made a covenant with him.

The standards exhibited by Isaac in this episode is one of life-affirming discipleship. Water being a life-sustaining, natural resource, needs to be considered as a common property. Isaac, by reclaiming the closed wells, recovered the sources of life; by digging new wells, revealed new sources of life; and

Kristu Jignasa
by giving them away freely, retained the access to the sources of water to the Philistines, the people of the land. Discipleship is a call to reclaim, recover, reveal, retain, open-up, and share or give away the sources of life to the people in need. Isaac’s life-affirming actions were at the cost of his own resources and reputation. In a world, marked by consumerism, individualism and privatization; practicing cruciform discipleship, characterized by life-affirming life-style is a real challenge. If we are blessed, it is only to become a blessing to many around us.

**Cruciform Discipleship: A life-transforming Model**

Along with life affirming attitudes, Isaac assumes life-transforming aspect too as part of cruciform discipleship. Isaac, when moved to the valley of Gerar, the major challenge before him was to find water to sustain his life. The Hebrew word *nahal*, used here to refer Negev means ‘a dry stream-bed,’ a “wadi,” which remains dry except during rainy seasons. Maintaining its cross-reference to the Abraham saga (Gen. 26:1, 15), the text mentions that Isaac reopened the wells Abraham had dug. The story then turns to the discovery of a new well (v. 19), a well of “living water” (mayim ḥayyim). This presumably refers to flowing water, perhaps an artesian well, as differentiated from the stagnant pond that might exist in a dry streambed. Artesian well is drilled through the strata of solid rocks into strata that receive water from a higher altitude. The third time, when they dug the well, there was no dispute and Isaac named it ‘Rehoboth’ (v.22). The word means “plazas” and as the name of a place, it means “spacious place.” Also, the name Be'er-she'ba means “well of the oath,” where Isaac enters into the peace treaty with Abimelech. That is, when Isaac was forced to move away due to dispute on water, each time Isaac could reach to more spacious and better place and finally settled at a peaceful place of running water. Running water symbolizes transformation as there would be constant dynamic changes to the places through which the water flows. A cruciform disciple is called not to become stagnant by clinging on to places or positions that could bring disputes; but to move on to be dynamic like the running water and bring transformations into the lives of people, to whom he/she comes in contact with.

**Cruciform Discipleship: A life-linking Model**

The narrative uses the well as a symbol of linking, which links the nature, animals and humans. This well in the Negev, dug by Isaac (Gen 26:22),“could serve as a paradigm for the relationship between agriculturalists and pastoralists, or nomads and the state, in the 2nd and 1st millennia B.C.” (Matthews 1986: 123–24). The well becomes a symbol of linking people and building relationship. Linking is a pro-life attitude. The narrative affirms the life-giving aspect of the water and the God-given reality of the natural resources. Isaac, by allowing access to the sources he had already found, explores new possibilities of water to connect people and build relationships. It also can be seen as affirming the right to access the sources of life beyond boundaries. In allowing the Philistine pastoral community and their herds to use the wells, Isaac humbles himself to be an instrument of God; assigned with the responsibility to find and share the sources of transformation. Further, this action extends to transforming relationships between the creation and the creatures. Isaac, being an agriculturalist and a pastoralist, could figure out the essentiality of water in life. The cruciform discipleship affirms the life-linking relationship between the nature, animals, and humans and explicate that any one of these cannot exist without the other.

**Conclusion:**

Isaac exemplified higher values of sharing, caring, giving away and moving on and that brought him the reputed status in life. The Philistine king Abimelech said “We see plainly that the Lord has been with you” (v28). Living in a world that promotes the life-negating realities of envy, anger, intolerance, disputes, individualism, possessiveness; we are called to be life-transforming cruciform disciples.

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Palm Sunday is one of the most important days in the Christian calendar. It is the Sunday before Easter, and marks the beginning of Holy Week, the week of events leading to the death of Jesus. On this day, we commemorate the Triumphal entry of Jesus Christ into Jerusalem. This is the first time in all the gospel narratives that Jesus allows himself to be elevated.

Every year when we celebrate the Palm Sunday, we remember the joyful shouts of the people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem, “Hosanna; blessed is He that comes in the name of the Lord” (Mt. 21:9, Mk. 11:9-10, Lk. 19:38 and Jn. 12:13). Even as we celebrate today, we shout joyfully ‘Hosanna’ which is not only a joyous shout of victory but a cry of great anticipation for the deliverance from the socio, political and religious bondage. It is a cry of hope for salvation. Today as we celebrate the Palm Sunday, our joyous shouts of Hosannas must be a cry for peace in this world of conflicts; a cry for liberation in this society that neglects, alienates and oppresses the weak; and a cry for spiritual renewal.

**Hosanna: Lord Save Us**

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**Hosanna: Lord, save us from the world of war and conflicts (Zechariah 9: 1-12)**

The book of Zechariah was written during the efforts of people to return to rebuild the Temple, which had been destroyed by the Babylonians. People were living in conditions where there was no peace at all. The exile was ended, people returned to Jerusalem but things were not restored to their original state. The reminiscences of war and captivity were still afresh in their memory.

The above words form a prayer by Zechariah while the remaining verses are part of his prophesy to the post-exilic community. It was to assure the people of God that the Lord will establish His kingdom by judging the nations and by bringing peace in Jerusalem. It was to promise that in spite of the nation’s lowly position, a Deliverer will bring a time of ultimate blessing of salvation. This salvation will be achieved not by war or conflicts but by the absolute Peace. This coming king is righteous and victorious, lowly and riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey (v. 9, NIV). Zechariah’s promise goes on to say that all the apparatus of war will be removed. Messiah’s rule will not be established by physical force, or maintained by military defenses. He will extend this peace to the entire world, teaching the heathen to receive his spiritual rule, to compose their differences, to lay aside their arms, and live as one united family.

These people of Jerusalem were also perturbed or upset by the constant hostilities between Romans and the radical groups of Israel mostly, the Zealots. As they were welcoming the Messiah with shouts of Hosanna, it was their inward cry to be saved from the world of war and conflicts and to have a life filled with peace and salvation. Even today, as the weapons of destruction continue to negate God’s purposes of creation, let us pray Hosanna!!! Lord, save us.

**Hosanna: Lord, save us from the Oppressive Structures of the society (St. Luke 19:29-40)**

A palm branch in Jewish culture is a symbol of rejoicing and in Roman culture a symbol of victory. It is said that the early Christians used the palm branch to symbolize the victory of the faithful over the enemies of their souls. Christian martyrs are usually shown holding a palm branch/leaf as a holy attribute, representing the victory of spirit over flesh.
The crowd who welcomed Jesus was well acquainted with his words and deeds. They were the people living as colonials of the Roman Empire and many of them were being oppressed, alienated and outcasted by the socio-political and religious structures of that day. They were seeking a Messiah or savior who, according to their understanding, would bring them spiritual renewal and political freedom from centuries of foreign oppression and currently from the Roman Empire. When they found Jesus as a powerful personality of the time, they welcomed him with shouts of joy holding the branches of palms which symbolize their anticipated victory. Even as we celebrate the Palm Sunday today we shout Hosanna joyfully with a hope to be delivered and to be victorious from all kinds of social, political and religious oppressive structures that treat us as outcastes and untouchables. Hosanna!!! Lord, save us.

**Hosanna: Lord, Save Us from Inappropriate Spirituality**

Along with His disciples, the villagers from Bethany and the citizens of Jerusalem, there were also many pilgrims who had come up to the feast from different parts the Roman Empire and had participated in this procession of welcoming Jesus into Jerusalem. Those were the people who came to worship the Lord in the Temple. But they were definitely disappointed by the religious practices that were made by the so-called religious leaders of that time. Religion was completely materialized. Access to God was made possible only on the basis of the sacrifices and coins that were exchanged and offered in the temple. It was almost difficult for a poor family to offer the annual sacrifices. God already told them that he is not pleased with their sacrifices (Isaiah 1:11&12, Jeremiah 7:21).

It was the expectation of the People who welcomed Jesus that he should come and reform the defiled religion and build a spiritual temple. Paul also expected the same thing when he was writing to Timothy saying “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1Timothy 4:8). Even to the Church in Sardis, the Apostle John writes, “you have the reputation of being alive but you are dead. Wake up, and strengthen what remains and is about to die…” (Rev. 3:1-2). Today, it is expected of us that we may raise from inappropriate spirituality and be revived in spirit to serve God and people faithfully. Hosanna!!! Lord, save us.

**Conclusion**

Celebrating Palm Sunday is not just about shouting with joy and enthusiasm but it has something to do with the inward cry of the people who welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem. Their shouts of Hosanna were the shouts of appeal for holistic Salvation. Even as we welcome Jesus into our churches and lives, may His triumphal entry give us Peace in our lives filled with conflicts, deliverance from the oppressive structures, and spiritual renewal in the context of materialism. As we shout Hosanna, we make our appeal to Him, “Lord, save us”.

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Kristu Jignasa
Eucharist: Communion of Suffering Humanity

Ex. 12:1-7
I Cor. 11:23-34
Psalm 116
Mk. 14:17-25

“He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him to life on the last day.” (John 6:54)

INTRODUCTION: Mark vividly explains the sequence of what happened on the night Jesus was betrayed. It was in the evening that Jesus came with his disciples and when they sat and were eating he told them that one of them would betray him. The disciples were perturbed and each one asked Jesus if it were he. Jesus revealed that it would be the one who dips his bread in the cup with him. Sad mood prevailed among the disciples. During this time Jesus instituted the Lord’s Supper by sharing with his disciples the bread and the wine symbolizing his flesh and blood.

St. Paul calls us to meaningfully partake in the Lord’s Supper. He states: “For if he does not recognize the meaning of the Lord’s body when he eats the bread and drinks from the cup, he brings judgment on himself as he eats and drinks.” (I Cor. 11:29). Therefore let us set our minds to understand the performance of Jesus in instituting the Lord’s Supper.

Mark writes: “While they were eating, Jesus took a piece of bread, gave a prayer of thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, ‘Take it’, he said, ‘this is my body’.” (Mark 14:22)

The breaking of the bread is already taken to be the symbol of the broken body of Jesus Christ. Jesus is seen to be identifying himself with the suffering, with the broken, with the marginalized for He said: “the son of man has come to seek and save that which was lost.” (Luke 19:10).

The lost are the suffering lot, the broken ones, and those who are living a life of hopelessness. The broken bread, which is the broken body of Jesus Christ relates itself to all that is broken in this world, created by God and is in need of redemption.

1. Jesus identified himself with the suffering animals: “Then, on the evening of the fourteenth day of the month, the whole community of Israel will kill the animals.” (Exod. 12:6). Eating the Passover meal with the disciples Jesus identified himself with the suffering animals. Suffering of the animals for no reason of theirs. John the Baptist rightly pointed to Jesus saying: “Behold the lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.” (John 1:29). Jesus by telling the parable of the lost sheep drives home the point of the lostness of the animals. In an ecologically disastrous time, when the world is gazing at the intense suffering that animals are subjected to and the rapid extinction of many species of God’s creatures as the prophet Hosea too points out: “Therefore the land mourns, and all who live in it languish; together with the wild animals and the birds of the air, even the fish of the sea are perishing.” (Hosea 4:3). Jesus being the paschal lamb identified himself with the sufferings of the creatures and therefore by his once for all sacrifice as the Lamb of God has redeemed all the animals from being put to intense suffering in the name of sacrifice. No more animal sacrifice so no more animal suffering. Jesus has redeemed them all! In the Lord’s Supper Jesus as the paschal lamb is the hope for suffering animals. When partaking in the Lord’s Supper we are called to remember that ‘Jesus the lamb’ is the redeemer of all God’s creatures, and thereby we ought to strive for the sustenance and dignity of all living creatures.

2. Jesus identified himself with the suffering humanity: When Jesus said this is my body, symbolized by the broken bread; Jesus had identified himself with the broken humanity. The brokenness of humanity is depicted well by the Psalmist as it is found in Psalm 116: 3 ‘The danger of death was all around me; the horrors of the grave closed in on me; I was filled with fear and anxiety.” Even St. Paul write: “For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.” (Romans 3:23). Another parable of Jesus, which is normally titled as the ‘prodigal son’ depicts the sinfulness and suffering of the broken humanity. Jesus in the human form identified himself with the broken and suffering humanity. Jesus with his new covenant is all
set to redeem the humanity and transform it to be in tune with the values of the Kingdom of God he proclaimed. As the ‘son of man’ Jesus identified himself with the suffering humanity. He is the redeemer of the humanity, for he took away the sin of the world. When partaking in the Lord’s Supper we are called to remember ‘Jesus the son of man’ is the redeemer of all human beings, and thereby continue to call all human beings into this grace and salvation.

3. Jesus identified himself with the suffering creation: Mark 14:22 “Jesus took a piece of bread…broke it….” The very act of Jesus breaking the bread itself depicts the brokenness of the creation. The parable of Jesus about the lost coin explains the brokenness of the material world. In the beginning the earth was formless and void and out of this brokenness God made this beautiful world, but human aggression towards the creation is turning the beautiful world back to being formless and void. As St. Paul reminds us that “the whole creation groans and labors with birth pangs” (Rom. 8:22) for its redemption. Jesus by identifying himself with the suffering of the creation redeems the creation, for he is the new creation and in him all things become new, a new heaven and a new earth. When we partake in the Lord’s Supper we are called to remember that ‘Jesus the first born of all creation’ is the redeemer of the whole creation, and thereby we continue to be the agents of this redemption of the creation.

CONCLUSION: Week after week as we participate in the Lord’s Supper we are reminded as Christ’s children to be in communion with Christ and as Christ was and is, to be also in communion with the sufferings of the humanity, God’s creatures and of the whole creation and to be engaged in the mission of catering Christ’s holistic redemption to the whole created order. Amen!

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The God of the Bible inaugurated, influenced and interpreted the process of salvation for the people, through the Cross and by the Church. The Messiah's death on the cross has become a symbolic tool in learning the meaning of salvation that God wants to teach us. Every story, incident, miracle, teaching of parables, discourses, and encounter of God with men and women that we find in the Bible is a sign orchestrated by God to make us understand the process of salvation. These signs can be embraced by every human being as models, popularized and executed for the salvation of humankind. God stopped providing manna after the settlement of the Israelites in Palestine. Manna was a sign and model. Jesus didn't provide bread and fish to thousands every day! Jesus didn't rise all the dead! Jesus didn't cure all the people suffering from leprosy! But there were many in want of food, many deaths, many lepers wanting to be cured. These works of Jesus were signs and models in order that his followers ought to take the mission work and to pass it on to the next generation. Hence the accomplishment of salvation is a continuous process which God inaugurated, in order to accomplish this mission, so that every generation needs to be taught with sound biblical teaching and reflection by learning the sufferings of people in their immediate context. The Cross is a sign wherein we learn how the mission of Christ is synchronized and culminated. The mission accomplished on the Cross is observed on Good Friday to witness the meaning of the accomplishment of salvation. Let us reflect on the theme THE ACCOMPLISHMENT OF SALVATION under three sub topics:

1. Salvation INAUGURATED for the people
2. The Salvation INFLUENCE of the cross
3. Salvation INTERPRETED by the Church.

1. Salvation INAUGURATED for the people:

Exodus 14:15-22

God initiates the process of liberation through the participation of people since it is primarily for them. In the book of Exodus we see that God does this through the leadership of Moses who was called and trained to present the appeal of liberation before the powerful king of Egypt and who mobilizes the people to support God's initiation of liberation from their oppression. And on the day of Passover God orders the people to "GO" (v.15), and warns Moses not to listen to their cry: the same God who once carefully heard their cry and responded positively (Ex.3:7-10) utters this harsh statement. We need to find the sheer difference between these two occasions. The fact that the word of God is powerful is being reiterated by his command “GO". It is evident that the word of God is in action. God wants the people not to be dependent forever. It is not the sign of God's withdrawal. But God wants to teach that every liberated one must take the role of the liberative God and experience independence by leading the journey of liberation from the land of servitude. Everyone who takes the first step from Egypt should witness how the accomplishment of salvation took place. This is the lesson of the inauguration of salvation.

God also trains the people in every possible way to equip them to face any life situation which is part of the process of liberation, since they have been slaves without independence for centuries. First they
are made to understand the functions of creation, through the cloud. The same cloud protects the liberated one by giving light to Israel to pave the way to escape and showing darkness to hinder the pursuit of the oppressors (v.20). Again the wind of the east functions to divide the waters of the Red Sea to make the way for the Israelites to walk through. The people of Israel live to witness the world as a sign and model that oppression is not a permanent phenomenon and that liberation is possible through the participation of God and people.

2. Salvation INFLUENCE of the Cross:

John 19:23-30

The saving act of God has been well taken by the people who have been longing for it through the sufferings and function of Jesus on the Cross. Jesus on the cross reveals the divine act of salvation while encountering the oppressive and draconian elements of fanatic Jews who are against the liberation of women, shepherds, fishermen, tax collectors and lepers. Their opposition by means of persecution and death on the Cross fails to deter Jesus who continues his mission of salvation. Two significant aspects of radical mission are demonstrated on the Cross.

Firstly Jesus creates a new relationship of family by asking his mother to take his beloved disciple as her son and asking the disciple to accept her as his mother. Here lies the radical thought and Jesus's true essence of mission as the fishermen are untouchables to Jews and alienated from mainstream social life. They were banned from bearing witness in a Jewish court of law (please refer to 'Jerusalem in the time of Jesus' written by Joachim Jeremias). John, Christ's beloved disciple who stood under the Cross, was a fisherman (John21:7; Luke 5:10) and now he becomes the son of mother Mary, of the wife of a carpenter. Carpenters alone were given the task of blessing the devotees as they proceeded to the Jerusalem Temple during the annual festival of Passover. By standing on a specially erected stage carpenters raised their hands to bless those who walked the street in Jerusalem to perform the purification rites of shaving their heads (Acts20:16 & 21:24). God converts the Cross into a platform to purify the polluted hearts and minds of Jews to embrace the new family formed of Mary, the highly respected member of a carpenter's family, and John, the lowly treated fisherman by breaking the Jewish discrimination, while thousands of Jews perform their rituals in the Jerusalem Temple which are external signs only and do not realize the sinful attitude of discrimination against people which is against God from whom they expect purification. Jesus says NO to inequality and discrimination by creating this new relationship on the Cross.

Secondly, the word becomes alive and it is realized on the Cross. John immediately takes Mary into his home. We don't know how the thief experienced the paradise as promised by Jesus (Luke 23:43), but the action-oriented implementation of the word is seen here. The mother of Jesus becomes the mother of John and she starts living in the home of a fisherman. This is the miracle; this is the sign of the kingdom God. To teach and to accomplish this new life Jesus dies on the Cross.

3. Salvation INTERPRETED by the Church:

Hebrews 13:8-17

The author of Hebrews meticulously brings out very important factors necessary for understanding the meaning of salvation through Christ. The author vouchsafes to interpret the salvation that Jesus brought forth on the cross through his blood. The letter to the Hebrews is believed to have been written to Jewish Christians, and explains very clearly the background of their rites of purification. The readers are called not to follow wrong teachings (v.9) and warned not to strengthen themselves with ceremonial food as the Jews do. Instead the author advocates that they understand the grace of God. By referring to the blood of Jesus shed on the Cross the young Church is advised not to rely on old Jewish rituals. The challenge is made that no one could ever replace the value of the grace that
springs out of the Cross with that of mere rites which have no value as they were broken and must not be revived. It teaches that the rituals of the Aaronic tradition end with the blood of Christ. The young Church is given this interpretation not to continue the practices of Jewish rituals as they cannot bring genuine forgiveness and also are not sensitive to the evil practices of discrimination. In India even after embracing Christ many wish to be culturally Hindus in following certain rituals which advocate the ill treatment of women and support discrimination on caste basis. The blood of Jesus that the faithful Christians receive at the time of Holy Communion has not been fully understood by them. They are the same as the Jews whom the author of Hebrews found in his time. Many fail to understand the grace that springs from the blood of the Cross, and instead they focus on their own blood which wishes to establish their own kingdom of a caste ridden society – a model entirely against the mission of God which has ruined the nations for many centuries. This wrong understanding of the gospel of Christ must be corrected in order to liberate the millions of so-called low caste people in India since this system of caste deprives them of education and participation in politics and favours slavery which oppresses more than 300 million. The Church in India instead of becoming prey to the Hindu culture must awake its members and educate them biblically with sound theological teachings to be aware of the consequences of this evil practice. Good Friday is not given to mourn for Jesus, but is instead given to focus on the needs of those who mourn, the victims of the caste system in India, of women, refugees and the crores of people who succumb to torture around the world.

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CSI Madras Diocese
In the prelude to the birth of Jesus Christ Luke narrates the birth of John the Baptist, then leading to the Annunciation to Mary, Mary meeting Elizabeth and then the actual birth of Jesus Christ. This is something very unique and it helps us to understand God, understand Mary and also understand ourselves as the Church.

The Annunciation to Mary is a parallel to the Annunciation to Zechariah (Luke 1.8-20). However the Annunciation to Mary is much more profound. There is a model of Birth annunciations in the Old Testament as we see in Gen 16:7–14 annunciation to Hagar, Gen 17–18 annunciation to Abraham, Judges 13:2–23 annunciation to Manoah. However the annunciation to Mary is very special as Mary is only betrothed to Joseph as in the Jewish tradition at that time would have been 13 years of age. She will likely wait one year after the betrothal to be married to Joseph. It is in this context Angel Gabriel was sent to Mary.

The Angel tells Mary that she has found favor with God. Mary in her situation is perplexed and pondered ‘what sort of greeting this might be.’ The angel assures her that she need not be afraid as she has found favor with God and she is going to conceive and bear a son and the son is to be called Jesus. ‘He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High, and the Lord God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.

The young woman Mary surrenders to this mighty act of God in her life and surrenders saying, ‘Here I am, the servant of the Lord, let it be with me according to your word.’

The annunciation to Mary draws her into a very special relationship with God. She is chosen for the special task of receiving the Son of God and bearing the son of God to let him grow within her and at the appropriate time to deliver him in the manger for the world to receive him, to believe in him, to be healed by him and to be redeemed by his death and resurrection. She was initially perplexed as she looked at her situation but her response to this realization was that of total submission and surrender to God. Mary was part of God’s plan of salvation and she responds by her surrender. There is nothing that she was required to do for all these things to happen but what was expected was for her to willingly submit herself to be part of this wonderful and mighty event of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Mary was chosen as a vessel to bear the Christ just as Jesus commissioned the disciples to go throughout the world to make disciples of all nations. After Pentecost the church is called with a special calling just as Mary was called. The Annunciation narrative defines the nature of the church. Like Mary the church as an ecclesia community with people are the people who have found favor with God. Now it is not the angel Gabriel but the Risen Christ himself appears to the church to say that they are to participate in the mission of God for the salvation of the world.

CHURCH: FAVORED TO SERVE

The Church now gets the good news of proclamation that they are a people who have found favor with God. As a favored people they are not to enjoy an exclusive status but they are called to participate with God in the work of Salvation. Being favored by God is a call to yield their will to God’s will and ask what you would like to do with us. We are so incapable in ourselves to respond as we know our frail nature. Not capable in ourselves for anything so miraculous to be a kingdom community and God responds to this fear by saying fear not. The Risen Christ lives now in the church.
and it is not Jesus who grows but the church grows in maturity and take shape to be the body of Christ. In the Annunciation the baby Jesus was taking shape in the womb of Mary but now the church who is receiving the Christ grows in faith in character and in mission. Taking the shape of a new creation to be the body of Christ. God assures the church, fear not. God comes to us when we are perplexed and are pondering about the immense nature of our call. Like Mary, the church needs to accept the call and move forward with the assurance of God.

**CHURCH: CALLED TO BEAR**

The calling of the church to be the body of Christ is accomplished by accepting to partake in God’s mission like Mary. It is too high a calling considering the tension that goes on in the church from being a human community striving to be a divine community of God on earth. Under the kingship of Christ. The Church is ever in wonder how to bear the Christ while we are so frail in understanding. God promises the Holy Spirit who helped Mary conceive the son of God, to be empowered to bear witness to the Risen Christ and become the visible body of Christ. Christ is not hidden in the womb of the church but Christ becomes manifest transforming the church to be Christ like in this world.

**CHURCH: CALLED TO SURRENDER**

Mary gave birth to the Christ child as she said "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word". God expects the same submission and obedience from the church. To become the servant of God and to let the destiny of the church be shaped not by Human will and plan but by the power of the word of God. In doing this the church involves in places and situations and in people’s lives that people may receive Jesus in the way the church incarnates in mission in the world. In places of despair, and as Mary sang, the Church should sing the anthem of mission proclaiming that ‘the Mighty One has done great things for me, and holy is his name.’ In helping the proud and the arrogant to understand that God will scatter the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. God will bring down the powerful from their thrones and will lift up the lowly. God will fill the hungry with good things, and send the rich away empty. The Church needs to be conscious of the fact that she is called to serve, bear witness and surrender herself to God’s purpose, just like Mary, so that God’s reign is realized by all.

**Rev. Deborah Premraj**

**CSI Madras Diocese**
Hope for the New Life

Daniel 12: 1-4       Psalm 4

Holy Saturday is an appropriate day to meditate upon the Hope which springs from faith and the faith leads to the Christian formation which is resulted in transformation. It is the new life in Christ. Yes, let's hope for the new life. Amen! Some Christian recognize Holy Saturday as the day on which Jesus “rested” from His work of providing salvation.

After the crucifixion, Jesus was laid in a nearby tomb in which no one had yet been laid. Churches that celebrate Holy Saturday observe it as a day of ‘reflection on the hope for the new life.

The day between Christ’s crucifixion and His resurrection would have been a time of grief and shock as the stunned disciples tried to understand the death of Jesus and the dashing of their hopes. Holy Saturday is a day of silence and stillness waiting and wondering, remembering and hoping perhaps that in what faithfulness look like on Holy Saturday. There is not much to do except be present to the reality of what is, to sit opposite the tomb. Where is Christ on Holy Saturday? Reread the apostle’s creed. Remind yourself that on this day “He descended to the dead” or as another translation says, “He descended into hell”. The new day dawns sorrow in transformed into joy, the tomb becomes a womb, and death gives birth to new life. Christ’s triumph is not apart from death but within death Christ trampled down death by death.

Hope is a remarkable feature of faith journey. For Christian, there is always a hope for the new life in Christ. So, we the followers of Jesus Christ are marked as the Community of Hope. This community is always featured by positive, creative, constructive, and dynamic paradigm in which we think that past is past, present is an opportunity. And the best is yet to come from God and we are awaiting daily with hope for that glorious future. In other words, Christian hope is an optimistic and innovative outlook in Christ towards every sphere of our daily life which will be the stepping stone for the eternal future. At this state, we need to perceive how the hope works for the new life.

Hope springs from the faith in God. No hope without faith since it is a matter of faith in God. It is the faith in the promise of God (Daniel 12:1-3), faith in the blessing of God (Psalms 4: 3,7,8), faith in the way of Christ (1Peter4:16), and the faith in the work of Christ(John 19: 38-42). Strong faith will increase our hope.

Faith leads us into the Christian formation. Old self has been replaced by the new self in Christ. It is a conditioning by Holy Spirit according to the will of God(1 Peter 4:14-15, 19), and complete and regular trust in God (Psalm 4:4-5). Christian formation is an organizing and representing skill on behalf of others for the sake of Christ(John 19:38-42). It is shaping and polishing by the power of the Word of God (Daniel4:4). Thus we became formed into Christ like character.

Formation is resulted in holistic transformation. It is a total change in our perspectives, personalities and patterns in accordance with Christ culture. At this stance, we could experience and realize the new life. Real transformation is the new and fresh life. It starts as intra personal and eventually and gradually develop into inter personal. Its influencing range is vast, wide and high. If someone could be transformed, he or she become an exponent and channel of new life (Daniel 4:3). They will be in otherness (1Peter 4:19) and their peace and happiness will overflow to their living surroundings (Psalm 4:6-8). Thus transformed life become transforming life. This will be the real new life and it's features.
Through His sacrifice, we ‘may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance’. The death of Christ was necessary, because it was the sacrifice that restores everything to the way God intended. With His death, Christ brought humanity into the presence of the Father, having satisfied the wrath of God against sin and demonstrated the love of God for sinners.

Rev. Maxcin John
CSI East Kerala Diocese
“At the heart of Christian faith is the story of death and resurrection of Jesus Christ” said, John Ortberg. Yes, the resurrection of Jesus Christ from death is the most significant as well as historic event upon which the Church is built. The resurrection validates the authenticity of the scriptures as they contain prophesies concerning the new covenant that God had promised and became a reality in Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Christ and of believers cannot be separated as ‘Christ is the first-fruits of the resurrection’ includes believers as well. Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of the future bodily resurrection of believers. His resurrection is not simply a bare sign but the actual beginning of the ‘epochal event’. Moreover, the Resurrection is not only a powerful proof of Christ's divine nature but it is also an evident display of powerful transformation of his human nature. The risen Lord did empower the people who encountered him and he continues to empower those who believe in him for he overcame the powers of death and darkness.

Empowered to realize the Vision: It needs foresightedness to envision while it requires courage and commitment to realize the same. Be it Church or any institution perishes if they are not led by the visionary leaders. There are many factors which affect the individuals and the communities. Greed has become a major challenge today that is destroying the purposes of God.

Gen28: 10-22 talks about a vision Jacob saw at Bethel. He saw a ladder which reached from earth to heaven, the angels ascending and descending upon it, and God himself was at the head of it. This vision gave very seasonal comfort to Jacob by letting him know that he had both a good guide and a good guard, in his going out and coming in. The former promises made to his father were repeated and ratified to him. God had promised him that his posterity will multiply exceedingly as the dust of the earth (v. 13-14). Jacob was actually apprehensive of danger from his brother Esau but God promised to protect him. He was unsure of his journey and the destiny but God said to him, “I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised you”. God wanted Jacob to go out, being empowered by the vision, to carry forward the faith of his father Abraham. The response of Jacob is worth noting for he reacted in bewilderment of the vision. He turned his pillow into a pillar as an altar and poured oil on top of it and changed the name of that place from Luz (meaning, nut bearing tree) to Bethel (meaning, the house of God). Besides these changes the vision has transformed him from a man of fear into a man of courage; from being pessimistic to an optimistic. It is important to note that God’s promise contains a moral obligation to be fulfilled by Jacob. That is, to claim God’s promises as he moved out and be loyal to Yahweh, the true God. Because of his loyalty, (a) Jacob prospered at the house of Laban despite being treated unjustly by Laban; (b) his life was saved from the anger of his brother Esau; (c) he could see God face to face at Peniel (Gen 32: 22-32); (d) he got victory over the enemy (Gen 35: 5ff); and (e) was renamed as Israel. In moving out, Jacob experienced the presence of God, protection and providence of God.

Empowered to Affirm Life: There are many life negating unjust practices in our society such as corruption, casteism, gender discrimination, fanaticism and abuse of natural resources. While life is a gift of God, those practices negate this fact and value things rather than ‘life’. Most often the Church is silent, taking a neutral stance when God’s creation is exploited or God’s image is marred until she is personally attacked. Many voiceless and vulnerable need a helping hand to be strengthened in their struggle for life and dignity. Paul ‘went down and bent over’ Eutychus to revive him to life (Acts 20:7-12) was a beautiful expression of showing God’s compassion to the dying and perishing. It was not an act of exhibiting his power but an act of extending God’s hospitality! God in Christ empowers us to confront the life negating practices and affirm the dignity of life. ‘To go out and bend over’ is the responsibility of all who believe in the risen Lord. A close look at the ministry of Jesus and that

Kristu Jignasa
of the Apostles indicate that they did ‘went out and bent over’ the blind, the imprisoned, the oppressed and the poor to give new hope. Risking for the sake of Christ becomes the hallmark of Christianity than Confining to the rituals and comfort zones.

**Empowered to Proclaim the Truth:** Speaking truth to the truth is an important task today. In modernism, truth was that which could be measured, calculated and proven. Whereas the postmodernism challenges all truths and concludes that there is no such thing called absolute truth. Postmodernism emphasizes on creativity and therefore truth becomes relative. It can be true and untrue simultaneously. But Jesus’ resurrection is a historical fact that cannot be true and untrue simultaneously. John 20: 11-18 describes the empowerment of a weeping woman to become the first witness of the risen Lord. In Scripture we see that the person who encountered an angel is generally struck with terror. But since Mary was in deep grief she did not recognize them as angels. She even did not recognize the risen Lord. Such can be the blinding effect of profound emotions. In this case her inability to recognize him also seems to be due to the character of Jesus’ resurrected body. But she recognized Jesus when he called her name. Jesus' statement “do not cling to me, for I have not yet ascended to the father...” indicated to her the radical change in him and consequently in his relationship with his followers. The use of the present tense (haptou) suggests in this context that he did not forbid her to touch him but told her to stop that which she was already doing. Jesus revealed that he was still on the move, and he also set Mary in motion to bear the good news to the disciples. She had just found him, and now she was sent away with a commission. As the ancient church put it, “she became an apostle to the apostles”.

Christian witness too should not merely attempt to share an experience rather it should direct people to Jesus so that people can encounter him for themselves. The risen Lord encounter us in our life situations. He liberates us and empowers us to realize the vision of God, to affirm the life and dignity of every person created in the likeness and image of God and to proclaim the ultimate truth. May the power of the risen Lord embolden us to confront the challenges and move forward to be a light in the darkness, and sort that loses its identity in order to transform others.

**Rev. K. James Cecil Victor**  
**Director, Dept. of Pastoral Concerns**
Resurrection is an invitation to read the scriptures with the risen Lord. Resurrection enables us to understand the universal mission of God. Besides, the power of resurrection moulds, strengthens and stabilizes the faith of a believer. In fact the present context and circumstances we face destabilizes the soundness of our faith and make us blind to understand the power of resurrection. So, we are tempted to read the Bible in a traditional way. The faith that constructed from the Bible builds Christian life, filled with the power of Resurrection. To stimulate and to flourish the power of Resurrection the re-reading of the Bible is inevitable. In this way the power of risen Lord helps us to read the Bible in a relevant context and make our reading more apt and realistic. There is pre-dominant power of Resurrection behind faith which the Bible builds. Similarly, the Bible is the most important thing which moulds and enhances the predominant power of Resurrection in a believer.

The texts selected for this day, even though documented historical incidents, speak to us very closely appear to be happening in our own context and expect us to register sensitive response.

1. For Israelites the temple was symbol of the presence of God and also symbol of their identity. The temple was a power center for them. By losing the real image of the temple rest of the community was dead to its internal strength and relationship. They had political freedom but that freedom had become meaningless as the whole community did not adapt to its inner relationship and inner strength. God started to trigger transformation in them and unite them by the prophet Josiah. Then they decided to alter their ways and turn towards God. They started to recognize the power of God in their midst and in all parts of their life. They experienced the presence of God and learned to respect His commandments. As an indication of all these things, purification of the temple had taken place. (2 Chr. 32:3-7). In fact they initiated to re-analyze their faith and this led to new thoughts, reconstruction and progress. Meanwhile it led them to perceive their weakness precisely. The prophetess Hulda led the Israel community to such kind of introspection. Israel could understand the reasons for their lowly situation only when they analyzed their faith (scriptures). The power of resurrection stimulates us to measure the difference between our lowly situation and elevated situation only through our faith. Through Hulda Israel could understand that it stayed too far from God. Risen Lord leads us to know about the role of our response to God’s action. In our scripture reading He helps us to grasp the limitations we have and His capacity of crossing the barriers. He can make us triumphant even when we are defeated and also examine our faith and its commitment. Israel re-examined its faith towards God and it caused the purification of the temple and reestablishment of their identity which was lost.

2. In early church, Baptism was a symbol for believing and finding existence in risen Lord. The sacrament of baptism was performed to pronounce the acceptance of a believer into faith community and it was believed that transformation generated in a believer is by the risen Lord himself. Transformation symbolizes that a person is changed into a new status. The baptism was used to perform at the time of Easter. It was believed that every believer should be part of Christ-event that took place in Jesus of Nazareth. This baptism indicates the privilege to take part in the life, given by the risen Lord and it’s a call to spread the LIFE in the contexts of dominion of death. Baptism symbolizes dying for sin and living for life and also to have union in the life of risen Lord. Baptism is sign for dying to worldly coherence and submit to heavenly power and to co-work for His life giving mission. It’s a inner stress to give a new interpretation to one’s life. In the book of Acts the Ethiopian underwent this kind of experience. Belonging to other faith, he read the scripture traditionally and found it difficult to understand. Meanwhile the power of Resurrection visited his curious mind through Philip. The power of Resurrection joined both interpretation of Philip and comprehension of
the Ethiopian. This power not only transformed his comprehension but also diverted his faith. He stood there and got baptized. This was the symbol of transformation. Unless the reading of the Bible and comprehension are not filled with the presence of the risen Lord, the transformation and true following cannot take place. The Ethiopian found the real meaning of his life. The baptism he had is the result of re-comprehension of his faith. If we need to find such outcomes in our faith community we need to give new interpretation to our faith. The book of Isaiah chapter 53 finds its fullness in Christ, in risen Lord and the whole Bible stands meaningful and contextual.

3. The disciples who had vision of the risen Lord got new perspective for their faith. Affirmation of Thomas (John 20:18), revelation to Mary (John 20:11-15) and commissioning of Peter (John 21:15-19) challenge Thomas, Mary and Peter respectively to a new understanding of the risen Lord.

The disciples who were travelling to Emmaus with despair and distress was encountered by the risen Lord. The destressed disciples could not recognize Him. But He joined them and made them analyze their faith. A Bible study took place! A re-reading of scripture with the risen Lord! He helped them to understand the mission of Messiah with an open mind. The risen Lord created a new understanding and a new direction to their faith. They turned their journey from Emmaus to Jerusalem which is also a significant sign of their understanding. Experience of the risen Lord became more significant when He broke the bread (Luke 24:30). Breaking the bread stands for a new understanding and gave new missiological ideas which emerged in early churches. The risen Lord envisaged the early disciples as the sufferings are inevitable part of the community. Sufferings in the mission can force us to new understanding and new interpretation to faith we have. The Lord’s Table enables the church to remember the sufferings of our Lord and share the sufferings of one another in faith community. This challenges the Church to re-read the faith with the raised Lord and have true understanding of Sacraments. The presence of the risen Lord enables the church to have new understanding, new interpretation and new experience of faith. He also makes it possible to interpret and apply our faith to the present context.

Rev.C.George Vinod Kumar
CSI Karnataka Southern Diocese
Commissioning by the Risen Lord

INTRODUCTION

The Resurrection Narratives in the John’s Gospel are challenging us with different dimensions of faith. Risen Jesus appearance to the Disciples, who were stricken with Fear of death at the hands of Jewish authorities, enriches them with strength and courage. Mission of God cannot be confined within the closed doors or behind locked doors but to break the confinement or the door of hostility, to go out into the world because, God so Loved the World. The Risen Lord gives His disciples this appearance to enable them to get rid of their Cowardice and be clothed with Courage. The Closed doors cannot stop Christ from entering but even though entry was restricted, Risen Lord proves His presence as unstoppable. No power or principality on this earth can stop the Presence of Jesus at the time of weakness, fragility, fear, crisis, danger, loneliness etc but His presence always makes a difference and equips people to Celebrate. This authentically shows the power of His Resurrection.

COMMISSIONING THE WEAK:

The Disciples of Jesus were upset and full of fear, confused and disturbed by the horrific Crucifixion of Jesus Christ. They were not able to comprehend the words which Jesus Spoke about Resurrection during His ministry. Their minds were not able see beyond Cross. These disciples could not perceive the power of God in Jesus. These disciples were very weak and forgot the Purpose of their Calling. They thought everything was over with the death of Jesus Christ, but at this point of time the Risen Lord says “Peace Be with you”. This was very conventional way of greeting one another pertaining to the Jewish tradition but at this juncture it was full of Meaning to their life. The presence of the Risen Lord transformed the whole situation, of Disturbance to Peace, of Fear to Faith, of Despair to Hope, of Sorrow to Joy; the very words of Jesus gave the disciples Life in all its fullness. They were ready to break the doors of hostility and divide between them and the world, thus the Risen Lord empowered and commissioned the WEAK.

COMMISSIONING TO SEEK:

Risen Lord Jesus gives the disciples the experience to seek the Wounds of His Crucifixion. He showed his hands and His Ribs, to empower them to have this as a Sign in their Mission and Ministry. His presence also emphatically pushed them to seek the People who are Centrality of God’s Mission. Being confined in the room is of no use and he prepares them to seek the people who are suffering the same wounds like Christ. Seeking is a challenge to the Disciples of Christ, Seeking needs courage and compassion. During the ministry Christ had told them clearly “seek ye first the kingdom of God.” There was a drastic change in disciples they were overjoyed seeing His pierced hands and His side. From fear and despondency they moved to Faith and assurance of Hope. This was a re-commissioning of the Disciples as His Apostles. Jesus Christ sending them into this world as His representatives as the Father had sent Him. This time these disciples who were sent with authority to Preach, teach, and do wonders in the name of the Risen Lord. Mission of God is being sent into the world. These disciples were stagnated in the locked room were sent from their stagnation, communicating to us that the Church must be on the Move to do God’s Mission with the Liberating power of the Risen Lord. This Liberating power was Breathed on the disciples saying Receive the Holy Spirit. Disciples were commissioned to “Go” with the power of God the Holy Spirit.
COMMISSIONINGTOSPEAK;

The post Resurrection ‘Breathing’ gave His disciples a experience of ‘NewLife and New Power’ in speaking the words of liberation to the Least, Lost and the Last in the society. This was the main purpose for which these disciples are being sent into the world. They are sent to make disciples, to speak the good news to all and to Baptize in the name of the triune God. These threefold responsibility had been endowed on the disciples. Speaking about the values of Christ especially the act of forgiveness, as the death of Christ on the cross was to forgive all our trespasses. Freely received has to be shared freely who trespass against us. Speaking or proclaiming Forgiveness of sins was the predominant and significant characteristic of the Apostles preaching in the book of the Acts of the Apostles. God in Jesus is God of Life and He never rejects or turn away any one who comes to Him in all truth to receive the liberating power of forgiveness. The Risen Lord clearly attributes that the presence and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit gives the power of forgiveness and acceptance of all, in spite of their going astray.

The Church as the Body of living Christ is called to be a Movement of the people, by the people and for the people. We are called not to be confined to the four walls or inside the Church but the Calling is to “Go Out”. The risen Lord commissioned us the Weak, to Seek and to Speak Peace to the people enabling them with the words of hope and assurance that there is always a” Life before death”. Many a thousands of people are denied of life and the possibility of life, as life is the precious gift of God and this life must be assured in all its fullness to the people who are denied of life. May God equip us in our faith Journey to carry out His Mission in a meaningful way.

Rev. Paul Francis
CSI Madras Diocese
Believing in Christ: The Truth

Ex.34:1-9    Psalm 119:89-96
Eph.4:7-16    John.17:6-19
Eve.Neh.8:5-12    John14:1-6

Today we live in the world which is under the impact of Globalization that fosters the inter change of world views, products, ideas, and other aspects of culture. It believes that the whole world comes together to be in union to solve the problems. On the other hand, globalization leads to uneven wealth distribution, degradation of environment, disparity, conflicts, monopoly and so on. It has a lot of ill-effects upon the society. In this situation what would be our responsibility being a Christian and how a Christian should respond to find a solution in this critical conditions.

1. Nature of God: Ex.34:1-9

In the History of Israel, the exodus event is an event of liberation, remembrance, and a custom for the future generations. Besides this event has made them to know about God and his nature and to be rooted have rooted in the tradition. Israelites rightly understood the true God when they came to Mount Sinai. Firstly, the Israelites were in wrong conception about the true God and hence made a image of golden calf. In the Ancient West Asian context, the image of bull was associated with the Fertility, Sex, violence, and power. God shown himself as God who forgives people and renews the covenant by calling Moses for second time to Mount Sinai. Hence forgiveness and mercy predominates in his dealings with the chosen people, who are called to be a counter culture to the system of exploitation. For instance, in the event of exodus, the king pharaoh has exploited the resources of his own people and the Israelites (Ex.47:13-22). So, God liberated them from the hands of Pharaoh to prove that he is a just god who is always with the suffering people. God is a promise keeping God for He remembered his covenant and came down to liberate them. Throughout the exodus event, God’s immaculate nature such as love and forgiveness, become explicit.


This passage from John’s Gospel is a prayer of Jesus for his disciples on the last evening before his death. The prayer of Jesus reveals to us that the mission of Jesus in the world is going to be accomplished. He distinguishes from the world as he prayed for disciples because they belong to him. In Hebrew traditions, revealing name is revealing the character of a person. Therefore, Jesus revealed the very nature of God, along with that; Jesus has made them to understand the vision of God by revealing himself to them.

The gospel according to Mark 4:41 shows that the disciples were in confusion to understand Jesus. Gradually, disciples had acknowledged Jesus as the son of God. The works of Jesus shows that God is active in every work of Christ. His deeds were liberating the oppressed, marginalized, and touching the “untouchables”.

In this high priest prayer Jesus prays that his followers may be kept from the evil. He says “Sanctify them in the Truth; your word is truth” (V.17). It is God’s will that we should be sanctified in them. While satan is the father of lies, Jesus, the son of God is “the Way, the Truth and the life.

3. Engaging in the world:

Nevertheless the early church was equipped with the spirit of the resurrection. They believed in going up to heaven after the death which is in contrast to the understanding of the descending down to the earth (Hades) in the Old Testament. They came to know the reality of the life and bravely stood as witness for the resurrected Christ, and for the growth of the church. The essentiality of the church is to build unity with proper values, such as humility gentleness, patience, forbearance. Attaining the unity and the knowledge of the Son of God, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ is the will of God (Eph.4:13). Paul says that only when each part works properly, the body grows and build itself up in love (V.16). So, knowing the nature of god and the will of God should motivate one to

Kristu Jignasa
engage themselves in the world, to transform the world after the Truth, found in Christ. Believing in Christ is believing the ultimate truth that sets us all free.

**Conclusion:** Therefore, the Old Testament God is always engaging with the world to disclose himself and the welfare of the creation. Through these institutions of the society in the ancient Israel like the temple, Prophets, and kingship God always tried to reveal his very nature. But when these institutions fail to keep the welfare of the people God himself revealed again through Jesus. The church really believed in reality of the nature of the God only through Jesus and his mission. The mission of the church is to stand against the exploitation of the people in the world. Further the church has to bring hormonal relations among them to show the reality of the life and will of the God.

Rev.K.J.Premavardhan  
CSI Rayalaseema Diocese,
Mark, the Evangelist

Hosea 6: 1-6 /Pro.15: 28-33
II Timothy 4: 1-11/IPeter 5: 5-14
Psalm 119:1-8
Luke 12: 4-12 /Mark 14:43-52

Mark, the Evangelist is the traditionally ascribed author of the Gospel of Mark. Mark is said to have founded the Church of Alexandria, one of the most important Episcopal sees of Early Christianity. His feast day is celebrated on April 25, and his symbol is the winged lion.

Mark presents the story of Jesus in a straightforward way with emphasis on what Jesus did. Mark contains careful explanations of Jewish culture and local geography. After a brief prologue about John the Baptist and the baptism and temptation of Jesus, the writer immediately takes up Jesus’ ministry of healing and teaching.

Mark's Identity

According to William Lane, an "unbroken tradition" identifies Mark the Evangelist with John Mark, and John Mark as the cousin of Barnabas. However, Hippolytus of Rome distinguishes Mark the Evangelist from the Seventy Apostles (2 Tim. 4:11), John Mark (Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5, 13; 15:37), and Mark the cousin of Barnabas (Col. 4:10). According to Hippolytus, they all belonged to the "Seventy Disciples" who were sent out by Jesus to saturate Judea with the gospel (Luke 10:1).

Identifying Mark the Evangelist with John Mark also led to identifying him as the man who carried water to the house where the Last Supper took place (Mk. 14:13), or as the young man who ran away naked when Jesus was arrested (Mk. 14:51–52).

The house of his mother Mary adjoined the Garden of Gethsemane. As church tradition relates, on the night that Christ was betrayed Mark followed after him, wrapped only in a linen cloth. He was seized by soldiers, and fled away naked, leaving the cloth behind (Mk. 14:51-52). After the Ascension of the Lord, the house of his mother Mary became a place where Christians gathered, and a place of lodging for some of the Apostles (Acts 12:12). Mark was very close companion of the Apostles Peter, Paul and Barnabas.

Message of Mark

Several features make Mark’s Gospel unique among the Gospels, beginning with the statement “the gospel about Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mk.1:1). Jesus is pictured as a man of action and authority. His authority is seen in his teaching, in his power over demons, and in forgiving people’s sins. Jesus speaks of himself as the Son of man, who came to give his life to set people free from sin.

Mark’s portrait of Jesus and its meaning for discipleship stand at the centre of his theology. In the opening verse Jesus Christ is identified as the “SON OF GOD” (Mk.1:1). This was confirmed by the Father (Mk.1:11, 9:7) and affirmed by demons (Mk.3:11; 5:7), by Jesus himself (Mk.13:32; 14:36), and also by Roman centurion at Jesus’ death (Mk.15:39). It was also confirmed by his authoritative teaching (Mk.1:22, 27) and his sovereignty power over disease and disability (Mk.1:30-31, 40-42, 2:3-12, 3:1-5).

Mark records Peter’s confession “YOU ARE THE CHRIST” (Mk.8:29) in its simplest and most direct form. Jesus did not accept or reject this title but turned the disciple’s attention from the question of his identity to that of his activity (Mk.8:31-38). He used the preferred designation “Son of Man” and taught his disciples that he must suffer, die, and rise again. The title ‘Son of Man’ is used 12 times by Jesus in Mark. His single use of the title “Christ” (the Messiah - Mk.9:41), was especially suitable to his total messianic mission - present and future. He was the suffering servant of Yahweh (Isaiah 52:13-53:12) who gave up his life for others in submission to God’s will (Mk.8:31). He was also the

Kristu Jignasa
Son of Man who will come in glory to render judgment and establish His Kingdom on earth (Mk.8:38-9:8; 13:26; 14:62).

**Mark’s Emphasis**

Mark, the evangelist emphasized on universal salvation: “For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mk.10:45). This is the heart of the Christian gospel that church should live out today.

**Rev. M. Rajendran**  
CSI Vellore Diocese
Mission with Christ’s Spirit

2 King.2:9-16
Acts 7:54-60
Eve. Nah. 1:12-15
Psalm 105:1-11
Matt.28:16-20
Acts. 1:1-9

The mission mandate of the Church is sharing the good news of repentance and forgiveness earned by Christ through his death on the cross and his victory over all powers of evil achieved by the resurrection from the dead. Fulfilling the mission is impossible without the strength from above. Jesus himself told his disciples, “…apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). As per his promise to send the ‘Helper’ after his departure (John 16:7) who will facilitate witnessing for him ‘to the end of the earth’ (Acts 1:8), the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit on the Pentecost day by which they were able to ‘turn the world upside down.’ The scripture passages for today help us to understand how the Spirit guides us to undertake the mission mandate meaningfully.

1. Christ’s spirit provides authority for the Mission

The gospel passage (Matt 28:16-20) narrates the end of the gospel story where the Master gives the last words to his disciples. So far they had been going through the process of mentoring. Now the time has come to take control of the mission by themselves. He charges them with authority upon earth and in heaven. Their mission was to make the entire world his disciples. Their fragility and timidity were overpowered by the assurance of their master’s presence throughout, ‘until the end of the world.’

We do not preach a dead or an absent Christ. We have not only to do with the Jesus of ancient history, but also with the living Christ of today. The Universal Church is a missionary church; the power and inspiration of missionary work is his presence in our midst. The apostleship is not an empty title, but a laborious office; ‘Go out, therefore, and teach all nations’. The meaning amounts to this, that by proclaiming the gospel everywhere, they should bring all nations to the obedience of the faith, and next, that they should seal and ratify their doctrine by the sign of the gospel.

2. Christ’s Spirit empowers to withstand persecutions

The persecution Stephen had undergone (Acts 7:54-60) was responded with an unequivocal and unprecedented ‘gaze.’ This gaze goes beyond time and space and stops at Jesus standing at the right hand of God. His commend on this vision was beyond the comprehension of the people around. We see the secret of his courage being the ‘Welcoming of the Lord.’ When Christ’s Spirit enters a person, his/ her mind and words go beyond time and space.

Stephen being full of the Holy Spirit looked up steadfastly into heaven (v. 55). Thus he directed his sufferings to the glory of God, to the honor of Christ, and did as it were appeal to heaven concerning them (‘Lord, for thy sake I suffer this’). Thus he made it to appear that he was full of the Holy Spirit; for, wherever the Spirit of grace dwells, and works, and reigns, he directs the eye of the soul upward. Those that are full of the Holy Spirit will look up steadfastly to heaven, for there their heart is. The heavens were opened, to give him a view of the happiness he was going to, that he might, in prospect of it, go cheerfully through death, so great a death. The heaven is opened for the settling of a correspondence between God and people that His favors and blessings may come down to us, and our prayers and praises may go up to Him. Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (v. 55). The glory of God shines brightest in the face of Jesus Christ; for there shines the glory of His grace, which is the most illustrious instance of his glory. God appears more glorious with Jesus standing at his right hand than with millions of angels about him. He sees Christ is for him, and then no matter who is against him.
God opens an inner door for the one who gazes into heaven which is inaccessible for others, and speaks of things, which cannot be uttered, and offers visions, which cannot be described.

3. Christ’s Spirit journeys from generation to generation

Elijah makes three efforts (2 Kings 2:1-11) to rid himself of the presence of his faithful attendant Elisha towards the end of his life, either desiring to spend the remaining hours of his life in solitude, or for the purpose of testing his fidelity and affection; it could also be to spare him the pain of seeing his master depart. Under ordinary circumstances, the servant would naturally have obeyed his master; but Elisha expressed his strong commitment to his master by spending the last moments with his master ready to do him all needful service, until the end. Elisha probably had a desire to see the wonders of God's working, not a vain curiosity but a rational wish to see the crown of glory put on a career that had already received so much honor. He wished to see the completion of one of God's great works.

We are also informed of the gradual disclosure to Elijah of the places to which he was to go. He is only bid to go to Bethel, and not till he gets there is he further sent on to Jericho and thence to cross Jordan. God does not show the entire road at once, even if it leads to glory, but step by step, and a second stage only when we have obediently traversed the first.

We are impressed with the vigor with which Elisha twists his characteristic mantle into a kind of rod, and strikes the waters strongly. The repetition of the former miracle is a sign that the Spirit of God that was guiding Elijah has been poured into Elisha. The God of yesterday is the God of to-day. Power is lodged in the faithful messenger. God’s strength dwells in those who love Him.

Christ’s Spirit that was implanted in the lives of the disciples on the Pentecost day did not conclude the mission with them. Even after twenty centuries it continues to equip committed people with authority and the strength to withstand persecutions. May God help us to ‘gaze into heaven and see the glory of God, and see Jesus standing at the right hand of God.’

Rev Dr Malhia Joshua
Union Christian College, Aluva
The life of Joseph the carpenter tells us how hard it is for the labourers to sustain their life. He was forced to move from one place to another. He and his family are forced to migrate due to government census, at times with the fear of genocide and at times due to political situations. Though Joseph remains silent in the New Testament, he play an important role in the story of nativity. To protect, nurture and to care his family he undergoes extreme situations in his life. He led a life that is similar to a refugee and migrant worker. The life of the labourers undergoes through difficult and hard times. They contribute their strength and energy for the functioning of the society. Many of them risk their lives for the maintenance of the family. Refugees and migrant workers are ready to take even menial jobs for their survival. Yet all those who work deserve dignity and respect. Labour Day is a reminder in our lives that demands respect, dignity, honour equality for every labourer.

Ancient Greek mythology gives an inferior feeling towards work. The noble and wise always spend their time in thinking and reflecting and to rule. This kind of binary is also seen in other religions. This is the ploy of the dominating groups and classes which oppressed the working class for the ages. Even in the Christian tradition Work is often misunderstood as punishment to humanity because of fall. Work is assigned by God and humans are created as working beings. Gen 2: 15 says The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. God the creator is an active worker in creating and sustaining life.

Work is the divine mandate for humanity (II Thessalonians 3:6-15)

In the Bible most of the times we find God is interested to call those who are engaged in work. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David are shepherds, Amos Shepherd and farmer. Jesus called Peter, Andrew, James and John who are fishermen. There were also tax collectors, zealots and other working class community who are part of Jesus Movement. Apostle Paul and his companions are working daily to earn their livelihood and supported ministry. Paul, Acquila and Priscilla are tent makers, Luke is a physician. Apostle Paul warns the Thessalonian church not to follow the Greek people who spend themselves as mere busy doers and are Idle. He further says that those do not work has no moral right to eat. The term labour is used for child delivery and also for the workers both has productivity in common. Those who do not work are not actually involving in the process of productivity and the functioning of the society.

Work is inspired and mandate of God. Martin Luther says every honest vocation is service to God (in his works Weimar Ausgabe). Only when humans work they remain healthy. Humans today suffer diabetes, blood pressure, thyroid, obesity and other diseases due to artificial comfortable lives. Major changes in the lifestyle of humans depending upon the technology to lead a cozy life leads to sickness.

God the worker established rest for all (Gen 1:26-2:3)

God(s) are commonly understood by many as idle beings who spend time in leisure. Whereas Christian God is one who is constantly at work in creating, redeeming, sanctifying and sustaining the life. In Genesis first and second chapter God is working to create the cosmos and engages humans in taking care of it. God took rest after working six days in creating the cosmos. It is the same God who intervenes in the life of Israelites while they suffered hardships under the Egyptian masters. The Lord God commanded to observe strictly to rest so that the land, animal and the slaves gets time to rest. Deuteronomy 5: 14 says so that your male and female slave may rest as well as you. Only a God who works can understand the pain of the labourer. Even the land needs rest endless and continuous farming has affected the fertility of the soil.

The workers in Chicago in the year 1886 suffered very much with long hours of work and without proper wages. The struggle against this severe oppression gave rise May Day demanding rest and rightful wages for the workers. Right to rest is basic human right for humans, animals and even to the Land. Today most of us demand rest and hike in wage at our work place. When it comes to the maids and servants at our house we deny them rest and hike in wages most of the time.

Kristu Jignasa
**Working for the Liberation** (Jn 5: 1-10)

Jewish religious system has become very rigid and oppressive during the Jesus earthly ministry. Instead bringing peace and comfort to broken communities it has at times become an oppressive structure. In John 5: 1-10 Jews objects Jesus from healing a person on the day of Sabbath. Jesus defends his acts by saying not only me, even my Father is still working. Fundamentalism is a serious problem for the whole humanity since ages. The message of Gospel or any religion is to promote peace and harmony in society. Millions of people died due to religious fundamentalism. Jesus attacked this dominant and oppressive force. His tool to achieve the means is to work. By doing the salvific acts of God he liberated people from the oppression of religious leaders of his time. God is inviting all of us to partake in the mission of love to promote life on earth. Missio Dei(Mission of God) is to extend the love of God to those who are unreached, untouched and neglected. Working for God and worshipping him is through spreading the message of love and not killing or hurting anyone.

**Rev. Manda Prashanth Babu**  
CSI Medak Diocese
INTRODUCTION:
Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ is undoubtedly an important event. It is absolutely right to state that, it is the foundation of our Church and it’s our greatest belief. It is the ray of hope for the children of God. Ascension of Jesus Christ is the end of the tenure of our Lord, on the earth as a human and the beginning of His heavenly reign. It represents the second coming (παρουσία – parousia meaning "arrival", "coming", or "presence") of our Lord as mentioned in the book of Acts 1:11. This is the major source to set faith on, not only for the apostles, but also for the believers and the whole world. Our Lord Jesus Christ preached as a teacher, sacrificed life for our sins, died for us on the cross and resurrected on the third day. These events mark His purpose of living on this earth. As a Savior he healed the sick, and also served the weak and mend the broken hearts through His life-giving compassion. But, His Ascension is remarkable for it shows the mighty power of God and His sovereignty. Glorification of Christ is the result of fulfilling God’s will on this earth. It shows that Jesus came to this earth as a human in the nature of flesh, but was raised and glorified. Above all, fulfilled His mission on earth. Therefore, bearing fruit for Christ, is what matters for a TRUE Christian. We are here to fulfill the tasks, Christ has assigned for us, to sanctify and glorify his name on earth. God’s love and promises are fulfilled through the Ascension and Glorification of our Lord and Savior The kingdom and judgment begins with Ascension of JESUS CHRIST. Today’s theme Ascension and Glorification of Jesus Christ guides us, as to how important it is for us to believe in God’s word, to keep our hope in our Lord, and fulfill the mission for which eternal life is rewarded by Abba Father.

DANIEL 7:9-14 - Rise of Sun of Righteousness and Supreme Power of God Shown Through Ascension and Glorification of Jesus Christ

Daniel receives God’s vision that describes about the events to happen in future. God comforts His children, through these verses, as they will be persecuted in the near future. Knowing that Son of God is to return the way he ascended to heaven, alone can comforts us. Verses from 9-12 portrays God’s Kingdom, His power, purity and enormity of the Kingdom. These verses are filled with speeches, which are crystal clear about the omnipresence of God, the manifestation of His power and talks about how His Kingdom will be established on the earth after dethroning every mighty power on earth. Every nation will bow down before the King, Our Lord and master Jesus Christ. When God gives the power of judgment to His Son. Verses 13 and 14 clarifies how Jesus will be exalted when His kingdom is established. It is mentioned that “He was given authority, glory and sovereign power; to all nations and all people of every language would worship him. His everlasting dominion will not pass away, and his kingdom is ONE that will never be destroyed.” Every nation, every race, and every creation will bow before him as, He is Glorified and given Authority by the Father, and He is to rule in His kingdom to Eternity. Every evil power, enemies and persecutors will be crushed into pieces during the judgment and children of God will be given justice for all the persecutions they faced, for the sake of our Lord. Deliverance will be given to the children of God against bondages. They will be freed from every prison and will be redeemed in our Lord’s rule (Rom 8:21). Lord Jesus will rise, as it is written in Malachi 4:2, “Sun of righteousness arise with healing in its wings,” providing them healing and happiness. Verse 14 proclaims the reason to await our Lord’s return and believe in the redemption to be provided by Him as Everything will be made new, Jesus will conquer everything and will be given every authority by His Father.
Psalms 47 is a chapter where the psalmist sings about the Establishment of God’s Kingdom in the world, to which we should relate ourselves, become anxious, to get to know him. Being His believers. By singing this Psalm, we will honor and glorify our Redeemer.

LUKE 24:50-53 - Blessings and Happiness Given Through Ascension and Glorification of Jesus Christ

The last four verses of this Chapter does not seem important because they are absolutely precise. But, we need to understand every act of Jesus. Before the Ascension, Jesus Christ blessed the disciples (verse 50) and later, the verse states that “JESUS Ascended into heaven.” (24:51). Christ came as human being, but returned to heaven in the form of Spiritual body. It was important for JESUS to ascend because the ‘Comforter’ Holy Spirit might rest and abide with us. In verse 52, the disciples returned to Jerusalem with great joy. This is the result of His Blessings. His Blessings are precious gift to mankind. Disciples and people around at that time, are the TRUE WITNESSES of Ascension of our LORD. Therefore, our faith should always remain and we need to pray for Heavenly Father’s Blessings. We are blessed by Him to continue to spread The Gospel. Jesus Ascended and will return and Judge every action of ours on the judgment day. Verse 53 enables us to know that disciples stayed continually at the Temple and Praised God. What an Amazing thing!!! We have to Praise God for providing us, with Comfort and Joy through His blessings. Through our Happiness, we have to Magnify His name at all times. These verses from the BIBLE shows that Ascension of Jesus Christ is also a source of Joy, because we are blessed by Him immensely for ever and ever.

ACTS 1:1-11 - Empowerment of Believers through Glorification of Jesus Christ

Book of Acts is the chapter of Great Commission and the Affirmation of Faith where disciples were commissioned to teach the world about Jesus and His life and it is also about how they sacrificed their lives and became martyrs for Jesus. In the beginning of this chapter, Jesus commissions his disciples, who He chose, to continue preaching about the Kingdom of God. After Lord’s Ascension here, is very important because, the ‘Comforter’ (HOLY SPIRIT) should be sent to them. As believers we are not simply meant to await the Lord’s second coming at an unpredictable time (verse 7) but meant to work, put ourselves in action to reach the Gospel to every corner of the world, till the return of Christ (verse 8). It is our responsibility to take the good news and preach about Kingdom of God to every nook and corner of this world, so did the disciples. They struggled, perplexed, persecuted, but still glorified the name of JESUS. Another purpose of ascension of Jesus Christ was to strengthen His children and make them stronger to finish their commissioned labors.

CONCLUSION: We, children of God, know that even though Jesus is taken to Heaven, will descend with Angels and Arch Angels and HIS mighty power to eradicate evil from earth and to deliver His children for salvation. Those who believe in God’s purpose in our lives, obey his commands and completes the commissioned work, will be honored with eternal life. Even though, our lives are short lived on this earth, Let us not ignore God’s call, to be His disciples and to preach His teachings, spread the true gospel, across the world as His Witnesses and help souls enter His kingdom. When our Lord Jesus returns with Supreme Power, the serpent’s head will be crushed, evil power will be overthrown, believers will be saved and a new reign begins. And so, as GOD’S children will live to see Eternity. Come Lord Jesus! (μαραναθά) Amen.

Rev. Adrian Deepak
CSI Karnataka Southern Diocese

Kristu Jignasa
Exodus 33:18-23 speaks about Moses’ encounter with God on Mt. Sinai and his request to see God’s glory. Moses was a person who had closer communion with God than any one of the human race prior to him. But when he asked God to show God’s glory, God showed only God’s back. In reply God said to Moses that he can see all God’s goodness but cannot see God’s face for no human being can see God’s face and live.

Later, during the time of Jesus’ Transfiguration when there was Moses and Elijah, it was John along with James and Peter who witnessed the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Being still in a physical body, John along with two other disciples got the opportunity to witness the glory of God. A revelation that was not allowed to Moses was revealed to John and other two disciples.

Indeed, we see the significance of John in all gospel narratives during the time of Jesus’ ministry. Therefore, it is a blessed thing to remember and celebrate the life and witness of this apostle and evangelist.

John was son of Zebedee and Salome. He was the younger brother of James the Great who together were called as “Boanerges” which means Sons of Thunder (Mark 3:17). He was a beloved disciple of Jesus Christ. Church tradition holds that St. John was the author of the Fourth Gospel and four other books of the New Testament, the three Epistles of John and the Book of Revelation.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, he rose to a position of influence within world-wide Christianity and shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in 70 AD, he moved to church in Ephesus (in modern day, Turkey) and lived there till his death. Tradition says that he was, by order of Emperor Dometian, cast into a cauldron of boiling oil but came forth unhurt and was banished to the island called Pathmos for a year where he wrote the book of Revelation and returned back to Ephesus. He lived to an extreme old age and died at Ephesus after 98AD.

The feast day of John in the Roman Catholic Church, which calls him “St. John, Apostle and Evangelist”, and in the Anglican Communion and Lutheran Calendars, which call him “John, Apostle and Evangelist”, is on 27 December. The Orthodox Church and those Eastern Catholic Churches which follow the Byzantine Rite commemorate the “Repose of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian” on September 26. On May 8 they celebrate the “Feast of the Holy Apostle and Evangelist John the Theologian”, on which date Christians used to draw forth from his grave fine ashes which were believed to be effective for healing the sick.

Some of the special characteristics of St. John are as follows:

- John was very much loved by Jesus Christ, His master. He was called as one of the three inner circle of Jesus Christ.
- John along with Peter and James were witnesses of the raising of Jairus's daughter (Mark 5:37), of the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1), and of the Agony of Jesus in Gethsemane more closely than the other disciples (Matthew 26:37).
- Jesus sent only John and Peter into the city to make the preparation for the final Passover meal (the Last Supper) (Luke 22:8).
- At the meal itself, the “disciple whom Jesus loved” sat next to Jesus and the tradition identified this disciple as John.
- He was the only one of the Twelve who did not forsake the Savior in the hour of His Passion. He alone among the Apostles remained near Jesus at the foot of the cross on Calvary alongside numerous other women (John 19:27).
Following the instruction of Jesus from the Cross, John took Mary, the mother of Jesus, into his care as the last legacy of Jesus.

He was with Peter at the healing of the lame man at Solomon's Porch in the Temple (Acts 3:1) and he was also thrown into prison with Peter (Acts 4:3). He went with Peter to visit the newly converted believers in Samaria (Acts 8:14).

He was the last remaining member of the Twelve Disciples of Jesus Christ. He died as an old man, the only apostle to die peacefully.

St. John 21: 20-25 is the epilogue of the gospel that includes the uniqueness of John among the disciples and the authenticity of his testimony in this gospel. John, throughout his journey with his master, witnessed many things which some of his fellow disciples could not. He was an eye-witness and an ear-witness of all recorded in this Gospel. That is what he mentions when he wrote his first epistle:

“That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched - this we proclaim concerning the Word of life.” (1 John 1:1ff)

Unlike the other gospel writers, he testified about Jesus in an utmost spiritual way as **Love, Light and Life** in a great philosophical depth yet in simple language. Because of the depth of his Gospel, John is usually thought of as the eagle of theology, soaring in high regions that other writers did not enter.

As we commemorate his life and witness, may our savior Lord inspire us to live in accordance with the gospel proclaimed by St. John, which relentlessly emphasized, “Love one-another” and what may be called a summary of the Bible.

“We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him” (1 John 4:16).

Rev. Dileep Kumar Kandula
CSI CSI-Krishna-Godavari Diocese
Our theme indicates that we are saved, are led by the Holy Spirit of God. Actually, it is precisely Holy Spirit’s leadership that affirms this identity, both internally and externally. When the Holy Spirit speaks to our hearts, it assures us that we are indeed, children of God. When we follow that voice, people take notice and see the spiritual dimension and deep spirituality in to our lives. If you are led by the Holy Spirit of God, then you must are a child of God.

The Word of God is clear that when we are saved, the Holy Spirit comes to abide within us as a Comforter or helper. Jesus in John 14:16-18 says, ‘And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter that He may abide with you forever’. What does it mean to be led by the Holy Spirit? Perhaps we can gain some insight by looking into the book of Acts and reading about how first century Christians were led.

In Acts 8:29, the Holy Spirit directed Philip to meet an Ethiopian eunuch join a chariot in the desert. ‘Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.’ Just before this, in verse 26, it tells us that an ‘angel of the Lord’ spoke to Philip, and instructed him to go to the desert in Gaza. After arriving, it was the Holy Spirit who gave Philip more detailed instruction. In Acts 10:19-20, the Holy Spirit spoke to Peter, and instructed him to go with three men without hesitation, because the Spirit had led them to Peter for the purpose of connecting with Cornelius. While Peter was pondering over the vision, the Spirit said unto him, “Behold, three men seek thee, Rise and go down and accompany them.”

Five Ways the Holy Spirit Leads Us

1. The Holy Spirit leads us through our prayer life. The church in Antioch prayed and fasted together, seeking God's intervention and direction. Our prayers can solicit the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

2. The Holy Spirit leads us through the Scriptures. The Holy Spirit is called the "Spirit of truth." The Bible was inspired by the Holy Spirit. If Peter 1:21 says, ‘for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.’ The Holy Spirit speaks to us as we prayerfully, openly, thoughtfully read the Bible. John 16:13 says, when He, the Spirit of truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth: for He shall not speak of Himself; but whatsoever He shall hear, that shall He speak: and He will shew you things to come.

3. The Holy Spirit leads us through teaching and preaching. In Acts 10, when Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius and preached the gospel, the Holy Spirit dealt with their hearts. Acts 10:44 says, ‘While Peter yet spoke these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. ‘Reading the Word of God is one thing, but hearing it taught and preached is another. The Holy Spirit always accompanies the teaching and preaching of God's Word. Sometimes a scripture portion or sermon confirms what the Holy Spirit has previously said.

4. The Holy Spirit leads us through the voices of people. Proverbs 11:14 says, ‘where no counsel is, the people fall: but in the multitude of counsellors there is safety.’ God has placed wise, proven, godly believers in our lives, to help us discern God's voice. We are foolish to ignore the wisdom that can be gained from those who are spiritually mature and proven. God's Holy Spirit can use their voices to speak to our hearts and minds.

5. The Holy Spirit leads us through circumstances, situations, and experiences. When Peter arrived at the house of Cornelius and saw the Gentiles gathered together for the purpose of hearing the
gospel, it moved him and opened his heart and mind to the truth spoken by the Holy Spirit. We can never underestimate God's ability to speak to us through experiences and situations we find ourselves in.

**Conclusion:** It is important to note that we need to be led by the Holy Spirit in all spheres of our life. In our personal life, in our family life, in our community life and even at our work place. God has bestowed us with many resources. But to be resourceful, we need to be guided. In Ex.36:1-7 we see that Bezaleel and Aholiab were skilled craftsmen. Their ability and intelligence to build the sanctuary came from the spirit of God. Therefore, they were able to manage people, material and every resource and complete the work. Rom.8:6 says that setting our mind on things of the Spirit leads to life and peace. May God help us to be led by the Holy Spirit.

**Rev. Prakash Jaswil**
**CSI South Kerala Diocese**
Pentecost was the second important festival of the Jews. It was the harvest festival when the first fruits of the grain harvest were presented to God (Lev.23:17). The feast of Pentecost coincides with the Jewish feast of Weeks, which occurs 50 days after the Passover (Deut.16:10). According to Jewish tradition, the Ten Commandments were given to Moses 50 days after the first Passover. At the time of Jesus, the festival focused on rabbinic law and traditions. We celebrate Pentecost Sunday, not because of the old historical event but because of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, which led to the birth of the Church. The spirit of God is active not merely from the event recorded in Acts chapter 2 but has been active from the beginning of creation. He was brooding upon the face of the waters before the creation (Gen.1:2). Human became a living being only after the spirit was breathed in to him/her. In Old Testament we see the Holy Spirit as creative, directive and empowering agent that came upon Bazaliel, Samson, Gideon, David, Samuel and so on. Similarly in the New Testament we see Holy Spirit as an empowering and guiding force for humanity to be set free and walk in faith and truth.

1. Prayer that sets us free: is a prayer for God’s intervention in our lives’ situation. Prayer is a conversation. It is not a monolog but a dialogue for God communicates in and through prayer. It is a relationship for communication establishes relationship. But how do we pray and for what purpose we pray becomes important. We must pray with confidence that God will answer our prayers sooner or later. We must pray not just for material things, but for peace and justice that affects the lives of people. When Jesus said, “When the Holy Spirit comes he will set you free” he intended both spiritual and social liberation because without one the other is futile. Today people need to be freed from greed, consumerism, fanaticism and communalism which destroy the “neighbour-hood”, negate life and bring disorder in God’s creation. While materials gain prominence than people; personal pleasures than needs of others, we must pray for the deliverance. The Spirit of God is ever willing to intervene and transform the lives and structures. Prayer is power, prayer to invoke the Spirit to set us free is certainly a genuine prayer that can change the attitudes of people and transform the lives of people.

2. Person who indwells: As a spirit he goes everywhere he wants but as a person, he understands our needs, aspirations and grief. He is one among the trinity, the God head. He proceeds from the Father and the Son. He has personal characteristics for he thinks (Rom.8:27), feels (Rom.15:30), wills (I Cor.12:11) and loves. He speaks to us, indwells, confronts us, intercedes for us and sets us free from untruth. In this post-modern era there is nothing called absolute truth and therefore nothing to rely up on. But one needs to realise that
God is the ultimate truth. People and the human structures needs to be subjected to this truth. The Spirit is the agent of salvation (Jn.16:7-8), reveals to us the truth about Jesus (Jn.14:16,26) and incorporates us into the body of Christ (I Cor.12:13). He is the agent of sanctification (Rom:8:9) and deliverance (Rom:8:2-4). He indwells us to give us courage to confront the life-negating elements of the society; to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God; to live as Christ’s witnesses. As an advocate and comforter, he continues to guide us and strengthen us.

3. Power that empowers us: He empowers the weak, the vulnerable and the marginalised to testify to the saving knowledge of Christ. Acts 1:8 says ‘when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, you will be empowered to be a witness in Jerusalem, Samaria, Judea and to the end of the earth. It is impossible to be a witness without the help of the Holy Spirit. Isa. 61:1-11 is a clear depiction of empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The messiah was promised the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in order to preach the good news to the poor, release the captives, restore sight to the blind and thereby deliver people from their spiritual and social bondages. Acts 2:1-13 is another remarkable event which portrays the enabling power of the Holy Spirit. On Pentecost day there were three observable manifestation, while the Holy Spirit descended upon 120 disciples. a) Audible manifestation: There was a sound as of a rushing might wind (v.2). The Hebrew and Greek words for Spirit have the meaning of wind which is one of the Biblical symbols of the Holy Spirit (Jn.3:8). b) Visual manifestation: There also appeared visibly cloven tongues like as of fire (v.3) that rested on each of the disciples. c) Speech manifestation: As the 120 disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit they began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them the utterance v.4. The foreign languages spoken by the Galilean disciples were a corporate prophetic sign that the witness of the Church was to be universal. Besides, the Holy Spirit also revealed His nature as an agent of salvation. These manifestations point out to the power of the Holy Spirit that empowers people to be effective communications of God’s love.

In Luke 4:18-21 Jesus gives the purpose of his Spirit filled ministry. a) To preach the Gospel to the poor, the destitute, the afflicted and the broken hearted. b) To heal those who are bruised and oppressed. c) To open the spiritual eyes of those blinded by Satan. d) To proclaim the liberation from Satan’s dominion, sin, fear, guilt and oppressive structures. It is imperative for the believers to follow this ministry of Jesus by the power of the Holy Spirit so that God’s kingdom is realized.

Department of Pastoral Concerns
Trinity: Community of Love

The Russian artist and writer Vera Nazarian once said, “Love is made up of three unconditional properties in equal measure: acceptance, understanding and appreciation. Remove any one of the three and the triangle falls apart.” It is the *tri-ness* or *many-ness* of love that makes love so inevitably imperative. The idea of a community of love, indeed, can never escape such a Trinitarian logic of love.

**Mark 1:1-11**

The faith of the early Christians in the *tri-ness* or *many-ness* of the Godhead is well reflected in this pericope. John the Baptist, God’s ‘path-straightener’ stands here as a witness to the *many-ness* of God. Descending voice of God the parent and the descending act of the Holy Spirit are embodied in the ascending body of the Son, who was just *coming up* out of the water. This sight of triune revelation of God is surrounded by a socially significant sacrament: Baptism. For John, Baptism was a public demonstration of a new community, a community that is repented for its sins and now reformed and renewed by the incarnation of Love. Jesus, the Son of God, stands here as the ultimate and supreme revelation of God’s descending love. Thus a community that comes up out of the water is a community of love.

**Genesis 18:1-15:**

The faith of the Church in the *many-ness* of God is traced back to the Abrahamic community of faith not just by the early Christian apologetics but also by the contemporary theologians. The Mamre experience of Abraham and Sarah is remembered and reaffirmed as an experience of Triune God who is in loving communion with human beings. The unconditional hospitality of Abraham and Sarah to the *many-ness* of Godhead is powerfully demonstrated in Abraham and Sarah’s acceptance of the guests not as ‘foreigners’ but as part of their own self. They do not make any queries regarding the whereabouts of the ‘guests’, but get ready to cater them unconditionally. An unconditional hospitality is not associated with right, law, debt, or with duty. It is associated with mutual love, respect and being together for each other. In this act, Abraham and Sarah become part of a new community where Godhead is adored in its *many-ness*. A pure gesture of love and hospitality becomes the foundation of such a new community.

**II Corinthians 13:14**

The communitarian benediction that the Church has been affirming since centuries signifies that the Church’s faith is deeply rooted not in the ‘oneness’ of her members but in their *many-ness*. As God is perceived in God’s *many-ness*, the community of believers is also perceived in its foundational faith of being many in different identities. The plurality in God’s image demands an acceptance of plurality in the image of humans too. It challenges the modernist stress on singularity and individuality. It is the singularity and one-ness that should be put to stake, and not the plurality and *many-ness*.

Trinity calls us to worship God who is diversified in *many-ness* and who is different in God’s ownself, and to recreate communities which are so diverse, yet unified in the love of God. Love becomes a guiding principle to celebrate *many-ness* and differences in human communities. Affirming God in *tri-ness* or *many-ness* in the midst of hatred, injustice and turmoil, thus is a daring act of faith and hope for a new community of love. Such a new community challenges all the singular claims of power and knowledge, transcends the barriers constructed by such claims and celebrates plurality and differences.

**Dr. Gladson Jathanna**

Karnataka Theological College, Mangalore
"We only learn to behave ourselves in the presence of God."  C. S. Lewis.

There is no doubt that God’s presence is everywhere. At the same time worship is a time we realize and acknowledge the presence of God. Worship without revelation of God cannot be considered as worship. If it happens without experiencing the God’s revelation, the order of worship will become merely a program. The biblical contexts which narrate the worship always reveal theophany with a vision. This vision helps one to understand God, realize the context and examine the self. The texts of the day help us to examine whether our worship is a revelation of God or are we participating in a program.

Revelation of God the creator who is greater than the worship place (I Kings 8: 22-30)

Our church buildings ought to helps us to focus our lives on God. We gather to worship God. We come to hear His Word, and to receive His grace, forgiveness and love. At the same time we come to learn that the God we worship is the creator of the universe. Building a sanctuary for worship is not only a human effort. David desired to build a temple but he could not do that. Solomon constructed a magnificent huge structure of a temple but he himself admits that it was not an exclusive dwelling place of God. He acknowledges his limitations and the limitations of the human made temple. Psalmist says, “I lift up my eyes to the hills (where temple was situated) from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and d earth.” (Ps 121: 1, 2)

Revelation of God in worship with unity, witness and integrity (Rev 14: 1-7)

In his vision the author of the book of Revelation sees a vision of heavenly worship with a loud voice. A multitude of one hundred and forty four thousand, the first fruit of God as described here, worshiping God and the Lamb with a new song. They sang the song louder and it was like the sound of harpists playing on their harps. Such a big crowd singing a song with harmony shows the need of unity in worship. These worshipers always follow the lamb where ever he goes. Worship never ends with the benediction pronounced by the clergy. It continues. The worshiper should follow their master where ever they go. The text also says “in their mouth no lie was found”(v.5). The integrity of a disciple is important in worship.

Revelation of God who sees the heart of the believer in worship (Mark 3: 1-6)

There was a person in the synagogue who had a withered hand. The critics of Jesus were not interested in needy but they were very much keen on the rules, regulations, precedence and traditions. Jesus takes care of the need of the people in a worship place. But the so called worshipers like Pharisees try to find fault. When one receives God’s mercy, the Pharisees immediately started conspiracy against Jesus along with their enemies i.e., Herodians (cf Mark 12: 13-17). If at all there is conspiracy, unholy political alliances and strategically attack against the good work of God’s people, God reveals the divine mercy to the needy. God sees the needs of the heart as well as the crooked intentions of the people.
“Fear of the Lord” doesn’t indicate terror but reverence and awe towards God. In the Old Testament, the phrase “The fear of God” is often used in the sense of a genuine faith which is characterized by a) obedience to God’s law (Dt.5:29), b) listening to his voice (I Sam. 12:14) and c) learning his ways (Ps.86:11). While knowledge can be acquired from various sources, wisdom and understanding are divine gifts to human kind.

The acquisition of wisdom begins with understanding that God is holy, overwhelming, majestic and glorious and that His glory is fully embodied in our Risen Lord, Jesus Christ. Ps. 14:1 says that only fools say in their heart that there is no God. They do not understand God because they are corrupt in their perception about creation. Oswald Chambers says, “The remarkable thing about fearing God is that, when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas, if you do not fear God, you fear everything else”. Jn.5:20 says “the son of God has come and has given us understanding so that we may know him – who is true… He is the true god and eternal life. “Fear of God doesn’t make one terrified and fearful but emboldens a person to face the realities of life; to be optimistic and strong.

**Fear of God motivates people to Holiness**

Prov. 3:7 says “fear the Lord and depart from evil’. This verse clearly indicates that the fear of God keeps a person from doing anything that brings disgrace to God. Those who fear the Lord will flee from evil. Joseph in Potiphar’s house is a splendid example to understand to efficacy of the fear of God. With the advancement of information and technology people are finding newer ways of drifting away from God. Cybercrimes, pornography and voyeurism are few examples to mention. Today’s education if it can’t instill fear of God in a child, it will be devastating for the society itself. On this students’ Sunday, it is important to affirm that the education should be value-based rather than career oriented. Education should inculcate values in the lives of children, and lead them to truth and justice that are the marks of holiness.

**Fear of the Lord prolongs life**

Prov.10:27 says, “The fear of the Lord prolongs the days, but the years of the wicked shall be shortened”. It is said that approximately 60% of human illness can be traced directly or indirectly to fear, sorrow, envy, guilt, hatred or emotional stress. Contrarily, the fear of the Lord prolongs life as a sign of God’s blessing and also assures eternal life. Yes, fear of God brings discipline in one’s life in terms of attitude, prayer life, habits and interpersonal relationships. This invokes the presence of God and God as a shepherd, shield and buckler, will protect and preserve those who fear him. Isa.40:29 says, “He gives power to the faint and to him who has no might he increases strength’. Though how long we live may not be as important as how well we live, the prolonged is certainly an indicator for God’s blessing. It should only enable us to proclaim God’s saving power and loving grace.

**Fear of the Lord produces a sense of security**

Prov. 14:26 says “In the fear of the Lord is strong confidence: and his children shall have a place of refuge”. Luke 10:21-24 reveals the blessed status of those who fear the Lord. “They see what Jesus sees! And understand the mysteries of God’. Sense of security lies not in perishable goods but in possessing the eternal God. True wisdom is not going after mammon but loving God and serving people genuinely which gives him/her a sense of belonging to God. The real security lies in belonging to God! King David relied on God’s strength rather than in his chariots or military. As a request he won battles and the enemies. For David, God was the rock and refuge, the fortress and the buckler.
Fear of the Lord produces contentment
Prov. 19:23 – “The fear of the Lord leads to life, and whomever has it rests satisfied…” Those who fear the Lord will have a clear Goal in Life; and therefore, when his/her needs are met, they will be happy and satisfied. Wisdom enables us to seek what we need and not what we want. Human want has no limit but needs do have. When we know what we require, we will be content when our requirements/needs are met. King Solomon, when a chance was given to ask what he wanted, he chose what was needed. It was a wise choice for two reasons. Firstly, his choice was based on the experiences of his father, David. Secondly, his choice was based on the need. As a king, he needed wisdom to rule people than strength to protect or amass wealth. Like his father, Solomon also walked before God in faithfulness and righteous which are the expressions of obedience to God (fear of God). Hence, he could choose aright and as a result, he received an understanding mind to discern good and evil, and also what he has not asked, both riches and honour. Our prayer are not answered because either we ask wrong things or ask wrongly. 1 John 5:14 – “If we ask anything according to His will, he hears us”

Rev. K. James Cecil Victor
Director, Synod DPC
Introduction

The name Barnabas means “the son of encouragement” and “consolation”. He came from Cyprus and was a Levite. At his young age became Christian. He played a vital role in the early church. He made remarkable impact on society and there are many aspects of his life that are worth remembering as Barnabas the Apostle was known for his sacrificial life and good deeds.

When the early church was scattered due to persecution, some of them ended in Antioch. Antioch was the greatest city in Roman Empire and ranked as third in the empire. The city was filled with wickedness and deceitful activities. This metropolis had large community of Jews, who enjoyed a considerable amount of self-government. Scattered believers had word of God on their lips. Their proclamation of Gospel had great impact and sinners repented and believed. Elders at Jerusalem commissioned Barnabas to go to Antioch to find out what was going among the Gentiles.

Let us meditate on the life of Barnabas

I. Barnabas was a cheerful giver:

Acts 4:36 says that first thing Barnabas gave up was his possessions and wealth for the extension of ministry. During the early church, Barnabas’ life remains as exemplary for many. He did what he heard and believed. He proved to be generous for the sake of Christ.

II. Barnabas lived up to his name: Acts 11:23

During his visit to the church at Antioch Barnabas had new experience in worshipping God with Gentiles. He did not criticize the practices and methods they adopted. Barnabas was a righteous man obeyed word of God in daily life and was filled with the spirit which explains effectiveness of his ministry. He encouraged believers to be persistent in faith. He was a man of faith which is evident from the way he encouraged the church and Saul. New churches and new Christians need people like Barnabas to encourage them in life and ministry.

III. Barnabas saw the Grace of God Acts 11:23

When Barnabas seen the growth and development of the church he saw grace of God behind the growth. Barnabas a young man relied on the grace of God. He rejoiced at what he saw! It was work of God and Barnabas gave thanks for God’s grace. Apostle Paul acknowledges that “only by the grace of God I am what I am” (ICor.15:10). Barnabas opened the door for Paul to become apostle to the gentiles in Antioch.

Barnabas was an extremely important person in the life of the early church. His life is a dynamic example to all. Antioch was destined to become the second birth place of Christianity. Though Paul and Barnabas were together for short time, they made great impact on the life of the Jews and Gentiles.

As we commemorate the day of Barnabas let us learn three lessons (i) to be generous (ii) to encourage others and (iii) to see the grace of God. Barnabas encourages believers’ into the ministry of God. We need to involve ourselves in the ministry of encouragement and remain faithful as Barnabas in the ministry of God.

Rev. S. Susheel Kumar
CSI Medak Diocese
O Lord, how manifold are your works!
In wisdom you have made them all;
the earth is full of your creatures. Psalm 104:24 (NRSV)

While I was addressing children in a School, I asked them about their ambition in life. They said they would like to become a ….doctor, engineer, advocate, teacher etc. One boy said that he would like to become a veterinary doctor. As it was an unusual answer, I asked him the reason for the choice. He immediately responded: ‘Sir, whatever medicines we give, they will take it without a word. Moreover, these animals will not a file a case against the doctor in the consumer forum’. This is the public attitude towards animals. We fail to understand the intrinsic value of each component and the ecosystem surrounding it. The Universe, Earth and all its components, are a part of a dynamic cosmic design within which each piece has its place. God designed each component to play a role in contributing to the wellbeing of the Earth. The goodness of creation is of value to God and was created with a purpose. Thus, for 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. All components on the Earth are mutually interconnected or dependent on each other for life and survival. Man is not is not the only species, 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 the species and abiotia make to their shared ecosystems. Actions that inhibit their contributions should be identified and prevented. In the web of life, every animal and every plant relies on other plants and animals for survival. All animals and plants in a sense work together to survive. God created the web of life which is interdependent. In human eye some of the creations of God are useless or waste. Let us study the value of some of the creations of God.

**Mangroves**
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. Mangrove is a group of tropical and specialized trees growing in the saline and brackish water area which the most suitable for feeding, breeding and nursery grounds of these marine organisms and hence important for aquaculture purposes. Mangrove trees offer significant and unique habitat to birds, mammals, and fish populations through a complex marine food chain, creation of breeding habitat, and establishment of restrictive areas that offer protection for maturing offspring. Mangroves, one of the creations of God, has intrinsic value, purpose and is interconnected with other creations. Mangroves are an essential part of the body of Earth. If Mangroves vanish from Earth every part of the Earth will suffer.

**Frogs**
Frogs, the friends of farmers, are an important indicator of the ecosystem. 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 vital role in maintaining a healthy environment. Many of the human activities are unsuitable to frogs and their habitats. We drain the wetlands to get land for cultivation, housing and tourist resorts thereby causing habitat destruction. The extinction of frogs, will result in the multiplication of mosquitoes and other
insects which will spread fatal diseases. Frogs are a wonderful creation of God, which have an intrinsic value, a purpose, and an interconnection between other creations.

**Bees**

Bees visit the flowers of plants and take nectar and use it to make honey. While the bee is collecting nectar, it gets a powder on it called pollen. Bees fly from one flower to the next, carrying this pollen, which falls into the flowers, and the plants use that to reproduce! The plant helps the bees, and the bees in turn help the plants.

**Grass**

The majority of people consider the grass which is growing on the ground, as useless. In order to avoid the growth of the grass, some may spray herbicides. If we clear the grass from the surface of Earth it will grow within a short period. Normally the majority of people don’t know the intrinsic value, purpose and interconnectedness of grass. If the grass is not there on the surface of the Earth, the Sun’s rays will fall directly on the surface of the Earth and heat energy from the Sun will be transferred directly to the earth. As a result of the disappearance of moisture, micro-organisms will die, which will result in desertification. This is an irreversible process. If the grass was there, sunlight will not fall on the surface of Earth. The grass will convert the heat energy from Sun to chemical energy. In other words, photosynthesis will take place and carbohydrates will be produced which is a food for all animals. God created grass as a blanket over our dear Earth; it is neither waste nor useless. It is a wonderful creation of God.

**Sun**

The energy in living things originates from the sun. Green plants are the only living organisms that can use the energy from the sun to make food, which can be used by the plant itself or by animals that eat the plant. If people/animals eat the plant, they get energy from the sugar in the plant. But people cannot hold out their hands to the sun and make food in the same way that the plant makes food in its leaves.

**Holy Spirit**

We are reluctant to acknowledge the intrinsic value, purpose and interconnectedness of each component in the universe. Each component of God’s creation has a voice. We are unwilling to hear the voices of God’s creations, communicating to each other in their own language. Why is it not possible for us to understand the language of communication of each species. From Acts chapter 2 we understand; when the Holy Spirit comes upon us we will be able to understand the language of plants, animals and other components of earth. The presence of the Holy spirit will enable us to understand the language of other creations of God and we will respect the integrity of creation.

**Conclusion**

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 are yet to be identified. Everything created by God has a purpose and nothing in the universe is neither waste nor useless. God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good.(Genesis 1:31)O LORD, how manifold are your works! In wisdom you have made them all; the earth is full of your creatures (Psalm 104:24).

**Prof. Dr. Mathew Koshy Punnackad**

Honorary Director, Ecological Department, CSI Synod
**Make Disciples**

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**Introduction:**

The Greek word for Disciple is ‘Mathetes’. The Greek root verb ‘manthano’ means to learn. The term is understood as a learner or pupil, the one who accepts and follows a given doctrine or teacher. According to Old Testament understanding, disciple means a person who is seeking to become scholar. According to New Testament, the term disciple term used with the sense Talmidim meant disciples of the rabbis, whose studies resulted in the Talmud. Two important points derived from above; (a) to designate an adherent of almost any great leader. (b) as the most frequent and general term for believers in Christ.

A disciple is therefore one who is primarily a learner, a student and a pupil. In the beginning of Jesus’ ministry Jesus picked up 12 people as his disciples. And he had given them vigorous theological training for 3 ½ years. The lessons appointed for this Sunday would help us to understand the theme from three different contexts in the following lines.

**I Kings 19:15-21**

The prophet Elijah goes to Beersheba, the southernmost town in the land of the Lord’s people. Elijah is legally well beyond the reach of Jezebel. For Elijah, who had known the presence of God (theophanies) through God’s providence and through miraculous acts that clearly demonstrated God’s power was also manifested in his role in the ordination of his successor. Elijah made available himself to God who revealed his intentions with regard to Elijah’s successor. Elijah did not feel jealous to ordain his successor.

This text reminds us that the God’s ministry may take many forms. God needs human agents to fulfill his will and his ministry on this earth. Our faithfulness to God’s calling may entail the preparation of others for their own ministries. Throughout the text Elijah manifests all the signs of depression. He complains. He needed to be told to eat. His view of reality was distorted. He expressed self-pity, and was alone faithful to God; as result received a divine rebuke. Elijah was touched by a divine intermediary. His perspective was strongly challenged. And further God offered him a lesson. God did not let him go simply because he was burned out and depressed. Finally he understood that discipleship is costly.

**John 1:35-42.**

John 1:35-51 is treated as a pericope under the heading of ‘how people find Christ’. Our Lord’s first disciples were originally drawn from the John the Baptist’s circle. First two disciples were directed to Christ by John the Baptist. John the Baptist did not feel envy or jealous through the attitude of his disciples who have chosen to follow Christ. Rather he encouraged them to become Jesus’ disciples, as he knew Jesus was greater than himself. Two pairs of brothers suddenly received call from Jesus Christ to be his disciples from their fishing craft. Jesus did not conduct entrance test or test their scripture knowledge. Their prompt response to Jesus’ call certainly challenges us. Some of them voluntarily followed and expressed their desire to be his disciples. Selection as disciples is not for a privilege, but for service, suffering and self-sacrifice for the sake of Christ. The people who received Jesus’ invitation as disciples they were ordinary people. Primary tasks of Jesus’ disciples were (a) to learn mysteries of Jesus the Messiah and the Kingdom of God, (b) proclaim God’s Kingdom.
Romans 16:3-16.

Pricilla and Aquila were Jewish Christians, expelled from Rome by Claudius. They have settled in Corinth, they were engaged in tent-making. Their family provided hospitality for Paul. Later they have decided to travel along with Paul to Ephesus where they took up residence. They opened their home to conduct Sunday worship (house church). As wife and husband they both supported Paul’s ministry and looked after the Church. They both were treated by Paul as firstfruits of Asia unto Christ. Making disciple is a mission of the Church. Ready to learn, depend upon God to be guided in our day to day life should become the lifestyle. Encourage the Church members to respect God’s call.

Conclusion

Jesus’ command to make disciples of all nations indicates that he has authority over all nations. Besides, he does not want any to perish but be saved in order to have abundance of life. This command to make disciples of all nations also indicates to nature of God’s kingdom. God’s kingdom is not an exclusive community but an inclusive one. It welcomes all and accommodates all. The justice of God’s kingdom becomes a paradigm for discipleship. A true disciple follows Christ in humility, in service and sacrifice.

Rev. Sunil Varakumar
CSI Rayalaseema Diocese (ACTC)
### John the Baptist

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**Introduction**

Often, we use to hear the role of John the Baptist in our churches. He was called simply as “Baptizer” or “the Baptist”. Undoubtedly, we can see the religious diversity in John’s day. There were existing, three principle sects; each of which was committed to upholding the covenant law of Moses. Firstly, the Sadducees represent priestly interests and secondly, the Pharisees, non-priests, committed themselves to applying the commandments to everyday life. Thirdly, Essenes, who came from priestly and non-priestly backgrounds, tended to separate themselves from the society at large. In midst of these backgrounds he emphasizes his preaching was on sin, repentance, judgment and hell. His prophetic call was “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near.” (Matthew 3:2) and we can see his prophetic dynamism when Pharisees and Sadducees coming for baptism, he said to them; “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?” (Matthew 3:7).

1. **Forerunner of the Messiah**

   It was the prophecy that “I will send my messenger, who will prepare the way before me, and he will clear a path before me.” (Isaiah 40:3), Here the usage of Hebrew word *Derek* means “prepare the way” or better “clear a path” which are mentioned in Isaiah (40:3; 57:14; 62:10). Prophet Malachi actually interprets the “messenger” here as an identical with the “voice”. When it comes to New Testament, four gospels see it as fulfillment in John the Baptist (Matt.3:3; Mark 1:3; Luke 3:4; John 1:23). John the Baptist is also understood in the gospels (Matt.11:14; 17:10-13; Mark 9:11-13; Luke 1:13-17) to fulfill the prophecy of Elijah in Malachi 4:5, who is announced there to Precede “that great and dreadful day of the Lord”. If this verse can be understood in the light of Isaiah 40:3, the task of “my messenger” would be to send for the people to prepare for the Lord’s coming by clearing away the obstacles of unbelief.

2. **You are neither Cold nor Hot** (Rev. 3:14-22): A call for Repentance

   Laodicea is the last of the seven churches; and its geographical location ison the highway system and trade routes but not for good defense or water resources. And it’s meaning and significance is “judging of the people”. This city was built by Antiochus II, 261-246 B.C., and was named in honor of his wife, Laodice, reference to whom is found in (Daniel 11:6).

   **The Characteristics of the Church of Laodicea**

   Laodicea used to be called “city of compromise”. And it has a peculiar character. It has ever flexible and accommodating, full of the spirit of compromise. And it was a city of wealth, with large markets,
a large banking exchange, and large manufacturing interests. A rich farming district surrounded it. Valuable wool was produced in the valley, soft in texture. Laodicea was one of the leading health resorts in the Greco-Roman Empire. Lukewarm baths and mineral springs attracted many visitors from Europe and Asia. Because of their wealth, the citizens were proud, arrogant, and self-satisfied. Since they lack nothing they have become nominal believers and their spiritual life become very static one.

i) **Commendation:** There was nothing to speak well of Laodicea, for this church had imbibed the proud spirit of the world around it, and its people were in spiritual threat. For that Lord’s called them as “lukewarm”.

ii) **Accusation:** The Church was in the situation of miserable, poor and blind and naked; yet interestingly, they possessed all the essentials that make an impressive appearance. Yet they are actually wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked. “Increased with goods,” even today’s churches are wealthy as measured by world’s standards, possessing beautiful church buildings, wonderful institutions, and centers of learning, yet lacking the very essentials of Christian experience. When worldliness eats its way into our hearts, it destroys our passion for souls. Too many of us are comfortable and self-satisfied, yet we do not know our real condition; we are immunized with just enough Christianity to make us resistant to the genuine thing.

iii) **Warning:** God warns the Laodicea, by saying that, you are blind but not incurably blind. You need to be healed; but look! The great Physician waiting to helps you. You need to be clothed, and he is waiting to cover you with his own robes of righteousness. No garment, comes out of the earth can meet your need. In the Greco-Roman world, black was generally recognized as symbol of subjection. But white is a symbol of purity and victory. Thus, God wants us to be pure, that we may be victorious. And He appeals us with tenderness and love, saying “I counsel you”. When we surrender ourselves to Christ, our hearts will be renewed by his spirit. Thus, the Church of Laodicea gives a symbol of self-pride on the earth and living in the status of lukewarm. All these consequences will lead them to the wrath of God i.e. “I will spit you out of my mouth” (Rev.3:16).

### 3. He must Increase, but I must Decrease (St. John 3:22-36)

John’s Gospel gives the clear picture of John the Baptist as forerunner. Though crowds misunderstood him as messiah but he came to prepare the way for the messiah. His powerful words melted the hearts of the people; and they left their homes in search of the object of desire inspired by him. Repentance led them to search for new life (Luke 3:15). On the other hand, the disciples of John the Baptist came and said, “Rabbi, the one who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you testified, here he is baptizing, and all are going to him.” (3:26), this is very natural and human tendency. The central figure in the scene is of course the John the Baptist himself, with his total lack of envy and bitterness, and with his splendor of generosity and complete forgetfulness of self. Says very powerful statement “I am not the Messiah, but I have been sent ahead of him.”(3:28) and goes beyond said boldly “He must increase, but I must decrease” (3:30). And I exalt that my groundwork work has made it possible for him to come, and he has come, and that increasingly I am being forgotten and he being accepted.

**John the Baptist: the Preacher of Repentance**

He refers to his disciples concern; and reminded them of what he had confessed before “I am not the Christ” (1:20). And then emphasized it again: you yourselves can testify that I said, “I am not the Christ but am sent a head if him” (3:28). It seems that some of John the Baptist’s disciples had not grasped the full meaning of his testimony about Jesus. They could only remember John’s statement that he was not the Christ because he had said it in their hearing. Which indicates Christ’s forerunner showed himself worth of his calling and perfectly fulfilled his task.

**Conclusion**

Therefore, the dynamic John the Baptist was fearlessly and harshly spoken out, and he condemned even those who are in the high places who committed wrong (Matthew 14:3-4). Here we can draw some conclusions that John the Baptist came as forerunner or to prepare the way; he was succeeded in
his responsibility. Often we are lacking the prophetic voice, in our churches and society. We are not able to come out of our safety zones. Like, church of Laodicea, we are trying to get or hold abundance in worldly wealth, but utterly poor in spiritual life. Today’s church resembles the status of lukewarmness. The ultimate result will be “to spit out of mouth”. However, John the Baptist is one of the most fascinating personalities of the Bible. A Prophet with his feet in two worlds, he calls out to the Israel of his own generation as well as to Christian believers of every age. Listen and respond to the most radical demands of conversion and newness of life.

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People of God: Flock of Christ

Gen: 35: 1-15       Psalm 95
Acts. 16:11-15      John 10:1-6
Eve. Eze.34:25-31   Gal.6:1-10

Introduction:

All those who are on the earth are People of God, since God created everyone (Nehemiah 9:6), provides everything (Ps. 65:9-13) and sustains everything and everyone (Acts 17:22-28). Though this is true, many a times people do not realize this fact and are not live a life worthy as ‘People of God’. Sometimes, even among the people who believe that they are ‘People of God’ also do not maintain the decorum but have dual standards (St. Matt 6:23).

People of God contain characteristic of ‘Flock of Christ.’ In other words ‘flock of Christ’ are the ‘people of God’. 10th Chapter of St. John’s Gospel gives an account on ‘Jesus the Good Shepherd’. Here Jesus used ‘figurative language’ where Jesus presented himself as Good shepherd and his listeners as his sheep. The following are three important characteristic features of the ‘Flock of Christ’

I. Flock of Christ listen to their Master:

It is obvious that a Shepherded can maintain a flock of hundred or sometimes more than hundred sheep. How they can handle that many sheep? Jn. 10:3 Jesus says ‘Sheep hear his voice.’ The shepherd may be one, but with his voice, shepherd can handle many sheep. Further Jesus said that ‘sheep do not know the voice of the strangers’. There is a video in the ‘YouTube’ with name ‘Good Shepherd,’ in which a group of visitors with the permission of Shepherd tried to call the sheep. They imitated just like the voice of Shepherd. They tried and tried but they couldn’t succeed. Even some of the sheep were very near to them, but the sheep did not respond to them. In Jn. 10:8 Jesus said, “before me are thieves and bandits but the sheep did not listen to them”. In the video, at last Shepherd came forward and he called the Sheep. In a fraction of seconds all the sheep gathered around the Shepherd. John 10:3 says ‘Shepherd calls his own sheep by name.’ It rightly depicts the intimate relationship that Shepherd and Sheep have between them. As it said in Jn. 10:27 ‘my sheep hear my voice’, ‘Flock of Christ’ listen to their master alone.

In Gen 35: 1-7, God said to Jacob, ‘Arise, go up to Bethel and settle there.’ Jacob listened to the Voice of God just as his father and grandfather. This made Jacob to receive a name of Blessing from God (Gen. 35:9). Whoever listens to God, God will give a name to them and develop a bond of relationship between them. Hence People of God like flock of Christ listen to God.

II. Flock of Christ follows their Master:

Jn. 10:4 says ‘Shepherd goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him’. Sheep has a habit of following. For this reason shepherd goes ahead and sheep follows. It is obvious that if we observe those who are herding goats or cows and buffalos, they follow their flock. But only in the case of sheep, Shepherd goes ahead and Sheep follows him. Among hundred sheep, many may not look at their shepherd, but they follow the sheep which are immediately to them, ultimately never lost the way from flock. If shepherd walks slowly, sheep walks slowly; if shepherd walks fast, sheep walks fast.

‘Following’ is just not limiting to the likes and dislikes, but wherever Shepherd goes, whatever the way he choose, sheep follows. Christ extended the same call to his disciples in their ‘following’. In Jesus’ earthly ministry, there were many instances that huge crowd followed him (Mt. 4:25, 8:1, 12:15; Mk. 3:7, 5:24; Lk. 9:11, and Jn. 6:2 etc... All these texts reveal the fact that the crowd followed...
Jesus for getting some sort of benefit. Addressing to them Jesus said in Jn. 6:26 ‘you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs but because you ate the loaves and were filled.’ But Jesus’ call to his flock is not just for material benefits but to carry the Cross.

In Acts 16:3, Paul wanted Timothy to follow him. So he took Timothy and had him circumcised. In fact Paul’s preaching doesn’t demand circumcision, but here Timothy was circumcised because of the ministerial need. Timothy is ready to face any sort of sufferings while following Paul in the ministry. In Jn. 10:27, Jesus says I know my sheep, and they follow me. ‘Know’ is the verb which qualifies the statement here. Jesus knew about his flock. They follow Christ in any means, hence they are ‘people of God’

III. Flock of Christ receives life in its abundance from their Master:

Life of sheep is always a providence that given to them by their master. Shepherd saves the sheep. The shepherd’s worry is always about the wild animals. At any time they may attack sheep from any side. For this reason shepherd always looks around to save the Sheep from them. Sheep have intimate relationship with master. They completely believe their master. Since the sheep completely rely on him, he feels it as his responsibility to save the sheep. As part his caring he will dispose his best even will be ready to give up his life. Life giving commitment of the shepherd gives life to the sheep. The same way flock of Christ receives the life in abundance from their master. In Jn. 10:10, Jesus says ‘I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.’ Jesus loved and promised life in its abundance to sheep which listen to him and follow him. In Jn.10:28, Jesus said, ‘I give them eternal life and they will never perish. As ‘flock of Christ’, ‘people of God’ do have life in its abundance.

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Jesus’ first words to Simon Peter were “Follow me” (Mark 1: 17); his last words to him were “You follow me” (John 21: 22). Irrespective of having few fumbles, Peter never failed to follow Jesus in every steps of his life, even unto the point of giving his life as a martyr.

**Peter: A Transformed Witness for Jesus**

In judgment oracle, Jeremiah 16: 16-21, God proclaims a warning for the iniquity of the people and their evil ways. Here, the judgment of the Lord is emphasized by the image of ‘fishers’ and ‘hunters’ to round up all the people for exile. When Jesus used the metaphor of fishermen to describe the mission of his disciples (Mark 1: 17), he was actually reversing its meaning from that intended by the Jeremiah. Jeremiah’s fishers caught people for judgment; Jesus’ fishers are called to catch them for salvation.

When Jesus entered Peter’s life, this ordinary fisherman became a new person with new goals and new priorities. Though Simeon is gloomy in human perception, he dazzles in Jesus’ perception. Having identified his great potential, Jesus gave a new name Peter – ‘rock’, to be a vital leader of the Church. We may wonder what Jesus sees in us when he calls us to follow him. But we know Jesus accepted Peter, and, in spite of his failures, Peter went on to do great things for God. Are you willing to keep following Jesus, even when you fail?

**Peter: A Martyr for Christ**

Peter in his first public discourse, he described himself and other apostles as "witnesses" who saw the risen Christ. Subsequently, after the miraculous escape of the Apostles from prison, when brought a second time before the tribunal, Peter again declares the twelve as witnesses to Christ. Moreover, Peter in his First Epistle St. Peter also refers to himself as a "witness of the sufferings of Christ" (1 Peter 5:1).

Though Peter declares himself as the witness of Christ on several instances, he stands tall only through his witness for Christ as a martyr. The Greek word martus means ‘to witness’. To understand the significance of martyrdom, it should be viewed in the light of Roman persecution. During the persecution against Christians, witnessing to Christ can’t be done openly; all the activities and functions of the church and Christians were done secretly. In such a situation, martyrdom was the only opportunity to witness publicly for Christ. Therefore, the martyrdom witness of the apostles like Peter, has helped the early Christianity to withstand in the times of persecution.

**Conclusion:**

As a dedicated servant of God, like Peter, who gave his life for the growth of Church, and suffered for the faith in Christ, let us also be a living witness for Christ, in the midst the challenges confronting us.

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Giving without Counting the Cost

The Bible both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament talks about a God who is generous. The created order is itself a testimony to the generosity of God. God’s providence for the entire creation to sustain life is also an indication to God’s generosity. In the creation of the human being God gives a part of his own being as God creates human beings in his own image. God gives so lovingly and God also forgives so graciously. Therefore the nature of God is to give. God in the Old Testament is seen as someone who loves people and gives them life. In fact the Bible tells us in a very revolutionary way that God cares for both good people and bad people, God makes life possible for his covenant people and also for all people. That is the nature of God’s love. The New Testament tells us the ultimate level of God’s generosity in God giving his own Son Jesus Christ to the world to redeem the world to God. Jesus responds to the selfless and sacrificial generosity of God by giving his own life on the cross of Calvary.

The woman in the gospel narrative in Mark gives us an insight into the nature of discipleship. The woman has deep devotion for Jesus Christ and she has something very special with her; a very expensive flask of Nard known as the fragrance of Jerusalem and she pours it on Jesus’ head and anoints him. This woman gives us an idea of giving like how God gives without counting the cost.

Giving is a major responsibility of every Christian believer. Giving from whatever we have. There are different types of giving that we find in society.

There are people who give to get – sometimes popularity, power etc.
There are people who give and announce about their giving.
There are people who hesitate to give and give grudgingly.
There are people who give as in Proverbs 18:16 A gift opens doors; it gives access to the great.
Giving to compete with others- to be better than others.

Christian experience is a giving experience – giving ourselves, giving what we have – for God. It is important to see why we should give; to whom we should give and how we should give?

1. Why should we give?
We give because everything belongs to God and we give as much as we love God. What we have is what we have received and therefore a part of what we have is to be given. Giving is a way of sharing what has been given to us. In the Old Testament time we hear of the word Tithe. Tithe refers to offering to God 10 percent of the produce. During kingship, the tithe was given to the king and later on it shifted to the priests and the religious establishment. In the book of Deuteronomy there are two types of tithes mentioned.

a) On the one hand, the tithe, the tenth of the yield of agricultural products, is to be used, year by year, in an offering culminating in a sacrificial meal in which the household of the farmer is to share (Deut. 14:22-27; 12:6-19). Although the meal is a household affair, it is to be held at the sanctuary, and to it the Levite is to be invited. The offering and the meal are, however, a household affair, and their primary purpose is not the support of the Levite. It has been conjectured that this provision was a reform which was the result of such abuses as those condemned by the prophet Amos (Amos 4:4; cf. 5:11).

b) There is another Tithe in Deuteronomy where Deuteronomy speaks of a tithe to be offered for charitable purposes every third year (14:28-29; 26:12-15). This tithe is to be distributed to the Levite, the SOJOURNER, the fatherless, and the widow--those without land to produce crops for themselves. The question of whether or not Deuteronomy is thus contemplating two separate tithes naturally arises, and the answer to the question is probably a negative one. The tithe in Deuteronomy is, thus, something which may have different purposes. It is an offering which acknowledges God's ownership of the soil and its fruits, a means of support for the Levite, and an offering for the sake of charity.

Kristu Jignasa
2. To whom should we give?
Belonging to the Church is responsibility in giving and supporting the ministries of the Church. Christian giving is to support the work of the church. The Church is also a giving community – reaching out to people in need and distress, helping the work of the gospel. Giving should also be a believer’s response to God. St. Paul says that one’s abundance should respond to a person’s need. It is a fair balance between your present abundance and their need, so that their abundance may be for your need, in order that there may be a fair balance.
Paul also wants believers to be careful in giving. There may be people who do not work and Paul urges the church not to support them. Idleness is against the will of God. Giving to the Church and Giving to the Poor and the needy both are a Christian responsibility.

3. How should we give?
Firstly, God accepts offering that comes out of Love.
Matt:5. 23 and 24 says, when you are offering your gift at the altar, if you remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother or sister, and then come and offer your gift.

Secondly, God appreciates giving out of poverty and need.
Luke 21 1-4
He looked up and saw rich people putting their gifts into the treasury; he also saw a poor widow put in two small copper coins. He said, “Truly I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all of them; for all of them have contributed out of their abundance, but she out of her poverty has put in all she had to live on.”

May God enrich every believer, every church and every community to be giving generously to be giving graciously and in such giving of themselves the church and the world will be a haven of justice and well-being of all.

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Theological Education: Making of the Faithful

Introduction

The word, “Theology” comes from two Greek words, “Theos” which means “God” and “Logos” which means word. Hence, theology means the study of the word of God. According to the English dictionaries, education is training for body, mind and character followed by systematic instruction. Education can be religious and secular while both are necessary for every human being. The word secular is a supplement to a moral standard of religious education. Theological education equips a person to study the word of God in a deeper level in relation to the philosophical, political, sociological and psychological context of the society. Hence, the ultimate goal of theological education is to equip a person to minister to the needs of Church and Society to establish the ministry of reconciliation of God to human and human to human as revealed in Jesus Christ. Therefore, the central focus of the theme is the role of theological education in making faithful humankind.

Theology Memorialized (Joshua 4: 1 – 9)

God’s saving act is a unique once-for-all event in history. It is good to memorialize the great act of the Lord, provided that the memorials do not become idols. According the book of Joshua, chapter one verses one to nine, after the people safely crossed the river, God directed them through Joshua to build a memorial from the twelve stones drawn from the river by the twelve men from each tribe to commemorate God who was guiding them. To educate the new generations about what God has done for their forefathers so that they will also obey God’s word and trust Him in the future (Psalm 78 : 1 – 8). “Crossing the Jordan” illustrates the death to old self and identification of new life in Christ in His resurrection as Romans 6: 1 – edifies. When we have living faith in a living God, the past is not a dead history, it throbs with living reality. Every believer must set up in his heart stones of remembrance of what God has done in the past, and when trouble overtakes them, they can have the confidence they once had. Theology is partly shaped by Church history. None of us can live in isolation from the past. Apostle Paul built his teaching on those like, Abraham and David, who preceded him (Romans 4: 1 – 8). Joshua built up his spiritual career following the footsteps of his master Moses and communicated to his future generation a witness which culminates in his commitment: “As for me and my household we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24 : 15).

Theology Internalized (I Timothy 6: 11 – 16)

The epistle portion speaks about Paul’s charge to Timothy, a man of God. He does not address him by name. Instead he uses the title “man of God” which in the Old Testament is reserved for the leaders of Israel like Moses (Deut 33 : 1; Joshua 14 : 6), Samuel (I Samuel 9 : 6) David (Neh. 12 : 24, 36), Elijah and Elisha(I Kings 17 : 18, II Kings 4 : 7). As a man of God, Timothy is deliberately contrasted with false teachers who are the men of the world. Accordingly, Timothy should be radically different from false teachers. Then, Paul goes on to develop a threefold appeal to Timothy which is ethical, doctrinal and experimental (I Timothy 6: 11, 12).The internalization of theological education and spirituality depends more upon the role of the Church and Theological Colleges in training the candidates for ministry. There is a greater awareness today that the authentic spirituality cannot be expressed apart from participation and involvement in the struggles of the people to be truly human. One must internalize God’s love and His saving acts to save the world. At this context the Church and the Theological Seminaries must co-op equipping the candidates for ministry. They should prepare the candidates giving priority to private devotion, and meditation. The earlier image of a minister as a

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mere shepherd of the souls and one who presides over traditional spiritual exercises, has been broadened in the contemporary Church and society. A true spiritual minister must have sound theological training, motivate social change and take up cause of justice and love to mobilize people for the right type of action against all forms of inhumanity. Leaders in the Church must internalize the theology to opt for the ministry of the Church.

Theology Contextualized (Mathew 13: 1 – 9)

The word parable comes from a Greek word that means “to throw alongside”. Jesus used the familiar to teach the familiar and the unfamiliar (things new and old – Mathew 13: 52). He did that not to hide the truth but to arouse interest in the truth (Mathew 13: 13 – 15). He wanted to open people’s eyes and ears to receive the truth in to their sluggish hearts. Any training is must be contextual so too is theological. India is pluralistic with a variety of major religions such as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, Jainism, Sikkism, and many other minor religions. People of different faiths live side by side and usually get along well. But we notice tensions and violence between religious communities increasing in recent years. Over emphasizing the supremacy of their own religion, conversion and anti-conversion efforts are prevalent in the society and create restlessness in the society.

Does theology need contextualization in India? Should we insist only evangelism, and ignore inter-religious dialogue? Can the issues be included in the curriculum to maintain peace and harmony? Young Christians must be trained to appreciate culture, uphold indigenization and at the same time not to contradict the Gospel. According to the parable of seeds, God is sowing His word in human hearts and looking for fruit. Let our Church and the theological institutions plan to preach the word of God in such a way that it reaches the people of all kinds in the society with tolerance and without hurting people of other faith too. The seed has life and power, to produce the harvest of blessing in the life of the Society at large. Do we share with others the way Lord taught? We have to plan and work carefully to make the theological education relevant to our context modifying periodically the curriculum, the teaching method, the involvement and the evaluation procedure.

Conclusion

The Church as sponsoring body, the theological colleges as training bodies are expected to train the students and ministers to be people oriented with kingdom values. Jesus preferred discipleship training model to suit the goal and objectives. Jesus mission is liberative. He trained the disciples to live and die for the gospel of forgiveness, liberation and welfare. He used houses, seashores, streets, pools, gardens, hills and mountains, temple, synagogues as centers for his training.

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Ordained Ministry: Fragrance of Christ

Ex.29:1-9 Psalm Ps.99
Eve. Lev.8:1-9 2 Cor.2:14-17

The ordained ministry which Jesus entrusted to the apostles and then to the seventy-two was a new form of mission envisaged by him which has been accomplished with the participation of God and human beings to save the world from sin (Luke 10:17-20). This pattern of mission has become a pioneering model of mission work to the Church. Jesus’s instruction on mission was a unique one and an alternative to Jewish style of teaching the saving act of the people from sin. Therefore it was one which challenged the Jewish establishment from the very inception of selecting, training and ordaining the ministers. Jesus’s design of mission was not only aimed at Jews alone but it was a broader and an inclusive one, not a selective one which was earlier proposed by Jesus at the time of appointing the twelve (Matthew 10:5-6). The very introduction of the ordained ministry reveals the spirit of universalism of Jesus and the urgency of building the kingdom of God. Let us reflect on this theme under three sub topics based on Luke 10:1-11:

1. ORDAINED MINISTRY FRAGRANCED WITH DISCRETION: Luke10:1-4

Christ’s mission mandate of freedom to the people as against the Jewish religion and Roman rule which posed a threat to the rights of common people are very well exhibited through the freedom he has exercised in his unique method of selecting and training the twelve apostles and a further seventy-two. His move is a counter approach to the discriminative method of election of priests in the Jewish religion where only the descendants of the family of Aaron could serve as priests, with no-one from the other tribes enjoying this privilege. This meant that a vast majority of people in Israel were deprived of the right to become a priest. Jesus breaks this tradition of discrimination and ordains as ministers any who accept his call and who commit themselves to be his co-workers in the new form of the ministry, partaking in building the kingdom of God. Here a new life dawns on the people of non-Aaronic families to serve for humanity. The works of priests are limited to the people of Israel, whereas Jesus selects ministers to minister to the people of all nations. In India those who are treated as untouchables could serve for God as pastors and the same is the case around the world. This blessing for the Church in treating the so called untouchables is drawn from Christ’s way of selecting and ordaining ministers. Although the Tamil Nadu government introduced amendments and appointed non-Brahmins as Archaka in Hindu temples through the Government Order on May 23, 2006, the same was challenged in the Supreme Court of India and an order was passed in favour of Brahmins on December 16, 2015 that the appointment of Archaka (priest) be based as per the Agamas which means those privileges will not be available to Non-Brahmins.

Jesus also teaches the very essence of being a fellow worker in his mission, and hence a simple lifestyle was programmed to them in which they would not take a purse or bag or sandals. These external appearances and attitudes of the new workers would have great appeal for the people who had seen the worst aspects of Jewish religious workers who dressed elaborately, decorated with very expensive stones (Exodus:28:13-30) paid out of public money. And this culture of the Jewish priests alienated them from that of Christian worshippers where Christ’s teaching brings the ministers very close to ordinary people who long for spirituality.

Christ also appeals to them to mobilize more volunteers to support his cause of building a new community of faith based on the values of freedom, equality and simplicity. They were to function
like John the Baptist to prepare the people before he himself could be ministering for the people. Ordinary people have been chosen to be his co-workers, and thus the mission of God to the people has become a feature of common people, thereby bringing the domination of the single tribe to an end. Transformation was possible only by disturbing the present structures which were not helpful to ordinary people.

2. Ordained ministry fragranced with distinctiveness: Luke 10:5-7

The ordained ministry was once again a counter one to Jewish religious authority and the Roman rulers. Jesus proposes a counter order of Peace through ordinary people (v.5) while the colonial Roman government was active in propagating Pax Romana – a pseudo programme of Peace under Roman rule. Jesus teaches them to say “Peace to this house” by meeting individual families through visiting their houses. This was the first task directly associated with the mission activities of these seventy-two to the people. Peace, proclaimed by the workers, would rest on the family if they are welcomed by the members of the house who have been longing for it. Jesus propagates the mission of peace and wants them to promote it among the people who live under foreign rule without freedom and peace. This new way of meeting people is a unique part of Jesus’s mission at a time when the religious leaders were indifferent by only concentrating their income through the expenses incurred through religious rituals (John 2:13-16). People were taught by the Jewish religion to go to the Jerusalem temple to perform many sorts of religious rituals and for the observances of annual festivals like Passover, and to undergo rites of purification administered by the priests, whereas Jesus’s ministers are trained to go to the people and meet them on their doorsteps to proclaim peace. Jesus eases the burden of the people on spending money like offerings and transportation from all the corners of Israel and neighbouring countries by making the ministers to go the people. Now the transition takes place in terms of understanding God, earning peace and entertaining the workers of God (Jesus’ disciples). Again no mandatory offering like tithes (Numbers 18:21) are demanded as that of provisions made to meet the needs of Levites, but the basic needs of the ministers are looked after by those who embrace peace and who have benefitted by their ministry which is a voluntary act of hospitality. And they were also warned not to develop the bad attitude of making use of their position to take advantage of people by moving from one house to another which might invite wrong understandings at the very inception of Christ’s great mission. The pity is that this teaching has no value in today’s culture of Christian preachers who wish to promote rich life styles and advocate that such things are the blessings of God - an approach which is quite contrary to the teachings of Jesus (Mark 10:21-23; Luke 19:8-10).

Jesus also taught his disciples not to waste their time when their greeting of Peace is not welcomed by members of the family, and therefore he makes them to realise that Jesus’s mission should not be forced upon people (v.6b), simply saying that the peace proclaimed by them would return. Jesus taught the new workers that when someone is not interested in embracing peace and is indifferent (during the foreign rule with exorbitant compulsory payment of taxes there was no true peace) it’s a waste of time to try to bring them under the influence of Christ’s programme of peace. But he teaches them to warn those who are not welcoming the promoter of peace that they wouldn’t have any more relationship with them and to declare that "the kingdom of God is near", a call to repent as in the manifesto of Jesus’s inaugural mission.


The mission given to them by Jesus was to heal the sick. Jesus diversifies the mission work and each time it focuses on the individual, which again negates the approaches of Jewish religious teachings where no concentration on the needs of people finds place. Many sicknesses were understood by the Jewish people as the consequences of their sins. Certain sick people had to go to the priest and Kristu Jignasa
perform certain rites which qualified them to be treated as normal and free from sickness. There was no personal contact or support between the officiating priest and the sick or healed person. But Jesus creates a cordial relationship between the minister and the people who are sick. Here begins the formation of the Kingdom of God. Again this union is a witness to the realisation of the mission of God and initiates hope among the sick. Jesus aims to establish a new order by the genuine involvement of his workers in the society. The longing for Peace in Jesus’ time was a national issue since they were under the foreign rule, but it was also a matter of individuals. Whereas the sickness is not a national phenomenon and at the same time those who are sick must be identified in order that they be healed and comforted with the assurance that the kingdom of God was near to them – a new order for which the healed would serve as signs and instruments. The sick are vulnerable since their condition deprives them of the very right to work and earn money to meet their needs. If the sick happen to be economically poor and the bread winner of a family falls sick for a long period their condition will be pathetic as they lose the buying capacity without money. This could be witnessed in the families who depend on daily wages. Jesus cured the leper when he approached him and advised him to meet the priest so as to accomplish the rites required of the law recorded in the book of Leviticus (Mark 1:42, 44; Levi 13:43-59). Jesus healed many (Mark 5:29, 34, 41) in order to make them united with their family. Jesus was available to the sick whereas Jewish priests would not go to meet the sick, and that was the approach of the religion. Jesus gives worth to every individual in the society and desires their health. He wants everyone to be healthy to take part in the kingdom of God. Thus the mission of Jesus is very significant since he cared for those who were neglected and made them partners in mission (Mark 5:19).

The Church has to follow the teachings of Jesus as given to the apostles and the seventy-two, and must function so as to build a new order of the world wherein we are reminded to go to people to proclaim peace, to heal them and above all to make them understand that we are available to rescue them from all bondage.

Rev. N. Manova Santhosham
CSI Madras Diocese
Marriage: Lasting Life of Love

Gen.29: 1-20 | Psalm 128
Heb. 13:1-6 | Matt.19:3-9

There are many different approaches to the subject of marriage. The liturgy for the solemnization of marriage in the Church of South India, is one of the finest liturgies among the liturgies of the traditional churches, with a strong biblical and theological foundation. The emphasis is about the lasting nature of the relationship based on the lasting love, till death separates the two. It becomes mandatory on the part of the Church to stress on the importance of the lasting nature of marriage.

In the OT passage, we are introduced to the love story of Jacob. It is love at first sight. He is prepared to do anything in order to get her to be his wife. Jacob is blessed in many ways in spite of his sinful nature. God had appeared to him and had given him an assurance that he would bless him with a large family and also land. His sins were forgiven. When he went in search of his future security, he easily gets the access to the family of his uncle Laban who accepted him saying 'my bone, my flesh' (29:14); he was received as a member of the family. He is safe in Haran. He is looking for a new future. At the same time Laban also has his own secret agenda to accomplish. He uses the opportunity to be good to Jacob and at the same time to achieve what he wanted to achieve. When he tells Jacob - should you serve me for nothing -the words appear as words of concern for Jacob but Laban is clearly indicating that he is the master and that Jacob is a servant.

Jacob asks for Rachel and agrees to serve for seven years. Considering his background, working for someone is something new for Jacob. He was the son of a rich man Isaac and has a rich tradition in Abraham and Isaac. They are great ancestors. He would have had many servants to serve him in his own place. But now he is in a new environment where he cannot make any claims. He has to build his future. His willingness to work with Laban is not only for his own security and assured basic necessities in life, but also to get a beautiful woman as his wife. His purpose in life appears to be to get the hand of Rachel. In order to achieve this he is prepared to become a servant and serve for seven years leaving behind his glorious past in the family. His sins - of deceiving his brother must be a reminder to him.

After the end of seven years he gets the shock of his life. Laban did not give Rachel to be his wife but gave the elder daughter Leah to whom he did not have any liking. His first love was for Rachel. Leah was not appealing to him. He decided to remain with his first choice. But now after seven years he got the older daughter to be his wife. He would not have worked for seven years if he had known that at the end of seven years Leah is going to be his wife. But Laban has planned his scheme successfully and the deceiver Jacob is deceived by Laban.

Still Laban appears to Jacob as if he is truly concerned about Jacob and makes another offer. Jacob was willing to work for an additional seven years for his love towards Rachel.

God's promise of family and land to Jacob is being fulfilled. But in the process Jacob is also learning a lesson to understand his true position. This understanding makes him to realize the greatness of God to forgive him and to give his blessings to him. We could observe how his life is going through a change. This experience makes him to move closer to God and his love towards Rachel appears to be true and a lasting love. He is not a deceiver in this relationship. He submits himself to all the conditions in order to see that his love becomes fruitful and meaningful. God uses every circumstance to shape his people.

In the letter to Hebrews the first 12 chapters tell us about the supremacy of Christ and presents him as the great High Priest.. When we come to chapter 13 there are practical instructions that concern our
daily life and our relationship with Christ and the importance of living in a way that is acceptable to God. The writer begins by emphasizing the importance of love - love of the brethren - loving our fellow believers and refers to the importance of marriage. It is just one statement - Marriage to be held in honour among all.

To hold in honour is to hold it as precious or valuable. It is precious because God ordained marriage. It was God's desire that man should not be alone and he created woman to be his partner. Since marriage comes from God it should be held as valuable and precious. As we read this practical message we should also understand that this message tells us that marriage should not be dishonoured by reducing the love relationship to a mere arrangement between two individuals for the sake of comfort and convenience. It should be a commitment to the other person and no person should be treated as a property on which the other person has absolute ownership. We are called to honour marriage and remain in the lasting love relationship by staying committed to our partner and working through difficulties rather than attempting to bail out.

The gospel lesson presents to us a discourse on the subject of divorce and marriage. It is important to note that the discourse does not begin with marriage and then lead to the discussion on divorce. On the contrary it begins with divorce and ends with the stress on the marriage - Jesus emphasizing the lasting nature of marriage.

The Pharisees come to Jesus seeking a clarification on the provision made by Moses regarding divorce which is found in Deut 24:1.

Divorce was a common practice during the time of Jesus. The Pharisees were raising the issue to trap Jesus. They used every occasion and every conversation to find fault in Jesus' teaching and preaching. The framing of the question is such that any answer, be it for divorce or against divorce, can be interpreted wrongly and can be used against Jesus. If Jesus contradicts Moses, his reputation will be ruined. It will also involve him in Herod -Herodias affair and he also may be arrested like John the Baptist.

In his reply Jesus takes them out of the context of divorce, a provision created by Moses because of the hardness of heart of the people, to the original plan and purpose of God. He quotes from Genesis 1:27 and 2:24 to underline the purpose and plan of God. He points out that the original intention of God was misused by the people and Moses had to create a provision for separation in order to put some fear in the hearts of people who were breaking the marriage relationship according to their own desires. But such a provision was used as a licence to promote separation. Jesus emphasizes that marriage is a bond formed by God, designed by Him and that it is rooted in creation itself. Marriage is not supposed to be viewed as disposable. It cannot be defined merely in terms of an agreement. Jesus stresses on the long term impact that our choices and decisions make on our lives and the lives of our families.

To the question about divorce Jesus replies that dissolution of marriage was not an option given by God. His only intention was for the husband and wife to live together till the last. If there is right relationship, a relationship that is revered and respected, there would be no question of divorce.

Marriage today is not viewed as a lasting relationship but as a civil contract or arrangement. The marital relationship is assessed on the basis of one's comfort rather than one's commitment to a lasting relationship. The increased divorce rates even among the Christian families remind us that the partners are succumbing to the pressures of this world and are seeking the easy way out to move away.
from the lasting relationship. We know the old saying - love at first sight. Today people are trying to regret for this because they failed to take a second look or another look at the other person. They stopped with the first look. The blueprint for marriage that God gave to humankind is a man and a woman leaving their respective families and cleaving to each other for ever. The two becoming one flesh is not simply sexual union but a union of their lives. It is the union of or coming together of their hopes, dreams, ambitions, plans and sexual activity. They are one by God's will. They are called to remain in this lasting relationship.

Rev. Dr. Moses Jayakumar
CSI Karnataka Central Diocese
Once, a man came to me and said that he wanted to join in the church. And I asked him, when he was willing to take baptism?. He replied, if he was given baptism, this would be his fifth one! All over the world more or less 40000 denominations are there in Christianity. Every denomination has its own way of baptizing people and gives own meaning time and again to convince people. John 3:1-13 talks about the unknown kingdom in which no one ever entered. I would like to drive home three points from this text.

1. **Baptism gives new identity**

Baptism is one of the sacraments in Christianity. It is normally enforced on people to be members of the church. But when we read John 3:1-13, we can understand the real meaning. Recently one of my friends went abroad to work over there. For which he had to change himself a lot, learn the rules and law code of the country to adopt it for his survival sake. To work or live in other countries one should get the identity through some procedures. In this same way for heavenly kingdom, we should have to go through certain procedures, which can make us eligible to get the identity. When Nicodemus spoke to Jesus, Jesus said to him that “very truly, I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above.” Nicodemus asked Him “how can anyone be born after having grown old? Can one enter a second time into the mother’s womb and be born?” Jesus answered “very truly, I tell you, no one enter the kingdom of God without being born of water and spirit”. Until a person assures the government of another country that he or she would follow the rules and regulations, they will not get permission to enter into that country. Baptism, as a sacrament gives born again experience from the evil life to holy life (kingdom values). The baptized obtains a new identity as a child of God. So it becomes a challenging responsibility to keep up that identity.

2. **Baptism gives new Citizenship**

Secondly, once baptism is taken, the person has to follow the new rules and regulations. In the time of Old Testament, Israelites were given a land and all the rights, once after they came under the law. Similarly, after baptism person is given a authority or right to possess the things which belong to the kingdom of God, and exhibit the values as well.

Once two different group of people went to Malaysia to work over there for their life survival. One point of time Malaysian government petrified after seeing the report that more than 50% of land of that country and wealth was owned by these two group of people. Then government gave them deadline to leave the country, since they were not of that country. When they came back to India, left their land and most of the wealth over there. Without baptism, one cannot become citizen of Kingdom of God. Baptism makes one as a citizen of heavenly kingdom.

3. **Baptism gives new inheritance** Baptism gives new inheritance who are baptized with water and spirit. After becoming the citizen of one kingdom, he or she begins to get all the priorities. Once, Paul was talking about his Roman citizenship, saying that Paul didn’t purchase it by giving money. During that time, many got Roman citizenship by paying money. But they didn’t get the privilege as others did. Baptism which gives privilege cannot be purchased by paying money as it is the symbol of divine love that embraces us.
In John 3:5 Jesus answered, Truly, truly, I say to you, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. Water symbolizes a cleansing which only Jesus can give, a new life which Jesus offers, and is used in baptism to showcase the acceptance of Jesus and the denial of self(worldly privileges). Water refers purification. This is the outward sign of cleansing. When we take baptism with water, outwardly we are cleansed, at the same time, inwardly by spirit. Spirit of the Lord cleanses everyone’s heart, mind and soul. Such a purification gives inheritance and authority to possess and live a life in that kingdom of God. Baptism makes a person to own the kingdom of God and its possessions without any impediment and hurdle. Let us enjoy the gift of baptism through the one who has taken baptism to set us a model in the river of Jordan. May the almighty God help us to receive new identity, new citizenship and new inheritance through the holy sacrament of Baptism.

Rev.A. Raja Christopher
CSI Tirunelveli Diocese
INTRODUCTION

Our faith is dependent upon what we have perceived and our understanding of God is articulated on what we have received. Many a time, our faith remains stagnant. Our doctrinal and traditional upbringing does not allow us to articulate our faith according to the changing scenario and the contexts we live in. We have stopped rethinking, re-evaluating and re-formulating our faith and our understanding of God. The transfiguration narrative that is found in Luke 9:28-36 is a call to all who have been stagnant in faith; it is a call to rethink, to set us in motion and to articulate our faith, understanding and theology relevant to the changing contexts. The passage of transfiguration is one of the complicated passages in the gospels, because of its complexity of vocabulary and the various interpretations that arise from it and the diverse theological arguments it gives way to.

Transfiguration as transformation of faith

Peter, John and James are considered to be in tension with the power politics among the disciples. Peter’s eagerness to respond to Jesus; mother of John and James requesting for prime position to be seated at the right and left of Jesus at his kingdom are few dynamics of socio-political scenario that is evident in the gospels. Amidst these dynamics, Jesus chooses only these three disciples to witness the transfiguration experience. Often the three disciples are interpreted as the few who had close relationship with Jesus. However, it would be unfair to imagine the partial relationship that Jesus had with Peter, James and John among the twelve. The very mission of God in Jesus and the Kingdom of God would be in stake if Luke 9:28-36 is read with such exclusiveness. Amidst the socio-political and religious context of the first century, the message of Jesus would be no greater than any other teachings of the time. In a patriarchal society where hierarchy is rigorously maintained Jesus’ teaching brings renewal to the existing structure. Transfiguration experience is a classical example where the focus is not just about Jesus being transfigured to endorse his divinity before the disciples, but rather the selection of the disciples highlight one of the purposes and that is to transform the understanding of the disciples about Jesus, the mission to be carried and their faith in God. The disciples’ actions display that their faith has been disfigured and this transfiguration experience has enabled them to re-figure and trans-figure that faith.

Dis-figuring faith to trans-figuring faith

The passage cannot be read in isolation from the previous pericope as it has a connecting word in the beginning of the verse 2. Luke 9:28 begins with the words "about eight days later Jesus took..." is a representation of transition that Luke is trying to draw between the previous pericope and the present one. If we observe the previous pericope, we discern that Jesus has already informed that "But truly I tell you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the kingdom of God". The disciples heard these utterances of Jesus and wondered who would see the Kingdom of God. And after eight days when Jesus took Peter, John and James to a high mountain, probably the disciples would have slightly guessed that Jesus would share with them alone that which is forbidden from others. When the three disciples saw that Jesus has transfigured before their eyes, probably this is a shocking experience for three of them, but only one responds to the incident. Peter immediately responds to the incident and says, "Master, it is good for us to be here; let us make three dwellings, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah". Through his response, he makes a connection with the previous incident and with the previous pericope and with the previous teachings of Jesus Christ. And
now, Peter perhaps elevates his position to another level as he has seen Moses and Elijah too. He considers that as a virtue. He clearly says to Jesus; Let us make three dwelling places, one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah. By calling out their names, he attests that he has seen what is forbidden from others and he will respond to it to which others are unable to respond to. Peter misunderstands and relates Jesus' teaching of the coming of the Kingdom in power with what he has seen during the transfiguration. Peter now sees the transfiguration as a full revelation of the Jesus' glory. When Peter assumes everything and takes decisions, in Jesus's Silence, a voice comes saying "This is my Son, the Beloved, listen to him". The voice shattered Peter's plans for the future. Peter assumed to pitch tents so as to watch over the coming of the kin-dom of God. Peter has been one of the disciples who has often claimed to have known Jesus very well than anyone else. He has been the first among the disciples to confess in Mark 8:29b that "You are the messiah". In spite of the affirmations he was making from time to time about Jesus Christ and his Messiahship, Peter's faith has often been stagnant, his understanding of the ministry of Jesus has been limited, his faith has not transformed him or he neither makes an effort to transform his faith based on his journey in the ministry of Jesus and his accompaniment at various instances. Transfiguration, is depicted as one of the crucial symbols of coming of God's reign and the place where it takes place is significant too, because mountain top is considered as a locus of God's revelation. And Peter assumes this revelation as the revelation of God's reign coming down and wants to limit God's reign to mountain top. But the voice that comes from the cloud is a call to disfigure that faith that makes us stagnant, that makes us to limit god's revelation and that is formulated by physical perceptions.

**Conclusion**

The voice from above is a call to each one of us to go beyond in our faith i.e. to trans-figure his/her faith that is beyond physical appearances. The presence of the three disciples and their fear is a representative for the need of them being transfigured too. Our faith either has to transform us or we need to transform our faith. Our fasting and prayers might remain ritualistic if its observance doesn't transform us and allow us to transfigure in our faith in and perceptions of God.

**Rev. Rueben Manohar**

**CSI Karnataka Central Diocese**
**INTRODUCTION:**

The Church has been bestowed and challenged to carry out the Mission of God. The Church cannot exist without the Mission. The word ‘mission’ is not a sacred word but secular in nature. This word has been taken seriously by Christendom only after the advent of Jesus Christ, through his Mission Mandate as we read in Luke 4:18ff. Mission is the Commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the Church was commissioned to Mission. There is no Mission of the Church but the Mission of God to be accomplished by the Church which is the Servant of the Lord. The world is the Missional platform for the Church to minister and mission. Mission must be local and contextual, addressing to the living situations and aspirations of the people. The Church must consider Mission as a privilege as God becomes our partner in Mission. Mission has the power to transcend all boundaries such as caste, color, creed, culture, language, race, etc. Mission must be the most significant priority of the Church. Mission has always been misconceived as ‘conversion’ and ‘proselytization’ where the other aspects especially, the “Diaconal” perspective is always missed. In the context of life threatening issues and concerns what is Mission and how the Mission is possible? Can the Church pitch her tent in the midst of the poor and victims in society?

**MISSIONISLIFE:**

Prophet Elijah was prepared by the Lord to demonstrate to all Israel that God Yahweh and not Baal, is the only true God. Elijah was directed by God to go to Zarephath, a town on the Mediterranean coast between Tyre and Sidon in Phoenicia, the homeland of Jezebel. God Yahweh promised Elijah that a widow would feed him. Widows were very poor and God’s direction to go to a widow for food was very strange and obscure. She welcomed the prophet, fed him with what was available with her, a limited stock of flour and oil, which she had for her and her son as a last meal before death. God is God of Life. Elijah was sent by God with a purpose and Mission. Elijah promised her that she would have flour and oil until the drought ended. She was bestowed with life anew. Her fear was turned into Faith. The word of promise and assurance gave the gentile woman life in all its fullness because of her implicit Obedience unto God’s word. The Poor widow of Zarephath experienced joy, hope and life. I am reminded of the words of the former Bishop Late M. Azariah of Madras Diocese, who always said “SharingofLifeisMission”.

**MISSIONISLOVE:**

Mission is possible only if founded on Love. Many times, everything precedes from us without love. The shorter commandment of our Lord Jesus Christ is ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ is full of meaning with Missional perspective. Our lord and savior Jesus Christ was sent by God the father with a Mission to bestow life for the life denied and love for the love denied. This love of the lord was freely given to us ought to be freely shared. The widow of Zarephath in spite of poverty shared what she had, obliging the request of Prophet Elijah. The words of Elijah was full of love for this lady who was denied the possibility of love. A widow will not entertain strangers and no person will go to a widow’s home seeking food as all widows were very poor. The love of the widow in giving and the love of Elijah in responding that she and her son should not suffer from want of food till drought is over. This miracle again is a protest against Baal just as was the drought. This is to understand that God Yahweh could provide flour and oil even at the time of draught and famine. This is what is God’s
Mission to His people, when people respond and obey to God’s word. The Mission that was given to Elijah was again successful in proving that God Yahweh is all powerful and full of love.

MISSIONISLIBERATION:

The liberative act of God is seen when the people suffer and when people become victims of oppression. Here in this event the widow would have been seen as an expendable in all perspectives. No person would have come to her rescue at the times of trouble or at times of starving without food. God is God of liberation. He is quick to respond at times when people call on Him. God honored the immediate demonstration of faith of the Widow by fulfilling His promise miraculously. Her faith became strong. she had fresh hopes to live, the fear of death was missing in her, and in totality she had become a new woman from being to Becoming. This Becoming was possible because of the experience of the Liberation from the shackles of bondage socially, economically, culturally, religiously and politically. She would have gained a new respect and she would have been a source of liberation to all people who were starving as she would have shared what God had given to her as a gift.

As a Church in our Faith Journey we are called to understand the Mission of God in an emphatic way by which Life, Love and Liberation could be offered to the People who are denied of these possibilities. May God empower us and equip us in our Mission and Ministry to the Least, Lost and the Last.

Rev. Mrs. IndiraPaul
CSI Madras Diocese
Sacrament of Holy Communion

Ex.12:1-14
I Cor.10: 14-22
Eve. Gen.14:17-20

Psalm 42
Luke 22:7-20
Heb.10:1-10

Introduction: The Sacrament of Holy Communion is also known by several other names such as Eucharist, Last Supper, The Lord’s Supper, Memorial Meal, etc. Augustine of Hippo defined the sacrament as an “outward and visible signs of an inward and spiritual grace.” Until 12th century there were a number of sacraments and sacramental activities in the medieval Church. Peter Lombard (1100-1160) had systemized sacraments and the total number of sacraments was listed as seven. However, the Protestant Reformation reduced the sacraments to just two, they are Baptism and Holy Communion, with both having the explicit command of Christ in scripture (Matthew 28:19-20 and Luke 22:19-20). Martin Luther (1483-1546) argued that “…only in these two (Baptism and the Holy Communion) do we find the divinely instituted sign and the promise of the forgiveness of sins.” The Sacrament of the Holy Communion as Luther understood was one of the most essential symbols that point to and builds up the Church as the communion of saints. The Roman Catholic belief emphasizes on the true and literal presence of Christ in the communion elements. (Doctrine of transubstantiation) Luther challenged this view and put forward an alternative view, wherein, the elements do not change completely into the body and blood of Christ, rather Christ is present ‘in, with and under’ them. (Consubstantiation) This is called as sacramental union, for which faith is essential to those who receive the sacrament. Let us consider three important aspects of the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

1. Holy Communion as Exodus from Slavery to Freedom (Exodus 12:1-14)
The Holy Communion serves as a reminder that God loves us unconditionally. It signifies the love poured out to us giving us freedom. The Holy Communion has its origin from a sacred Jewish meal called “Passover Seder,” a ritual meal that the people of Israel celebrated when Moses was leading them out of Egypt. It is a meal in which they give thanks to God for freeing them from slavery. One of the major concerns of the Exodus 12:1-14 is deliverance from unjust oppression. Passover is the tenth plague that God sent upon the Egyptians to force them to free the people of Israel from slavery. Even though God has shown grace and mercy to Pharaoh, had given him every opportunity to change his mind, Pharaoh refused to listen to God. Moreover, God has chosen Israel as its “chosen nation” and was motivated by his antecedent commitment to the patriarchs so God delivers the Israelites and they move slavery to freedom.

Each of us should make our own Exodus from the slavery of any darkness, from the imprisonment of narrow thinking which oppresses our creativity. There will be many challenges, struggles and difficult situations along the way. And we will need sustenance along the way. We are asked to step into the way, to sustain ourselves on the Bread of Life in order to enact our own Exodus to our own Promise Land in a strange and unknown place.

2. Holy Communion as Re-membering (1 Corinthians 10:14-22)
In the Eucharistic prayer, Jesus said, "Do this in remembrance of me." The Greek word, ‘an-namenesis’ is translated as ‘remembrance,’ which is much stronger word than ‘memorial.’ Remembrance has reference to an event in the past that is recalled with such power that it brings a blessing into the present. According to Moody, this “blessing” includes not only union with God but the unity of all who are participating in the Supper. Moreover, the aspect of ‘re-membering’ brings another powerful practice of the gathering church – it “reconstitutes” the church. One of the reasons why Paul writes to the Corinthian church is because it was divided, a fact which seems to have been most apparent in this church’s practice of the Eucharist. (1 Corinthians 11:20-22) Raymond E. Brown notes that the Corinthian church were conducting worship services in the homes of the wealthy, wherein the hosts and their closest friends had preparatory meal before what was supposed to be the bonding practice of the Lord’s Supper. However, persons who were rich were taking advantage of their position and were

Kristu Jignasa
eating and drinking greedily, whereas Paul believed that all Christians including the poor and slaves have to be accepted into the hospitality area of the house for the Eucharist. The very rite which effects unity in the church is in fact bringing to light the division in the Corinthian church, therefore he says, “we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf” (1 Corinthians 10:17). Paul’s understanding of church’s unity implies that the members of the church were truly – a body, rather than individuals. Therefore, when we ‘re-member’ or ‘reconstitute’ the body of Christ we are to include all the excluded ones; excluded on the basis of sex, gender, sexual orientation; least, lost and the last.

Jesus used the Passover meal and put new meaning into it, he identified the bread and wine. He made them symbolic symbols of his own body and blood. Jesus took normal, mundane ingredients, bread and wine, and charged them with meaning, life, and potential. The bread symbolizes that Jesus’ body that is given to us for nourishment and his blood that gives us new life.
In the making of bread the individual grains of wheat lose their individual shape and form and dissolve in the flour to become one loaf. So also, the grapes lose their individual existence in becoming wine. And while we eat and drink in the same bread and wine, we, as individual believers are transformed into one body, which is the community of saints, a process in which the, individual identity dissipates and they obtain a collective identity as the body of Christ. In participating in the Holy Communion the members of the church are reminded that they are “members of one another” in the body of Christ (Ephesians 4:25), the body of which Christ himself was and is both “member” and “head” (Ephesians 4:15-17). The goal is to be transformed into Christ-likeness.

In Holy Communion we are called to move from slavery to freedom, re-member the body of Christ and be transformed into Christ-likeness. Thanks be to God for this Holy Sacrament. Amen.

Rev. B.J. Moses Shanthi Kumar
CSI Medak Diocese

Kristu Jignasa
Biblically and historically freedom is a celebrated theme in world History. The supreme command of Moses undergirded with a Divine authority of Yahweh reverberated in the portals of Pharaoh when Moses said, “LET MY PEOPLE GO”.

Before Christ and in 6th Century B.C. Cyrus the Great who was an Emperor for 3 continents never wanted any slaves to be entertained in any Kingdom which was won by him. This is the reason why he wanted Jerusalem to be rebuilt and authorized Nehemiah to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem.

Later in our own history the French Revolution gave the world a threefold formula on the meaning of Freedom and said: “Freedom, Equality and Fraternity.” And Martin Luther King Jr. who fought for human dignity always said, “LET FREEDOM RING”.

So Independence Day reminds us of the Freedom India has won paying a heavy cost of sacrifices by the Patriots. It is Freedom which brought to us Democracy and democracy announces the human worth and human talents and human participation in all the decision making processes. Usually decisions are made at the top. And the people at the grass roots level are asked just to follow what is ordered by the authorities. They are treated as objects. Now a days we also work out Models of decision making from bottom upwards. The CSI also encourages decision taken by the local congregations to reach the Synod.

2. We have a classical example of one leader wanting to take up all decisions in the case of Moses when he had to lead the People of Israel after their delivery from Egypt. If you read Ex.18: 13 – 17, you will find Moses carrying a huge burden on himself. His father-in-law comes to his rescue and introduces Participatory Decision Making Principle. Accordingly, they choose leaders with fear of God and talents to lead 1000 s, 100s, 50s and 10s. Here you find Group work and group dynamics! Moses stays back as a reference authority to solve critical issues. Moses becomes much more a listening type. Moses receives more recognition from the people as a humane personality. People are not subject to unreasonable pain in following a single leader.

In the Gospel narratives, you always find Jesus asking people on what they read in the scriptures, what they had learnt and what they thought, as in Lk. Ch.20. Jesus enabled people to make decisions in accordance with God’s will. Though Jesus knew all the answers He did not want to dictate on others or wanted to rule over them. Jesus brought out the potential and helped people’s personality to bloom to get nearer to the Kingdom of God..!

In participatory decision making you bear witness to the fact that all are created equal in the sight of God. You recognize that the Holy Spirit can work among men and women from the ordinary ways of life.

This also helps us to evaluate how our committees function in the church. Sometimes a Pastor wants his word to be the final word! A Pastor has to recognize that there may be more knowledgeable persons in the committee and people with many different Gifts. Sometimes one committee member would want to dominate all discussion! This can happen in the Diocesan Council also. Sometimes members want the Bishop to make all decisions. It is one thing to refer to the Bishop for a Final Decision and it is quite an inadequate practice not to give any opinion from the floor at all!

Kristu Jignasa
3. Participatory Decision Making comes from the Holy Spirit as we read in I Cor. 12:4 ff. They are referred to as varieties of gifts and the same spirit. And they are varieties of working. There is room for plurality of thinking. There is no need for one blueprint!! There is room for recognition of contribution from the least of all. There is no room for ego domination. People learn to self-empty their glories as Christ did. (Phil2:7) People learn to serve and not try to dominate. The result is enjoying the privilege of belonging to the ONE body of Christ. To God be the Glory.

PRAYER: God help us to relate to people as equals. Help us to honor our neighbors. Help us not to be negative in our thinking. Help us to understand Independence as interdependence, and help us to see the value of participation for a wholesome spiritual life in the church and the society. AMEN.

Rt. Rev. Dr. D. Pothirajulu  
Retd. Bishop, Madurai Ramnad Diocese
God and People of All Faiths

Introduction

The need of the hour is peaceful and cooperative living and growing as communities. The only way to solve all social and political issues is to focus our attention on development of the life of the whole earth, so that we learn to celebrate the differences and channel all human resources towards enhancing life. The need for having an understanding about the character of God as shepherd of all and who gives life for all is the unifying factor of faith. How to bring people of all faiths under a larger umbrella of God? What is the role of the church in realizing this end?

The recent floods in Chennai witnessed an amazing evidence of unique human community. The churches, mosques and temples became relief camps. Everyone shared all they can to minimize suffering and starving. And all got together in helping the other. A Christian cooked food and Muslims distributed and a Hindu gave his vehicle freely. Caste, creed, region, language were all forgotten, only humanity was found during the time of floods. You may also term it as the spirit of God moving in the hearts of all people.

Superior Spirituality - All are God’s People

Is Christian spirituality matured enough (practicing transcending faith - crossing all boundaries; and condescending faith humbling to the utmost and showing great respect) to reach out and embrace every other form of faith? Does Christian faith or Church communities possess the power to serve and strengthen the growing and weak faiths and also possess the power of humility to strengthen itself by other spiritualities? The text from Amos reveals the nature of God that was explicit in redeeming people of Israel, Philistines and Arameans and they are equal and same for God (Amos 9:7). God will punish all human communities that sin against God. The judgment will come upon all those who are filled with pride and arrogance. (Amos 9:8)

Splendid Spectacle

There will be one flock and one shepherd (John 10:16). Who is this Shepherd? Who are these sheep? This shepherd is good and life giving and therefore He has no prejudice and preferences and He does not possess the character which includes some and excludes another. The Shepherd knows the sheep (all people) and His knowledge about the sheep is perfect. Is our knowledge about people of other faith complete? Good understanding will lead to better living and practice and performance.

Specific Actions

The first principle for the family of God (God and People of All Faiths) will be that each religion should teach themselves all that is said in their own religion/scriptures about harmony, peace and loving the neighbor. Instruct yourself first. Let your religion change you first. (Romans 2:21) Secondly, we must see Christ’s presence in people belonging to all faiths. He is present where there is poverty, grief and life-negating circumstances. He invites us to partner with Him to alleviate such pain and injustice. If we bring glory to God we cannot disrespect people of other faiths, because we will find God living in them too. We do not know when we will arrive at this point in our human society but if we hasten peace mission we can bring about this reality soon. One God and one people is the assignment for the church. Our mission is to bring the other sheep. Let us strive to grow towards completion in our knowledge and in our understanding about people of all faiths so that all may have renewed vision of God- the unifying power.

Kristu Jignasa
Conclusion
As a called out community, the church, has a vital role in the construction of New Community. Let us realize the great expectation of God about us. Let us understand the responsibility entrusted to us. Let us also remember the power of the Holy Spirit who has anointed us to be special people to lead all around us into peaceful and harmonious living. Our baptism and participation in the Holy Eucharist will keep reminding us the challenges we have faced and the accompanying presence of God with us in our peace journey. Amen

Rev. Paul Pragasam
CSI Madras Diocese
Saint Bartholomew lived in the first century AD and was one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. He was introduced to Christ through St. Philip and is also known as “Nathaniel” of Cana in Galilee, notably in John’s Gospel 1.47. It would be because the name Nathaniel in Hebrew is equivalent to that of Matthew, meaning “GIFT OF GOD”.

Philip advised by Peter and Andrew, hastened to communicate to his friend the good news of his discovery of Christ: “we have found Him whom Moses in Law, and the Prophets wrote! Come and see”. Jesus saw Nathaniel coming to Him and said of Him, “Behold a true Israelite in whom there is no guile” (cf. John 1.45 – 49). His innocence and simplicity of heart deserved to be celebrated with this high praise in the divine mouth of our Redeemer.

And Nathanael, when Jesus told him he had already seen him in a certain place, confessed his faith at once “Rabbi Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel”.

Bartholomew was a missionary to Asia, he witnessed Lord in present day Turkey. The ministry of Apostle Bartholomew belonged more to the eastern churches than does to the western churches. Bartholomew was martyred for his preaching in Armenia when he was flayed to death by a whip.

The characteristic virtue of the Holy Apostles was zeal for the divine glory. A soldier is always ready to defend the honor of his prince, and a son that of his father; can a Christian say he loves God if he is indifferent to His honor? Jesus is our greatness. He is given to us, and carrying with him He brings all his gifts of forgiveness, life and salvation. No matter how horrible our lives may be, having been beaten by the assaults of the devil, stripped of our skin, our reputation, by this dark world, he will never leave us or forsake us. He cannot and will not be taken from you.

We celebrate Bartholomew because he staked everything on the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. So perhaps we can claim him as Patron Saint for all disciples, who never hit the headlines, but just get on with being faithful. The Book of Ecclesiastes gives some insights into what that involves. Ecclesiastics is a book of wisdom found in the Apocrypha, the writings from the inter-testament period. It describes a person who devotes himself to the study of the law of God. A devoted person is a person of prayer, setting their heart to rise early so that they can pray to God who made them. That’s not so easy for many of us, but some time set aside is important. Then, God can fill such a person with the spirit of understanding so that they pour forth words of wisdom that are not our own – wisdom that comes from God.

The additional gift of God is that some people live on in the collective memory and become part of our heritage and so today we remember Bartholomew. As we give thanks for him, we celebrate the daily routine of ordinary discipleship, of getting on with the task in hand, perhaps rising to occasional moments of greatness but underpinning them with routine devotion and, when the occasion arises, being willing to go wherever we are sent.

Bartholomew’s ordinary discipleship that led to extraordinary events can be taken as a good example with thanksgiving. We have to remember that we can’t just be spectators because our baptism demands that we are to be involved too, we have to follow the example of saints and martyrs.

Rev.R.S Supriya Sarvesh
CSI Karimnagar Diocese
Peace in the Context of Violence

1 Sam.24:1-12
Rom12: 14-21
Eve. Gen.33:1-20
Psalm 52
Matt 5:38-48
Matt. 26:47-56

One of the recent Indian theological consultations on Kairos-Palestine painfully expressed its view that, “today, the land in which the Prince of Peace was born has been turned into a land of separation, violence and injustice, subject to the geo-political designs of Israel and its anarchic Zionist political agenda”. Is there any place where justice and peace prevail in the world? In this context we are called to celebrate God’s Sovereignty, Justice and Peace.

Every day justice is denied to the earth communities including human communities in the form of Ecological degradations, Deforestation, Mining, Human Right Violations, Arm-attacks on innocents, Just-war, Unjust-labor policies, Gender and sexual harassments, Caste and Racial Profiling, Attacks on Minorities, Social Policing even Christian Denominationalism and so on…. When someone cry or mourn for Justice and Peace celebrate? What should be our response?

In this context God gives us enormous responsibilities including celebrating God’s Justice and Peace in this world. The readings of today call us to introspect ourselves with the flowing three key points: ‘Let your love be genuine’, love your enemies and love does not judge. Let us ponder upon these themes.

1. Celebrate God’s Desire for Love, Justice and Peace:

   Today’s Old Testament passage (I Samuel 24: 1-12) describes God’s desire of Justice God assures an appointment of a ‘ANOITED KING’ and this king will rule the society with ‘JUSTICE”. When the society creates misunderstanding between Soul and David, they were not yielded to those circumstances. Both have kept their promise alive and did not attack each other. As long as we are honest in our call there will be Peace and Security. And the meaning for God anointed kingship means “The Lord Gives Justice”. This shows how God of the Bible is concerned for Justice and Peace. God does not want the people to war against each other, suffer by the unjust politics of the rulers, the State and the people.

   Are we not fortunate enough that, we worship and follow God who is “Just- peace” and whose desire is Justice and Peace? So, we are called to celebrate God who has a desire for Justice and Peace. While celebrating let us introspect whether we have desire for justice and Peace? If not we are called to commit to have a desire for Justice and Peace.

2. Celebrate God’s Call to Establish Harmony”:

   We as Children of God, we are called to be the channels of Peace and Harmony. The Epistle reading of today (Romans 12: 14 - 21) reminds us to celebrate our call in order to establish societal harmony by forging the short coming of our neighbors and blessing them with God’s grace. This calls us to live in harmony by expressing and showing love for others. But often we are driven away by our ‘fundamentalist ideologies’ ‘judgmental attitudes’, ‘hate campaigns’, ‘character assassinations’ and such as. While claiming ourselves as ‘chosen, holy, saved, children of God need to practice the same in our faith journey are we realizing that, we are called to accept others as they are? The reading also calls us to love all as God loved the world, and we as Christian Church are called to be humble and not to exclude ourselves from the society with pride and jealous.

   As Jesus emptied himself for the sake of others we are all called to give-up what all we have with pride and jealous. Only by which we are empowered to be the ‘the agents of unity’ by Spirit of God rather divisive forces. Are we for Unity? If so, our calling to establish unity and harmony is to be celebrated.
3. **Celebrate Your Commitment to be a Peace-lover:**

   Today’s Gospel reading calls us to radically depart from loving the ‘loved ones to loving the most hated ones. (Matt 5: 38 - 48). The Gospel reading reminding us of our empowered commitment to trample the evil forces which have divisive and unjust characters. Jesus reminds us that, God’s power is bestowed upon us to cast out the injustice from the World by loving our enemies. Jesus crossed all boundaries and barriers in order to challenge the evil forces as a “Prince of Peace”. How about us? Are we peace lovers? If so let us celebrate our commitment as “peace-lovers”.

   In conclusion, ‘today Bethlehem, where the Prince of Peace is born’ is turned to separation, violence and injustice. Let our Church, family and neighborhood not be the case of the same. We are called celebrate God’s sovereignty, Justice and peace not inside the church but in the society with love, humble and commitment by challenging and voicing out for love against the hate, unjust and divisive elements. Let our actions be the celebrations. Let our love be genuine.

   **R. Christopher Rajkumar**  
   Executive Secretary  
   Commission on Justice, Peace and Creation, NCCI
Introduction:

As we celebrate ‘Teachers Day’ every year and observe ‘Education Sunday’ we remember and commemorate the great teachers who have shaped our lives and inspired us through their lives. As we may be aware that the word ‘Education’ comes from the Latin word ‘Educare’ means ‘To draw out’. Hence the teacher is the person who draws out the skills and abilities in the students which are hidden in them.

The distinction between a teacher and a preacher should be understood at this juncture. A teacher in a school/collage educates a person’s mind and intelligence with the knowledge of this world to live in this world. Whereas a preacher in the church educate and nourish the soul of a person with the word of God and prepares that person to live for the glorious eternity with God. I.e., the teacher feeds the mind and preacher feeds the soul.

Today the church’s ministry of education is primarily meant to reach out for the lost, care for the destitute, teach and train the people in the Christian ethical and moral values. Indeed the church’s ministry of education is the continuation of the teaching ministry of Jesus Christ our Lord.

The churches from the beginning recognized the holistic need of the people in the community and send its missionaries to reach out the needy not only with Gospel but also with education and medical services. It should be noted that the effect of the holistic Gospel must reach the whole mankind. Hence in this regard education was given precedence over other considerations. To name some of them: Alexander Duff of the Church of Scotland stationed in Calcutta was the pioneer in this area in the early part of 19th century [Duff school in Calcutta]. Apart from that there came ‘John Wilson’ college in Mumbai, ‘Madras Christian College [MCC] in Chennai, Noble College in Machilipatnam, Andhra Christian College in Guntur are some to be named. It was due to the influence of the missionaries exerted by William Cary and others that the social evils like the sati and child marriages were efficiently banned during William Benedict’s viceroyalty.

The church missionary schools and English education produced an outstanding national leaders, freedom fighters like Dadabai Naouroji, Pattabhi Seetaramaiah, sarvepally Radhakrishnan, N.G.Ranga and Socio-Religious reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Keshub Chandra sen, Balagangadhar Thilak, Dayananda Saraswathi, Swami Vivekananda and above all, Mahatma Gandhi who derived his principle of non-violence from Jesus’s sermon on the mount.

Having said the above lines let us now look into the scripture lessons to understand the following aspects in the church’s ministry of education:

1. The Education Ministry of the Church is to impart knowledge [ Prov2: 1-15]:

   a. About the living God: Verse 5, 6 says, it is God who is the source of all wisdom, knowledge and understanding.

   In prov30:2, 3 we see the writers agonizing words of his stupidity and lack of the knowledge of the Holy one. In the end time this will be the cry of many people who knowingly despised the knowledge of God.
b. **About Jesus Christ:** 1Cor1:24 clearly says that ‘Jesus Christ is the power and wisdom of God’, who was mentioned in the book of proverbs time and again.

c. **About the coming disaster:** Prov1:24-33 we see the terrible consequences of the rejection of wisdom and understanding.

d. **About the Gospel:** if a person has not heard the Gospel, it is not his fault but the failure of the church which has neglected the great commission of our Lord Jesus Christ. The 1st century church in spite of heavy persecution [Acts8:4] never ceased to proclaim the Gospel.

It is sad to see that, in spite of every facility available to us, we as a church are still lagging behind to enhance the great commission of our Lord. We are investing cores of rupees for the construction of the big and beautiful church’s and on elections of church officers at all levels, and celebration of all church festivals, But are least bothered to support and encourage the missions and missionaries through our church resources.

2. **The Education Ministry of the Church has an Apologetic role to play [Acts18:24-28]:**

The church of Christ from its birth has faced the problem of heresies, which are making relentless effort in attacking the divinity of Christ and the authenticity of the Gospel. Still it is the same today. In the midst of this uproar of false witnesses we need a voice of Apollo’s the apologetic that refuted the false arguments through the word of God and proved that Jesus is Christ [verse28].

Apollo’s was from the Alexandria in Egypt, the second important city in the Roman Empire, and the home of a great university. He was a scholar, orator, and debater, and after his knowledge about Christ was made more complete, God greatly used His gifts to strengthen and encourage the church.

Reason is a powerful tool in the right hands and in the right situation. Apollo’s used the gift of reason to convince many in Greece about the truth of the Good news. If anyone in the church has the ability of logic and debate use it to bring others to God. We also have Jesus Christ in the temple when he was 12years old, Apostle Paul in Athens models for reason and debate to convince people about God.

Hence the church has an ‘Apologetic Ministry’ to carry on as the old church fathers like Origen, Athenasius, and Augustine did in the early church.

3. **The Education ministry of the church has an unchanging Message[Matt5:1-12]:**

The hymn writer Henry F Lyte expressed the faith of multitudes when he wrote: “O thou who changes not abide with me”. The author of Hebrews was correct in saying “Jesus Christ is same yesterday, today and forever”[Heb13:8].

So are the teachings of Jesus Christ, especially His sermon on the mount, they are:

a. An unchanging answer for an unending search of humanity. The ‘Beatitudes is God’s answer to man’s search.

b. They are the unchanging teachings of Christ who is the son of an unchanging God.

c. They are unchanging divine truths to be lived in an ever changing world.

Every human being ever born on this earth yearns for peace, purpose and above all God himself. But can this unending search in this ever changing world be possible for a finite human being?

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Kristu Jignasa
The Bible says a resounding ‘Yes’. And in these eight beatitudes Jesus points the way. Jesus’ first words were “Blessed are you…” He was telling us that there ‘IS’ an answer to ones search for peace, purpose and God. And because of that we are ‘Blessed’, i.e., we have peace of God in our life, purpose of God in our life and fellowship with God in our life.

But is it possible to be happy/blessed? Or is Jesus simply speaking some high philosophy of life which has no substance? To answer that – we got to look first of all at Jesus Himself. Certainly if anyone had genuine happiness and blessedness, it was Jesus. In spite of the religious heads opposition and abuse, and eventual injustice of His death. He knew the secret of true happiness, and in these beatitudes He unveils it to us. Now it is the responsibility of the church and every believer in the church to live out this blessedness in and through their lives thus proclaiming the unchanging message of God’s love and His invitation for salvation in this ever changing world.

**Conclusion:**

The education ministry of the church today should display the integrity and authoritative nature. When we look at the ministry of Jesus Christ, His teaching and ministry was marked with love n compassion on one side, and authority and integrity on the other side. His integrity in life is exhibited not only through his authoritative teachings but also through His mighty works.[Mk1:23-27].

He had the power to cast out the demons, drive out the unclean spirits. Likewise today Jesus has bestowed His power unto His church to cast out the demons and unclean spirits such as castism, corruption, politics, dowry, exploitation of poor and voiceless and injustice through its authoritative teachings and bold stand against such evils in the church and society. On the other side church also need to be sensitive to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to reach and teach the seeker in the society like the Ethiopian eunuch [Acts8:2-38]. May God grant us as a church to carry on the ministry of education with His wisdom and guidance of His Spirit. Amen

Rev. John Augustine. Govada
CSI Krishna Godavari Diocese

Kristu Jignasa
Remembering may not be always an occasion of celebration however remembering the past can also be a source of new energy and occasion to celebrate. Remembering and Celebrating Women’s Ministry is indeed a source of encouragement and occasion to celebrate the life and the witness of God’s people. Remembering involves thankful heart and celebration requires a joyful note. The theme that has been set apart for our meditation on this special day is an invitation to remember with thankfulness and that leads towards celebration of the greatness of women - our fore mothers in faith journey. In the Bible, we find women used as God’s instruments and a blessing to their own family, community, society and to the nation of their own and other nations too and remembering them is always a source of energy and happy occasion for women in faith journey. In general, women are considered as the weaker sex easily succumbed to temptation and downfall. Women were subjected to the tyranny of the male and given a subordinate place in the society. While looking back on our journey and the paths that we have travelled and navigated, remember many people especially the women who have contributed greatly to leave impact on our lives, faith journey and ministry as a woman. People of Israel were admonished to remember their past and the works of the Lord among them and be encouraged and equipped to move forward in celebrating the greatness of God, God’s works and lives of the people who were used as instruments for God’s glory.

Remembering the past has been an always an inspiration and source of energy to move forward in order to attempt and experience great and mighty things of God. Remembering is ever renewable, remarkable and memorable and it heals, inspires, encourages, and brings to life that which had been faded away. With this brief introduction about the theme of the day, let us meditate on what to remember and what to celebrate in the present context while remembering and re-visiting the past glimpse of faith journey from the scripture readings that are set apart for this day.

1. Deborah - the Great Prophetess whom God used (Judges 4:4-16)
Deborah, the Judge in Israel was the fourth Judge, who was a woman. Deborah is one of the most remembered of the judges. She was a judge in Israel when the people of Israel are being oppressed by Jabin, king of Canaan. Jabin lives in Hazor and has an army commanded by a man named Sisera. Deborah, judge in Israel, sat under the palm tree in the hill country, with people coming to her for counsel. She is introduced as a “Prophetess” and “wife of Lappidoth,” but we know nothing of why she has earned the title prophetess, nor do we hear anything of her husband. Perhaps one of the few women not defined by her husband, Deborah stands clearly on her own. Let us celebrate her individuality and self-assertion. Only Deborah of all those who judged Israel is identified as having function of judicious decision or arbitration (Jud. 4:5). She was chosen by Yahweh to free the people from the oppressor. Her authority as a charismatic leader was gifted with wisdom and prophetic insights. Deborah gifted with great wisdom and insight, sat patiently under the special tree, listened to the tales of heart breaking, anger, depression, loss and abuse and gently counseled the distressed. She also heard the Lord speaking to her and telling her that the time had come to lead the people into battle in the political and economic setting of the Israel on their way to settlement in the Promised Land; she obeyed without any hesitation or excuse. Thus she not only played the role as a prophet and as current judge and ruler but she was also in position of commander-in-chief of the armies, a military position. Let us celebrate her courage to risk herself for fulfilling God’s purpose.

As a prophet she knew that the Lord required faithfulness on the part of the people and that they had gone after false gods (Jud. 4:1) and she admonished, encouraged, empowered people to be faithful to God through her spirituality of listening to God and God’s counsel in all that she did. She knew and she spoke that which she knew boldly. It is important to note that people of Israel trust the Word of the Lord came through her (4:8). So when Deborah, God’s prophet, spoke, the people listened and obeyed. Let us celebrate her spirituality.
Jael is another remarkable woman, figures largely in the victory over the Canaanites. She is the woman whom Deborah foresees when she spoke to Barak (4: 9). She comes into story when the battle has taken a decisive turn for the worse for the Canaanites. Jael, skilled at driving tent pegs into the ground through many nomadic journeys, drove the tent peg through his head and killed Sisera and she was praised as the “most blessed of women” (5:24). Let us celebrate the humility of both Deborah, the prophetess who was equally on par with the great prophet Moses. And also Jael, the most skilled woman and victorious woman to recognize each other and work in collaboration to accomplishing the will of God. Finally we note that under the leadership of Deborah, as prophet, people of Israel experienced peace and rest on the land for 40 years. The present context calls for prophets who will speak against destruction and all evil that prevails on the earth. Let us celebrate and commit ourselves as woman into the hands of God to be used as instruments for God’s glory.

In this passage, Luke records list of women who were regular followers of Jesus, people who ministered to His needs and listened to His teaching and preaching. This passage becomes highly important when we realize that women simply did not roam about the countryside but followed the footsteps of Jesus. According to the custom, they were to remain at home, caring for their families but to travel with a rabbi was scandalous. Even more scandalous was the fact that women, both respectable and not, were among Jesus’ travelling companions. This behavior then must have been as surprising to onlookers as Mary’s behavior was to Martha. Yet we nowhere have an indication that Jesus discourages the presence of women in his company. On contrary, he teaches them, travels with them, and accepts their comfort and companionship. Let us celebrate the teamwork of Jesus as he knew how to work and walk, toil and talk with the people of different categories. He entered into theological discourses with women. He chose a woman to announce the message of His resurrection. Men, women, learned, illiterate, rich, poor, saints, sinners, he mingled with all of them and opened to them the love of his Father and be benefitted from His teaching, healing and be transformed.

The first woman mentioned, Mary Magdalene, is the best known among these women, possibly because of her healing was most dramatic, released from the possession of seven demons, the extraordinary malignity (Mt. 27:57, 61, 28:1; Mk. 15:40, 47; Lk. 24:10). Similarly, Joanna a long standing disciple, present with Mary at the tomb and the upper room and a witness to Jesus. She is unlike Mary of Magdala, who came from a small town and was undoubtedly avoided by many until Jesus healed her. Joanna, is the wife of Chuza who was in authority (Manager, Herod’s estate), thus she was a woman of some means and prominence. The noteworthy point about her presence among Jesus’ followers is that apparently she had left her home and family to become a follower and travelling companion of Jesus. This is clearly an indication of Gospel breaking down the class and economic divisions and social barriers. Jesus reconciles men and women from all walks of life into one community. The third woman was Susanna, a familiar person to Luke’s audience and most prominent among women who followed Jesus. Luke’s intention in mentioning these three women could be, to emphasize the fact that Jesus’ actions in behalf these women freed them to serve both Him and the disciples. Though it was uncommon and unknown for women to be travelling disciples of a rabbi and it was not uncommon for women to support rabbis and their disciples out of their money, property and foodstuffs. Let us remember all women who followed and served Jesus with gratitude and celebrate the privilege that Jesus has given us to serve Him at different capacities and establish His Kingdom on the earth.

3. Rejoice and Celebrate - We have Hope (Philippians 4:1-7)
Philippians were the crown of Paul’s toil. Paul suggests them to stand fast in the Lord, be in unity with one another without any barrier and rejoice in the Lord always. In verse 1-3 Paul tries to settle the dispute among the leaders of early church. In most of the Pauline churches, women had to be content with a subordinate place; however, in Macedonian churches, they clearly had a leading place. In this passage, we read of Euodias and Syntyche were women in whose homes, the house congregations of Philippi met. The women in Macedonia and Philippi women had freedom which was unheard in Greece. This passage shows clearly that in Macedonian church, women were in leading position and they endured trials and tribulations in ministry of the Lord. Paul acknowledging their endurance seeks to heal rifts within the leadership and encourages them through the word of God and assurance in God’s providence and care.

Kristu Jignasa
In verses 5-8 we read Paul suggesting them to rejoice in the Lord always. It is a promise which liberates them from anxiety. Though life seems to be bound with worries and anxiety, peace that passes all understandings is promised by our Lord Jesus Christ. The true believer will experience this peace through prayer and thanks giving in all things. “Peace” military term but Peace of God will stand sentry, a watch over our heart and mind to grant peace within and among us. So let us remember that Peace of God is promised to us and celebrate that the promised peace of God guards our heart and mind as we continue in the mission and ministry of the Lord wherever, we are and whichever capacities. (Ps. 125:2).

As we celebrate Women’s Sunday, let us thank God for his love and concern towards women and Jesus’ inclusion of women in ministry and commit ourselves once again to be faithful partners in God’s work (1 Cor. 15: 58).

Rev. Dr. Mrs. Ramani Dyvasirvadam
CSI Women’s Fellowship President
Christian Response to Consumerism

Consumerism means a drive to accumulate more, competitive comparing of what we have with what others have, and equating worth with the material goods or services we possess, purchase and use rather than who we are. It spends, exploits, and devours. The consumer uses, discards, and wastes. The “right” to consume has become a core value in our life today. Unfortunately, even Christian mindset also is driven by a merchant mentality and many of us have adopted the very consumerist tactics such as consumption, competition, accounting and transaction.

1. CONSUMPTION: The objective of the consumer is to receive. When we attend the worship service in our church, we passively listen to the preachers as a spectator event and pay by offertory for what we have listened.

2. COMPETITION: Merchants compete with one another. We boast ourselves for attending the best church in town. Increasingly, we have adopted competitive fellowship; vie for the shrinking number of people who are the commodities under the steeples.

3. ACCOUNTING: Consumer businesses measure their success by the numbers. The most of the Christians focuses on the bottom line that gets the prime attention is numerical attendance, offerings, and square footage.

4. TRANSACTION: Merchants push the sales at the doorsteps. Many Christians emulate the transactional model with altar calls, membership drives, and pledge campaigns.

Though some tried to rationalize on these methods but many Christians have been driven by the merchant mentality rather available to serve God and our fellow beings.

The first consumerism in the Bible

Before the sin has entered there was perfect existence of relationship between God and humankind. Adam and eve were naked in a lush garden enjoying fellowship with the Lord and each other 2:25. They satisfied what they had in that garden. All their basic needs were met. The first consumption happened in the Eden garden. The first consumers were Adam and eve and the wild animal serpent was marketing the materiel that the knowledge of good and evil. Then something happens that forever changed the world. In Genesis creation is described as a gift to enjoy, care for, develop and treasure (Genesis 2:15). If we concentrate on the accumulation of material wealth regardless of the need or usefulness of that wealth then this creation gift of God is undermined and the creation is treated as an ‘asset’ that can be cleared, harvested, or mined for our own selfish purposes. This contrasts with God’s purposes, which is that our use of resources will be balanced to bring increase that can be shared in the human family and that resources are preserved for future purposes and future generations (Acts 2:44; Acts 3:32). Thus Consumerism can become an entire worldview that human beings have developed. In other words, this has fully taken root to believe the world through consumerism we can meet our needs instead of God like Adam and Eve which resulted the emptiness and even death.

Our response towards Consumerism

Consumerism vs Simplicity

Jesus says “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?” (Matt. 6:25). Here, Jesus asks us to consider whether worrying accomplishes anything. Jesus is not against planning or concern for the future. Rather, Jesus is concerned about worrying when our catastrophizing thoughts and emotions generate fire within us instead of light outside. Jesus is against worrying the

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basic needs of a human being. Even the prayer Jesus taught his disciples is helpful (Luke 11:1-4), showing us an attitude that can curb the excessiveness of our consumerism. The prayer says ‘give us each day our daily bread’. In Phil 4:19 Paul said God will give you what you really need and he didn’t say God will meet all your wants. What Paul is advocating is a pure and simple life dedicated to godly concerns, not worldly ones. Paul continues to remind us in Phil 4:11-13 that contentment does not come from the accumulation. His formula for getting there was to love God, love our neighbor, and be happy with what we have. No longer are we encouraged to live within our means and live a life of simplicity that helps us to disconnect from the worldly concerns in destroying God’s creation and, instead, engage in redemptive actions that heal. Simplicity allows us to be transformed by God’s grace into people who take care of God’s creation and helps us do what we cannot do alone to save the planet. The opposite of simplicity is blind consumerism. A consumerist way of life tells us we never have enough. If simplicity brings us closer to God, consumerism draws us to the devil.

Consumerism vs Prosperity
Prosperity is sometimes seen as the blessings of God to a particular people. Many rich seek a free ride on the productive class and see poverty as a failing of human society to provide the means and opportunities for the poor. Instead of poverty, the consumerism embraces a wholesale pursuit of over the top material prosperity. In stark contrast, Jesus Christ, in the Incarnation, rather than coming in material riches worthy of God, He fully embraces poverty. When He launches His public ministry, Jesus lives a life that embraces poverty. The first words of Jesus’ first sermon (The Sermon on the Mount) are: “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt 5:3). After His baptism, Jesus goes into the wilderness, living as a starving person might, without food for forty days. He lives the life of a poor itinerate preacher, walking on foot for thousands of miles and often sleeping outdoors. He lives with the poor, heals the poorest of the poor, the blind, the lame, the lepers and the possessed. He lives like the homeless, saying, “Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head” Mat 8:20. Jesus tells the rich young man to give away all his possessions and to follow Him. (Luke 18:22.) He applauds the destitute widow who, even in her poverty, gives a penny to the Jewish treasury Mark 12:42-44. Prior to Holy week, Jesus spends time in Bethany (from the Aramaic, meaning “The House of Poverty”). Jesus dies like a common criminal, stripped bare, beaten and hung on the Cross and watches the soldiers gamble for His robe, His one material possession John 19:23-24. Jesus teaches that all people, even the poorest of the poor, are worthy of respect and are worthy of love. If we are to love and follow Jesus Christ, we must love the poverty of Jesus Christ and we must love those whom Jesus Christ loved: the poor.

Over and over, Jesus makes it clear that the consumerism of wealth leads to death. He teaches that, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God” (Matt 19:24). Christ teaches that we must practice the virtue of temperance, so as to moderate attachment to the world’s goods.

Consumerism vs Humanity
We live in a world concerned with the self and its satisfaction, with personal fulfillment and the meeting of individual needs whereas God cares for us as whole people, these issues are not outside his concern, but they can be used to subvert his purposes. We receive in the same measure with which we give. That is the way we attract others to the Gospel of Christ, the Gospel of hope, the Gospel of Life. Jesus Christ, in the plan of the Father, gave everything that He had. His “return on investment,” if I may be so bold as to use a term, is humanity. In John 3:16 the Father has given Him the whole universe as a reward. We must focus on our mission of sharing the humanity of the Father and the gift of Christ with those in need. God wants all humans to be saved, to be washed clean in the blood of the Lamb, and to draw near to Him in confidence and assurance of faith. This is the hope we have to share, the only hope that will fill the void in our lives and our hearts that all men feel.
The Holy Father warns us that consumerism, which by its nature is self-centered and ignores the needs of the poor, damages us not just on a personal level but on a societal level. Unbridled consumerism combined with inequality proves doubly damaging to the social fabric. Inequality eventually engenders a violence which recourse to arms cannot and never will be able to resolve. Some simply content themselves with blaming the poor and the poorer countries themselves for their troubles; indulging in unwarranted generalizations, they claim that the solution is an “education” that would tranquilize them, making them tame and harmless. All this becomes even more exasperating for the marginalized in the light of the widespread and deeply rooted corruption found in many countries – in their governments, businesses and institutions - whatever the political ideology of their leaders.

**Conclusion:** We can overcome consumerism by:

1. **Learning to be grateful for what we have:** We need to look at our possessions, our energy use and our money and decide whether we have enough. To keep adding to our pile of things takes up resources. We must learn the art of being content.

2. **Focusing on our relationship with Christ:** We should build a strong relationship with Christ brings internal security. A person with a strong inner life that is centered on Christ won’t be obsessed about buying things and won’t have trouble sharing or giving away things they own (Acts: 2:44-46).

3. **Seeing ourselves as stewards of the earth:** We should believe that God, as creator, calls us to be stewards of the world’s resources. (Genesis 2:15)

We are aware that excessive consumerism and scarcity can create unnecessary depletion of natural resources, the unjust polarization of the poor and rich, and the unacceptable death and suffering of millions of people. We individually need to live as stewards of creation, finding practical ways of living simply and adopting a sharing and caring lifestyle (Acts 2:44-46). “God wants to give us something, but cannot, because our hands are full - there is nowhere for him to put it” — Augustine of Hippo (City of God)

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Matthew, Apostle and Evangelist

Matthew is the son of Alphaeus and one of the twelve disciples of Jesus and an apostle, and further described as the tax collector (Matt.10:3). The meaning of the name Matthew is the "gift of Jehovah". Matthew appears in all four of the apostolic lists (Matt.10:2-4; Mark 3:16-19; Luke 6:14-16; Acts 1:13). While in the call narrative Matthew’s Gospel, he was identified as Matthew; in all other parallel passages the name is mentioned as Levi (Mk.2:13-14; Luke 5:27-28). The author of the Gospel of Matthew exhibits a theological outlook, command of Greek, and rabbinic training. Today, let us look at the specific traits of Matthew, which made him a true disciple of Jesus, a committed apostle and a profound evangelist.

1. Mathew is Ready to Accept Jesus and Take Risk

The Scripture describes Mathew as a person of immediate response. When Jesus said to him, ‘Follow me’ and it says, immediately ‘Matthew got up and followed him’ (Matt. 9: 9). Mathew gave up his position and occupation as the Tax Collector without a second thought. It is obvious that Matthew was taking a risk and he gave up far more than the other disciples. The option was open before all other disciples that they could have gone back to their old occupations any time, without much difficulty. Simon Peter, James and John could have gone back to being fishermen. Simon the Zealot could have gone back to being a freedom fighter. But not Matthew! He deserted his occupation as the tax collector, a responsible and accountable job, answerable before the authorities. When he listened to Jesus’ call, he got up then and there and just walked away with Jesus, leaving behind everything. There is no way they would ever have taken him back. For the authorities, He was too irresponsible! He was not to be trusted! He had no loyalty to the company! Such was Matthew’s absolute commitment to Christ. He was so radical, he was so unswerving in his desire to follow Jesus that he was prepared to sacrifice all the security, all the wealth, all the prosperous living that he had ever known.

In Matthew’s perspective, discipleship demands taking risk and sacrifice that is to be expressed in uncompromising commitment to Jesus Christ. Matthew burnt his bridges in following Christ and that is the call of Christ on our lives too.

2. Matthew is Ready to Introduce Jesus to his Friends

Mathew is so excited about Jesus and he wanted his friends to experience his Joy in their lives too. He had organized a meeting in his house where Jesus was introduced to many common people. Here is the tax collector throwing a party and all the sinners and outcasts and undesirables get an invite and Jesus and his disciples sit down and eat with them (Matt. 9:10). The Pharisees poke their heads through the windows to see what all the noise is about and rather than rejoice in what they see, they moan and groan to the disciples: “Why does your teacher eat with such people?” The Spirit of God is at work and the traditional religious leaders can’t cope with it because this new spirit of freedom is beyond their control. A big feast is not something that is organized every day of a week! Matthew was so excited at having been called by Jesus, he was so thrilled at the new lifestyle he had gained, that he wanted to celebrate it and share it with everyone he know. That’s the joy that Matthew had in his heart and he was determined to make an opportunity for his friends and family to meet Jesus at the

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earliest. Matthew considered this as his mission. It is our enthusiasm for Jesus that matters. The new life we’ve found in Christ is important. And that is something really worth sharing!

3. Matthew is Ready to Challenge the Authorities

Matthew may have been a tax farmer working for Herod; situated at an office in Capernaum, he was more likely a customs agent, charging import duties on wares brought through this town on important nearby trade routes. Even more than the fishermen, he had a secure and prosperous job, which he surrendered to follow Jesus’ call. There is a real irony in the fact that when true religious fervour and zeal awakens a congregation, when a church comes alive through a time of renewal, or when an individual is touched by the power of the Holy Spirit, more often than not, the major source of opposition to that renewal is the wider institution of the church itself. We see it time and time again. But Matthew doesn’t bow to the pressure; he doesn’t feel ashamed of what he is doing, he doesn’t bow to the pressure of the institution and quietly ask all the outcasts to leave his house. He knows that what he is doing may not be something ‘traditional’! But he is prepared to understand being misunderstood if it means the Kingdom of God is being preached.

4. Matthew is Ready to take up a Personal Challenge

When the Pharisees criticized the disciples for eating with sinners and outcasts, Jesus speaks up on their behalf in verse 12: “People who are well do not need a doctor, but only those who are sick. I have not come to call respectable people, but outcasts.” By recording these verses, Matthew does accept that he too was a sick man in need of a doctor. And also, there is nothing respectable about him but that he too was a sinner and an outcast. And this is the most fundamental aspect of Matthew Discipleship: that we must remember that we too are sick, outcasts and sinners; but loved by God. If we forget this, we become like the Pharisees in the very same moment. It is the fundamental thought, which needs to guide us on. If we lose touch with that base, then we get arrogant and proud and believe that we are somehow worthy of respect. We need to remember the words of Jesus, “Those who want to be first shall be last in the Kingdom of Heaven.” For Matthew, therefore, the discipleship begin out of a commitment to self-realization; and a complete dependency on the grace of God.

Conclusion

On this day Matthew teaches us the true marks of discipleship. Our call is to rise to the challenges of Christian discipleship. This can only be achieved by constantly renewing our commitment to Christ and renewing our commitment to mission. It also implies to challenge unjust structures in the society we live, challenge unjust authorities and also challenging our own sense of self. It may mean a radical change in lifestyle, a commitment in terms of time, money and energy, the development of a real heart of compassion and a profound commitment to mission and evangelism. But the reward, as Matthew found out, was a lifetime enjoying a relationship with Jesus Christ.

Illustration

The old preacher Vance Havner used to say, "The tragedy of our time is that the situation is desperate but the saints are not."

Three weeks before President John Kennedy was assassinated, he said, "Almost all presidents leave office feeling that their work is unfinished. I have a lot to do, and so little time to do it."

As followers of Jesus Christ, we have much work to do and little time to do it. We must give ourselves to it. The times demand urgent action. Remember, the gospel is only good news if it arrives in time.

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Kristu Jignasa
Caring and Accepting the Elderly

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October 1st is observed as the International Senior Citizens Day as declared by the United Nations. Men and women above 60 years of age are considered as senior citizens. The government offers special concessions and comforts for their travel, payment of taxes, increased rate of interest for investments and special pensions for the aged. Yet the increasing number of old age homes and the inmates is very much alarming. The children feel comfortable and self-satisfied that their parents are safe and taken care well. No one truly recognizes the inner cry and realizes their expectations.

COMMANDMENT: The wise man says ‘Grey hair is a crown of the splendor: it is attained by a righteous life’. The grey hair is the splendor of the old (Proverbs 16:31 and 20:29). The first commandment with promise is Honour your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you (Ex. 20:12). Moses taught to ‘Rise in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly (Lev 19:32). Jesus himself reminded the command of God through Moses saying ‘Honour your Father and Mother’ and anyone who curses his father and mother must be put to death. In addition, he condemns the attitude of people offering ‘Corban’ to get rid of the responsibility of caring the parents. Whereas Pharaoh, for accepting Jacob father of Joseph, received blessings from him (Gen. 49); Rehoboam son of Solomon rejected the advice of the elders, lost his way that led to division of his kingdom forever (1 Kings 12:12-16). These are classical examples of the need for obeying the commandments of God to accept and obey the elders and parents. Wisdom of Sirach, which was accepted by Martin Luther as a book to be read for guidance of life teaches about honouring and accepting the aged. Basically, acceptance and caring of the elders is commanded by God himself to be followed by every human.

RESPONSIBILITY:

Aged men and women in today’s society continue to experience rejection for they are isolated socially; harassed and robbed (Proverbs 28:24) of dignity for money, properties and wealth; and face abuse of one kind or another within the family.

Paul in his first letter to Timothy (5:1-10) talks about the relationships of life: church and family duty, as an honoured and a useful old age. It is to be noted that the early Church did not propose to assume the responsibility for older people whose children were alive and well able to support them. It was made clear the duty of the children to support them. Only when it starts in the family with parents and the grandparents, the children realize their responsibility towards elders in the society (James 1:27).

While the traditional Indian culture teaches the value of accepting, respecting and loving the elders in the family and the society, the influencing western culture inculcates the culture of nuclear family life style leaving the aged alone or in the Homes. Today the children are deprived of the privilege of being nurtured in values, faith and culture, by the grandparents and elders of the family. Also the grandparents lose the love and affection of the grandchildren, which results in losing the life values for the younger generation.

COMMITMENT: The commandment ‘Honour your father and mother’ (Ex. 20:12) demands us to care and love the elders. A moving example is of Joseph who had love and respect for his aged father in-spite of holding high position, great power and wealth, which were not obstacles for his love towards his father. He was able to understand that those were through the blessings of his parents. Also he was not hesitant to request the Pharaoh to get a place for his father and the brothers with all comforts. Accepting the aged and elders is accepting them completely together with their disabilities.

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shortcomings and disadvantages, which their natural process brings along. Jesus himself in the midst of His excruciating pain on the cross remembers his mother and hands over the responsibility to John whom he trusted.

Today this commitment of the children towards elders and parents are shadowing away slowly and is a great challenge for the church to inculcate this value of accepting, respecting and loving the elders, starting from the family to the church and the society. They need to understand that all the stages of life are the gifts of God and so need to accept the stages of life gratefully.

BLESSINGS:

Old age is real in human life. It signifies the fullness of life. When Jacob visited Pharaoh, he blessed him and Pharaoh himself was very glad to receive his blessings. It was a sign of accepting the elders practiced among other civilized communities. When Jesus was brought by the parents to the temple to fulfil the rites of purification, Simeon and Anna were led by the Holy Spirit to be present in the temple. They blessed the baby Jesus and revealed great truths to the parents. The act of the parents of Jesus shows their acceptance of elders in the temple as channels of blessings. As a church, we need to utilize fully the vast resources of wisdom and maturity that exists in the elders. It is not only the fellowships and get-togethers or a trip once a while that they expect from us, but allowing them to share their wisdom, experience, talents, and resources available with them for the benefit of others (Ps 92: 14). We need to accept them as channels of blessing.

CONCLUSION:

A son took his aged father to a restaurant for an evening dinner. Father being very old and weak, while eating dropped food on his shirt and trousers. Other diners watched him in disguised while his son was very calm. After he finished eating, his son who was not at all embarrassed, quietly took him to a washroom, wiped the food particles, removed the stains, combed his hair and fitted his spectacles firmly. When they came out the entire restaurant was watching them in dead silence, not able to grasp how someone could embarrass themselves publically like that. The son settled the bill and started walking out with his father. At that time, an old man amongst the diners called out to the son and asked him, ‘Don’t you think you have left something behind?’ The son replied, ‘No Sir, I haven’t’. The old man resorted, ‘Yes, you have. You have left a lesson for every son and a hope for every father’. The restaurant went silent. Care for those who once cared us is one of the highest honors. Let us obey to the commandment, accepting our responsibility with commitment and be blessed. Also let us not forget that this should be inculcated in the younger generation to be a channel of blessing.

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With gratitude and prayer let us remember the pioneers who became instruments in the hands of God in the formation of Church of South India. Today we are celebrating the seventieth anniversary. The mission spark spurred in 1919 became a flame in 1947 on this historical day. The church historians stated this as the second Pentecost. As a united and unifying church it has spread far and wide in south India and even crossed the borders. The motto we took from the high priestly prayer of our Master still kindles the spark within us. The people from different walks of life came together. Irrespective of their cultural, linguistic, regional and communal background they have united in their witness. That unity is the witness and backbone of the church.

Let us skim into the passages given to us to see how we can have more unity in our missionary journey.

1. Uniting for mission.

Moses and his brother Aaron are joining here. When Moses was called, he presented all sorts of excuses. But God told him that your brother will be your spokesman. That is getting materialized here. Aaron now receives his revelation, ensuring that the two brothers meet half way between Egypt and Midian at the Holy Mountain. Aaron, as promised, is Moses’ spokesman and presumably, as such, does the signs before Israel. Both together joined in the venture of God to liberate His people from bondage. This should be a model in our day to day missions. Why people cannot join together, why they cannot work together. Our ego or many other matters restrain us from joining in the Lord’s mission wholeheartedly. That’s why the Kingdom concerns are getting limited.

2. Hindrance for the Union.

The rebuke Paul gave to Corinthian church is noteworthy. He addresses them infants. Moreover he says that they have not grown up to have solid food. Also he says that they are worldly. He also models the relationship between other apostles. He explains that people like himself and Appollos are no more than servants depending on one another and God. It is God who brings spiritual growth. From the household duties of a servant he moves to the group activity model in the field. When all of them put their efforts together, that will lead to blessing. We, as a unifying church, are called to witness through our life. It is easy to preach and make schemes, but putting into practice really matters. Let us join together, breaking the barriers for common service and witnessing.

3. Model for union.

The church as a society has been created by God for a specific purpose. That is to convey to the world the revelation imparted by Jesus, and to reflect the self-sacrificing love manifested by Jesus on the cross. He does not pray that they may escape from the world, for that may be immunes from the world’s hatred. Jesus therefore prays to the father that they may be united and dedicated to their task and so sanctified by the truth about God that He has taught them.
As a united and uniting church we have crossed sixty nine years. Even though there are spurs and discomfort, still we continue in one track as a united church. Let us be humble enough to be channels of His blessing and molders of the perishing souls. May the high priestly prayer may give us strength in the days to come.

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**Introduction:**

Imagine a church without a pastor, how will the situation be? Who would say all the prayers, celebrate the Eucharist, solemnize weddings, baptize and do the last rites, who will edify the congregation in God’s word with a sense of theological direction? The role of the clergy seems to be indispensable. How about we imagine a Church without the congregation or believers. To whom will the clergy minister to? To whom will the worship services be conducted, and how could the clergy alone carry out God’s mission in this world? Truly as the presence of a pastor is requisite for a church, so is the presence and participation of the congregation in the mission of God. The priesthood of all believers is one such teaching which edifies the presence and participation of every believer called by God into the fellowship of Church. The functions might be different, yet the belief is that all are called by God to perform certain functions.

The ‘priesthood of all believers’ is a Protestant Christian doctrine stating that ordinary Christians share a common priesthood in that they have direct access to God through their prayers without requiring a human mediator.

**Common priesthood to recognize multifarious grace:**

In Isaiah 61:1-11. "Promises in this passage, are made to the Jews returned out of captivity. Here prophet Isaiah announces “the year of the Lord’s favor.” the time when all debts were cancelled and all property sold or mortgaged was returned to the original owners. Isaiah reminds us that in “the year of the Lord’s favor,” God comes to set right everything that has gone wrong, which make it possible for all people to thrive. It’s a time when God’s grace defines life for all people.

By the covenant made at Sinai, Israel was to be "a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation" (Exodus 19:6) this anticipation is slowly being realized through the passage in Isaiah 61:1-11. This unmerited gift is also to recognize the grace of God in the life of the gentiles and other people engaged towards a harmonious and just living of everyone equally. God gives the people of Israel this privilege to act as intermediaries between God and the gentiles. To be a channel of grace and mercy, proclaiming the righteous acts of God. Therefore God’s favour towards Israel in this time of desolation is just a means towards experiencing grace and recognizing the same grace in others’ lives.

**Common priesthood to proclaim God's goodness**

1 peter 2:1-10, Peter says that we are not just living stones being built into a spiritual house for God's habitation, but we are also a "holy priesthood." In other words, we are not merely the passive building where God dwells; we are also the active participants in worship. And not just participants, but a special kind of participant, the priests. This is the great teaching about the "priesthood of all believers."

We are the priests of this new spiritual house, and our privilege now as priests is to draw near to God with spiritual sacrifices. In ancient Israel, priests acted as mediators between God and people. They ministered according to God's instruction and they offered sacrifices to God on behalf of the people. Once a year, the high priest would enter the holiest part of the temple and offer a sacrifice for the sins of all the people, including all the priests.
Here the New Covenant recognizes Christ as a mediator between us and God (1 Timothy 2:5). The Epistle to the Hebrews calls Jesus the supreme "high priest," who offered himself as a perfect sacrifice (Hebrews 7:23–28). Therefore through Christ, God is equally accessible to all the faithful, and every Christian has equal potential to minister for God.

**Common priesthood to Glorify and acknowledge Christ.**

John 17:1-8 are about the character of the eleven men to whom they were applied. How weak was their faith! How slender their knowledge! How shallow their spiritual attainments! How faint their hearts in the hour of danger! Yet a very little time after Jesus spoke these words they all forsook Him and fled, and one of them denied Him three times with an oath. No one, in short, can read the four Gospels with attention, and fail to see that never had a great master such *weak servants* as Jesus had in the eleven apostles. Yet these very weak servants were the men of whom the gracious Head of the Church speaks here in high and honorable terms.

The lesson before us is full of comfort and instruction. It is evident that Jesus sees far more in His believing people than they see in themselves, or than others see in them. The least degree of faith is very precious in His sight. Though it be no bigger than a grain of mustard seed, it is a plant of heavenly growth, and makes a boundless difference between the possessor of it and the man of the world. Wherever the gracious Savior of sinners sees true faith in Himself, however feeble, He looks with compassion on many infirmities, and passes by many defects. It was even so with the eleven apostles. They were weak and unstable as water; but they believed and loved their Master when millions refused to own Him. And the language of Him who declared that a cup of cold water given in the name of a disciple should not lose its reward, shows clearly that their loyalty was not forgotten. But do we simply believe in Jesus? Do we cling to Him, and roll all our burdens on Him? Can we say with sincerity and truth, as Peter said afterwards, "Lord, You know all things, you know that I love you" Then let us take comfort in the words of Christ before us, and not give way to despondency. The Lord Jesus did not despise the eleven because of their feebleness, but bore with them and saved them to the end, because they believed. Let us glorify Christ and acknowledge him through our lives.

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Disability: Care and Honour

2 Sam.9 :1-13        Psalm 146
Acts.9: 32-35        Mark 3:1-6

Disability, be it mental or physical, is as old as the existence of human race itself. The issue of disability in India is so pertinent given the increasing population of Person(s) with Disability (PwD). They are staggeringlty over 100 million in number ranking our country as *numero uno* in the world with the largest population of PwD. They are either visible or invisible in our church parlance. The CSI has inherited several disability institutions from the mission bodies who empathetically initiated them. We must recognize and understand that they replicated the disability ministry of Jesus which predominated His earthly service. Therefore, we the church is endowed with this responsibility of imitating and continuing Jesus’ disability ministry.

A Person (s) with Disability are created in the image of God. This robust biblical affirmation mandates that these vulnerable and blessed creation of the creator God need to be cared for and esteemed as they carry the valency of life God has placed upon them.

The biblical accounts of Mephiboshet, Saul and the healing of the nameless man with the withered hand are an interwoven tapestry of God’s accompaniment. The promise and the very act of God’s accompanying presence runs as a silver liming in the scripture. This theme is very vivid in God’s assuring response to Moses, “My presence shall go before you” and Jesus’ farewell epilogue, “lo Am with you always.”

**God’s Accompaniment; Care and Honour of Mephiboshet:**

Mephiboshet’s story is a saga of PwD with a locomotor disability. This a journey from trauma to triumph. As David accepts, creates access, accommodates and accompanies the latter he experiences “care and honour.” The accompanying presence of David with a PwD is evident in the table fellowship which is a replica of Eucharist. The accompanying presence in this fellowship is pregnant with nurture, reconciling and sustaining shepherding care. This is a classic blueprint of leading a PwD from “exclusion and inclusion.”

**God’s Accompaniment; Care and Honour of the Nameless Man:**

The healing of the man with a withered hand by Jesus is an act of eradicating stigma and discrimination from the life of the PwD. It is also a ministry of restoration of this man to “equality and full participation into the life and witness in the church and society.”

**God’s Accompaniment; Care and Honour of Saul (Paul):**

The dramatic account of Saul’s visual impairment on the road to Damascus is replete with challenges a PwD with visual impairment encounter. Saul is led by an accompanier who guides the latter with his hand. It is a physical act of accompaniment where a PwD is supported and guided “overcoming the physical barriers” that are present on the terrain of the road. A PwD is challenged with three primary accessibility barriers in one’s life journey. They are structural and special barriers in the infrastructure, attitudinal barriers that challenge the transition “from exclusion to inclusion” and barriers in the area of information, communication and technology.

**Conclusion:**

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So, what can be gathered from the interpretation of the assigned biblical texts from a disability angle is captured in the aphorism, “including the excluded.” These three PwD, Mephibosheth, the unnamed man with the withered hand and Saul vociferously monologue the mainstreaming of PwD in our church for equality and full participation.

In order to achieve this set goal the church is called, inspired and also mandated to metamorphosize herself into an “Accompanying Church” to stand along with this blessed creation of God in our church and to co-journey along with them. Such an endeavor will morph the church into an “am there with you” Church.

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CSI Rayalaseema Diocese  
Programme Executive, DISHA, CSI Synod
Youth with Christ in Action

Daniel 1:1-17  Psalm 98
Acts. 6:1-7  John 1:35-42
Eve. Ecc.12:1-8  Mk.10:17-22

Introduction:

Youthhood is the most generous time in a person’s life. This phase of life can be regarded the best time to be moulded either for good or for bad. Today, youth are considered the best agents of change because they hold the key to the lifestyle of the world. Their life is a time of never ending newness and learning, both about themselves and the world around. No doubt they are the real ‘today’ and ‘tomorrow’. But is every young person with a vision in life? Does every young person possess the values of Justice, love and integrity? Is every young person seriously committed in being a responsible citizen? Are a few questions which also pop up when talking about young people.

The theme “Youth with Christ in Action” calls all the Christian young people to journey with Christ. Today the world characterizes people by one’s actions and not by one’s words. The call is for a collaborative action with the ideals of Christ in the context of competition, violence and provincialism. Youth with Christ in Action invites the young people to tread the paths which Jesus walked in bringing hope to the hopeless, love to the unloved and peace amidst violence. This call motivates the young people to leave the comfort zones but to take the journey of risking themselves for the sake of Christ. In short the theme bids young people to emulate the actions of Christ and also to proclaim Christ through their actions.

Action-oriented Faithfulness (Daniel 1:1-17)

In the context of Babylonian domination where Jerusalem was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim taken into captivity, and precious items taken from the temple, Israel experienced a bleak day in its history. In the face of foreign domination and alienation from one’s own culture and Land, among the captives, Daniel in his teens emerges as one in making a commitment “purposed in his heart” (1:8). His commitment was to “not defile himself” with the king’s food because it would make him ritually unclean according to Levitical laws about food.

Daniel remained true to his commitment by doing it with politeness - Dan 1:8b ‘he requested’ and not demanded, but respected the authority of those over him. He did it with God's help - Dan 1:9 and God granted him favor in the eyes of the chief of eunuchs. He did it through persistence - Dan 1:10-11. He did not give up after the refusal by the chief of the eunuchs, He tried something else, going to the steward directly over them. He did it through willingness to test his faith - Dan 1:12-15. He was confident that God's way was the right way. He was willing to demonstrate the superiority of God's way, so he asked the steward to give him and his three friends just water and vegetables for ten days. Ultimately Daniel’s faithfulness to God’s ways were fruitfully rewarded.

Action-oriented Service (Acts 6:1-7)

Two groups of people Hebrews and the Hellenists were part of the early church. The Hellenists were Jews living in Jerusalem but originally connected with Diaspora Judaism characterized by the use of Greek as their principle language, especially for worship and scripture and the Hebrew community were Aramaic-speaking Jews who held to their native language and culture.

As the disciples in Jerusalem increased, problems increased as well. The Hellenist widows were being neglected, leading to a complaint against the Hebrews in the early church. This problem threatened the unity of the church which affected the spread of the Word of God.

Kristu Jignasa
The apostles gave them the choice to select seven people with good reputation, full of spirit and of wisdom. Here the congregation takes the responsibility of choosing the seven people probably young man due to the nature of the task involved. These seven young men readily accepted to do the task. They showed great willingness in rendering their services and time for the benefit of the community. After selecting the seven, they were appointed with prayer. Though the church was mostly Hebrew, all the seven selected were from the Hellenist background. The congregation was pleased, and the widows’ need was met. The word of God started to spread without any hindrance. The Church problem was solved successfully by informing the congregation of the problem and by involving the congregation in finding a solution.

**Action-oriented Witness (John 1:35-42)**

Jesus Christ in the gospels is a young person full of life and vigor. This young man in his early 30’s made a commitment to stand for justice and proclaiming peace even to the extent of embracing the cross and its sufferings. He envisioned and inaugurated God’s reign against the rule of the colonial empire of Rome. He with his associates went on to revolutionize the world through their movement of love, justice and forgiveness. He spent a lot of time teaching and preaching. But, they always were coupled with acts of justice and love which gave a new impetus of faith and love to people in God.

John 1:35-42 speaks about the witness of John the Baptist and the confession of Andrew who followed Jesus. John the Baptist pointed and directed his disciples to Christ. His life was meant for that purpose to prepare the way and to direct people to Christ. His could have gained all the popularity or even the acclamation but he goes to the extent of even letting go his disciples when he saw Jesus. His actions spoke more loudly than words. He was just a sign board signifying Christ.

After being directed by John the Baptist, Andrew finds Jesus, he initially addresses him as ‘Rabbi’ which means teacher, He accepts the invitation of Jesus, goes with him and spends time. Soon after that being greatly convinced, first he finds his brother Simon Peter and tells him that we have found the ‘Messiah’. The confession of Andrew about Jesus from ‘Rabbi to Messiah’ denotes the curiosity and the faith acclamation after having a personal encounter with Christ. He immediately plunges into action. He goes to find his brother and brings him to Jesus. He realizes that there is more joy in sharing thus, he gets his brother to Jesus.

Our actions can be justified and praised only if they reflect or emulate the action-oriented Christ. Today, May we be sure that our actions and behaviors reflect the words and ideals and promises and commitments that come out of our mouths. As action-oriented young people, let us be faithful, willing to serve and ready to witness to the Christ in action. **Amen**

**Rev. Solomon Paul J.**  
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Coming of the Lord and Judgment

Gen. 19:14-25: Genesis 19 revolves around condemnation and judgment, it presents a view of moral reality that is widely shared in popular religions, i.e., God is the one who punishes sinners. The primary structure of the chapter 19:14-25 reflects a simple teaching of retribution in which “good people prosper and the evil people suffer and die.”

The word for Punishment in vs. 15 in Hebrew is Awon a common word for sin. The effects of sin flow out of the sin itself and they are not introduced by God from outside the situation. Beginning with the exilic/post exilic period, the noun awon attested 231 times in the OT. The cause of awon Punishment is found not only in the false behavior towards God but also in misdeeds against ones fellows. The awon caused by a wicked person surrounds and injures the innocent. Sin is an action and attitude in opposition to God and His purposes and sin breaks the harmonious and just relationship with God, others, self and nature.

In the OT worldview sin in any form is punishable. The connection between wrongdoing and its consequences is already captured in the very vocabulary that appears here in Gen 19:14-25 awon can mean both the wrong doing and the punishment that follows. This word awon therefore may refer to all three: The Sinful Act, Guilt and the Punishment. Thus the effects of human sin brings pain to God, as we see in Genesis 6:6 “it grieved Him to His heart”.

Sodom is condemned, not because they have no faith in God, but because of the way in which they treat their brothers and sisters. God takes seriously what human beings think and say, which can contribute in a genuine way to the shaping of the future because, the human behavior, affects, not simply the human community but the entire Cosmos.

This story shows that God is not eager to judge. God appears open to alternatives. The speech of God in Ezekiel 18:31, I have no pleasure in the death of anyone also characterizes the mind of God. Israel’s God is Slow to anger even with the non-chosen.

The Pentateuch suggests that the destruction of Sodom is a foretaste of the Judgment that will befall other inhabitants of Canaan for their sins (Lev 18:3-30). Even Israel the very descendent of Abraham is likened to Sodom and Gomorrah in the prophets and in the Book of Deuteronomy (Isa 1:9, 3:9 Amos 4:11). Indeed Ezekiel 16:46-47 says that Jerusalem’s sins are worse than Sodom’s and declare the punishment of Israel. Therefore, the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah serves as a warning of what could become of Israel’s own land; the text may allude the fall of Jerusalem, (Deut 29:22-23; Jer 4:23-26). The link between the practice of Justice and Righteousness and the future of the land remains very close, as the prophets often point out (Hos 4:1-3). They focus their message of Judgment in a sharply corporate manner, rooted in God’s concern for the oppressed, deeply embedded in Law (Exodus 22:21-24).

II Peter 3:1-10: The scoffers (Greek word empaiktes) are indicative of our tendency to despair of the promises of God when God does not respond to our pleas within the time span we have set as reasonable or convenient. We would like God’s help, insight, power, and strength when we want it, not when God in sovereignty deems it appropriate.

Kristu Jignasa
To meet the problem of the delay of the Parousia and Judgment, the author puts forward two arguments. **Firstly**, God who determines the time of the Parousia and judgment, does so from a different perspective on time from that of men and women. He is not limited by a human life span, but surveys the whole course of human history, so that, as the Psalmist observed (Ps 90:4), periods which by human standards are of great length may be from God’s perspective very short. Those who complain of the delay of the Parousia and judgment, impatient to see it in their own life time, are limiting the divine strategy in history to the short-term expectations to which transient human beings are accustomed. But God’s purpose transcends such expectations.

**Secondly**, again following traditional apocalyptic thinking, explains that the delay is a respite which God has graciously granted to His people before His intervention in the judgment. It derives from one of the fundamental attributes of God, His forbearance, which characterizes God as “slow to anger” (Exodus 34:6), mercifully differing His judgment so that sinners may have the opportunity to repent and escape condemnation. God delays the Parousia because He is not willing that any one may perish but should take advantage of the opportunity to repent and be prepared for the Kingdom of God.

Thus we should not take so much comfort in the patience of God that we do not immediately repent when we stray from the way of righteousness or ignore our obligations to evangelism with a false sense that there is plenty of time to attend to the unrepentant.

**Matthew 25:31-46:** These are the last words of Jesus’ last discourse, a climatic point to which Matthew has carefully built. Following the long series of six parables and warnings about living responsibly so as to be ready for the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:32-25:30). It is not a parable but an apocalyptic drama. Parables begin with familiar, this worldly scene, which then modulate into a new dimension of meaning. In contrast, it begins with an ‘other-worldly’ depiction of Parousia the coming of the Son of Man with His angels and the gathering of all nations before His throne-and modulates into affirmations of the ultimate importance of ordinary, this-worldly deeds. Matthew presents two important points here:

**The Two Kingdoms:** The Son of Man, who comes at the end, is identified as the King (25:34, 40) who sits on His glorious throne (25:31) and who admits the righteous to the final kingdom of God (25:34). This is the triumph of the kingdom represented throughout the Gospel by Jesus as the alternative to this-worldly demonic kingdom represented by His opponents. This negative counter kingdom is also represented in the imagery of the last judgment; the counter part of the kingdom prepared from the foundation of the world (25:34) is the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. There are only these two kingdoms: the Son of Man with His angels, the blessed righteous, and the kingdom of God prepared from eternity stand on one side; the devil and his angels, the accursed, and the destiny prepared for the devil and his own stand on the other. The Kingdom of God is disclosed as the only True Kingdom.
The Primacy of Ethics and the Commandment of Love: This is the only scene with any details picturing the Last Judgment in the NT. To the readers’ surprise the criterion of Judgment is not confession of faith in Christ. Nothing is said of Grace, Justification, or the Forgiveness of Sins. What counts whether one has acted with Loving Care for Needy People. Such deeds are not a matter of extra credit, but constitute the decisive criterion of judgment presupposed in chapters 23-25. Jesus has taught that the self-giving care for others is the heart of the revealed will of God in the Torah. The Messianic King has lived out His teaching that His kingdom consists of service of others. The fundamental thrust of this scene is that when people respond to human needs, they are in fact responding, to Christ.

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Celebration of God’s Sovereignty, Justice and Peace

Ex.7:1-7
Rom.13:1-7
Eve. Rom.14:13-23
Psalm 89:1-18
John 18:33-38
Psalm 24

Introduction

There are many theological themes centered on reformation. The theme of Celebration of God’s sovereignty, Justice and Peace taken from the Bible is used to reflect upon reformation in order to further the radical reformation. The key word for the exploration of above said theme is “name of God- Elohim.” This key word helps us to understand text, both the written as well as lived text.

Elohim Reminds of God’s Sovereignty, Justice and Peace

(Written Text: Exodus 7:1-7)

(v1.) ... see, I make Elohim to Pharoah; and Aaron your brother shall be your Prophet.

(v2.) You shall speak all that I commanded you....

Name of God- Elohim is extensively used in creation story in the Book of Genesis. Elohim reveals of God’s sovereignty, which is evident in creation acts of God. God’s sovereignty refers to God’s freedom in God’s reign. The statement in creation story it was good points to God’s sovereignty in terms of God’s creativity in making things good.

As much as creation story is about God’s creative activity, so much so it is God’s act of judgement as well. In the story Noah God becomes very disappointed over the human sinfulness and it results in God’s judgement on human sinfulness. In the book of Exodus (7: 1-7) the name of God Elohim introduces God’s sovereignty in terms of liberative justice for peace. In order to save the slaves from the clutches of Pharoah, Elohim had placed the weaker one- Moses to stand face to face with the stronger- Pharoah. If Pharoah stands for power to kill, Elohim stands for live giving spirit; if Pharoah stands for power to enslave, Elohim stands for engagement to liberate; If pharaoh stands for Egyptian might, Elohim stands for God’s care. In Moses facing Pharoah, it was Elohim facing Pharoah. It is in such a facing the power Elohim comes closer to people for their liberation.

The lived text referring to Reformation, which was lead by Martin Luther, God’s word was brought closer to people. Prior to that people in Western Europe were placed to serve the feudal lords as well as Church. In such a service people were reduced to “no-people” under feudal exploitation through movements like enclosures. Through bringing in God’s word closer to people, there was an experience of freedom among the people to raise critical questions with the existing feudal system.

The challenge to radicalize reformation for our times is ...

1. How to bring God’s word closer to people?
2. What are the factors stand in between God’s word and people?

Word of God affirms God’s Sovereignty, Justice and Peace

(St. John 18: 33-38)

(v 37b.) ...everyone who is of the truth hears my voice.

Kristu Jignasa
((v36a.) my kingship is not of this world....

Name of God- *Elohim* is further understood in terms of “word of God” – *dabar* in the book of Genesis. New Testament reflects upon God’s word as God’s reign. Jesus in response to Pilate had stated that he continue to speak and those who belongs to truth will hear his voice. Jesus as the word of God and at the same time Jesus speaks word of God is a theological discussion with political implications. The theological discussion points to the reign of God, which is indifferent to the rule of Kingdoms of this world. Such a differentiation implications are that Kingdom of this world calls forth for sacrifice by the followers of King in the interest of protecting power. But, the words of Jesus has to do with incarnation of God; God coming nearer to people (v37.)

In order to radicalise reformation, on the eve of 500 years of celebration of Reformation, it is an invitation to critically revisit reformation in order to develop Christian praxis for our times. For which the word of God needs to be revisited to theologically strengthen every move towards justice and peace.

**Rev. Dr. Praveen PS, Perumalla**

CSI Karimnagar Diocese

**Auxiliary Secretary BSI, Secunderabad**
All Souls Day

Isaiah 25: 6-9  
Psalm 118: 14-15, 17-21  
II Corinthians 5: 1-10  
Hebrews 12:1-2  
John 11: 21-27

The three parts of the Human Being in general are Body, Soul and the Spirit. While “Body” denotes the material appearance and “Spirit” the immaterial consciousness, the “Soul” means both the immaterial and material aspects of humanity. In its most basic sense, the word “soul” means “life.” The life principle of the soul is departed at the time of physical death. (Gen 35:18). The spirit, which is the God given consciousness for the body and its soul, also returns to God who gave it. (Ecc.12:7). However, the soul and the spirit are connected, but separable (Heb.4:12). The soul as with the spirit is the center of spiritual and emotional experiences (Job 30:25; Psa.43:5), it refers to the whole person, whether alive or in the life after. We believe that all souls that are alive before and after death should be saved for resurrection and life-everlasting by accepting Jesus Christ and His Slavic act of grace on the cross.

On such grounds the Church celebrates “All Souls Day” on the 2nd of November and “All Saints’ Day” on the 1st of November. The instances of celebrations in Roman Catholic Church depict ‘All Saints’ Day’ to honour church members, who were believed to have gone to heaven and ‘All Souls Day’ to commemorate those who died baptized but without having confessed their sins and they are believed to reside in purgatory. In the Anglican Church, All Souls Day is commemoration of All Faithful Departed, and it is seen as an extension of All Saints’ Day. The Protestants at the Reformation fused the All Souls Day with the All Saints’ Day. In the Eastern Orthodox churches there are several ‘All Souls Days’ during the year falling on Saturdays. The church of South India celebrates “All Souls day” with a belief in the resurrection of the dead and the hope of intercession for the Faithful Departed to meet them.

This year our celebration follows with three thoughts of meditation on the scriptures: primarily, the celebration is rejoicing in God’s Salvation, secondly it is the confidence in God-Given Spirit as a guarantee and finally it is a belief in Jesus, the resurrection and life.

Rejoicing in God’s Salvation

Here the first lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures in Isaiah 25:6-8, we learn that God not only fulfils the longing of those who wait for God’s help but also provides a feast to celebrate the victory over death. Thus the following verse 9, calls for waiting on God’s salvation to rejoice and be glad in it. Jesus provides the hope for the forgiveness of sins and hope for our resurrection in His own death and resurrection. (I thess.4:13-18).

Confidence in God-Given Spirit as a Guarantee

Here in the epistle lesson from 2 Corinthians 5: 1-10, we understand that the tent is the body in which a soul dwells before death and after death it regains the left mortal body as an immortal one prepared by God. This faith is kept in the souls by the God-Given Spirit as a guarantee. In this body every Soul groans and lives with burdens under a yoke of temptations. The souls get their freedom through death and also gain back their left bodies in a glorified form as the resurrected body of Jesus. There is no direct teaching about how the glorified bodies appear like, but we do have a teaching that the resurrected bodies appear as created by God not subject to sin, death and suffering. As the appearance of the Jesus’ body after resurrection looked like Jesus that He was, we will also look like the same people that we were.

Kristu Jignasa
Thus, All Souls Day is a celebration of a confidence that we all shall enter into heaven with the bodies like Jesus both in age and strength without innocence, pain and suffering by pleasing God.

Belief in Jesus, the Resurrection and Life

Finally from the gospel lesson John 11: 21-27 we see that celebration is renewing our belief in Jesus, who said, “I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?” These words were not only information about Jesus but also a grand saying about the power over death and result of believing Him.

The experience of the soul as a life without body is a temporary separation according to Jesus. The temporary separation of soul and body is here regarded as not even interrupting, much less impairing, the new and everlasting life imparted by Jesus to His believing people. Therefore, All Souls Day understands that we misuse the unification of the soul and body now at present before death and do sin. If we now confess those sins done in this unification with a belief in Jesus we are going to participate in His resurrection and enjoy the true unification of soul with the bodies after death that have become earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust in the burial ground.

Rev. Devanand Subuddy Kummithi
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Kristu Jignasa
John the Baptist was born to Zacharias, a priest and a descendant of Aaron, and his wife Elizabeth who was also from the priestly clan. He was born when they were old. He was filled with the Holy Spirit even when he was in his mother’s womb. He had understood the aim of his life, revealed to him by God. He condemned the sins of people and challenged them to repent for their sins and turn to God. Jesus Christ testified that there was no one greater than John the Baptist, who was born of women. Jesus was baptised by John the Baptist. This helped people to know from John that Jesus was the son of God. Only Luke’s Gospel gives a birth narrative for John, introducing him as the forerunner of Jesus and intertwining his birth story with that of Jesus. According to Luke both children were born in the reign of Herod the Great (4 BC). Their mothers were related as cousins. John was six months older than Jesus. John’s parents were an elderly couple, both of priestly descent and hitherto childless.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were very old and living without a child. Both of them were very much known for their empathy in the field of ministry to the God. In general and in their understanding, to get a baby in the old age, is highly impossible. But by the Grace of God, the impossible become possible which the world cannot provide to anyone. Because of this the topic for today’s meditation makes us to think deeper about the child as “what this child is going to be?”. The child was the forerunner of Jesus Christ. Further, in Historical Jesus’ research, one matter on which all are agreed is that the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry was associated with his encounter with John the Baptist. All four Gospels together with Acts (1:22, 13:24-25) attest to this. John’s existence as an historical figure is independently Josephus. All the accounts agree that John was a preacher who called people to a life of righteousness before God, and to baptism. Therefore his significance is couched in theological terms, both in the New Testament and in Josephus. In Christian memory John is the precursor of Jesus Christ and to some degree his life and death prefigure those of Jesus. We are familiar with John as the “voice crying in the wilderness”.

Zechariah belonged to the priestly ‘course or division’ of Abijah. One day when Zechariah was on duty the Holy of Holies, the angel Gabriel appeared to him. Gabriel announced that Elizabeth would bear a son, whose name would be John (Johanan, ‘Yahweh has shown favour’). John would drink no wine but be filled with Holy Spirit. He was to play the role of Elijah, the words of which are echoed on the lips of Gabriel: He will turn many of the people of Israel to the Lord their God. After this Zechariah asked for a sign that all this is true, and he is given a punitive sign: he was struck dumb until the child is born. We see three important points to meditate upon “what this child is going to be”.

**God’s provision:** The birth of John is very significant and we can notice the God’s provision as it was announced by an angel. This is not an announcement but an extra ordinary announcement which signifies the uniqueness of the same as it is from heaven to earth. In this, one can notice the leading and the providence of God. The God’s provision makes the impossible into possible. When Zechariah did not receive the message with total confidence and prompt obedience, that unbelief closed his mouth and believing opened it again. The hand of the God was working with John who was distinguished as a prophet. God is so evidently with him right from his birth. He was destined to some great and specific work of God. In the birth of John we can see the provision of God.

**God’s protection:** In the Gospel Luke (1:66), explicits some special care and peculiar providence of God in preserving the life, as the “hand” of the Lord was with John. The protection started from the womb as John was conceived. This protection makes him to get the recognition in the community as he was the instrument of God. The word “hand” is used to denote “aid, protection, favour of God”. We should understand this that this expression here means that God aided him, protected him and showed him favour. This is what this child is going to be. God is so evidently with him. The
expression, “hand of the Lord” was peculiarly a Hebrew thought and it is one of the vivid anthropomorphic idioms. Ultimately it shows the design of god. God had the plan of life for this child. There are supernatural marks in the case of John. John was under Divine protection.

**God’s perfection:** God had designed life of John and made him to do the significant role in the ministry before Jesus. He was the pioneer in the field work of the kingdom of God. He was known for his empathy in all the fields of ministry and strong in his subject of establishing the kingdom values. This is the impact of the direction and guidance of God towards perfection. God wants us to be an integrated personality in all the fields of life without any perversion. Perfection started when there was an involvement of the providence of God. The name of the child is given by God himself which is the first explicit direction of God to the world. According to the general understanding and tradition, the parents ought to play a significant role in naming their child. But in the case of John the naming took place through the parents under the eminent direction of God. The father of the child Zachariah also indicates the name on a wooden tablet covered with wax which shows a major lesson of obedience and the parents are for the plan of God. Zachariah echoes the instructions of the angel, not the crowd and custom. His obedience yields additional reward: his tongue was loosed immediately and judgment ends. Just as the angel promised (in Luke1:20), the temporary situation of silence of Zachariah’s life ends with the fulfilment of God’s word. God showed his mercy through John to the people who were in the society. He was the person with the direction of God to lead the humanity towards perfection and he stood for the perfection of God from womb to tomb.

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Vine and Branches

Ezek. 37:15-23  Psalm 133
1 Cor.12:12-27  John15:1-8
Eve.Eph.4:1-13  Ps.148

Introduction

Difference of opinions and perspectives are part and parcel of the human life and society. Different Culture, region, language and background of the respective communities form their opinions and objectives. Opinions of a concerned community should be a tool to express their unique identity and bring out richness of life in diversity. Nevertheless human history witnessed great amount of damage due to these differences in the name of caste, creed and religion. The Church is also no exception to this. It has witnessed several divisions due to its doctrines and origins. Many times they were a barrier to accomplish the vision and mission entrusted to it by God through Jesus Christ, his son. Today we should overcome our divisions created by human beings. Of course, God created diversity of life but man created divisions.

We should celebrate our diversity. But our differences should not be a claim to fight with each other. In this situation, we in India, Churches in India should unite in order to fulfill the mission of God. Passages provided for the theme speak about unity even in the situation of divisions. Vine and branches describes the progression of life even they have divisions. Divisions in the vine and branch are to carry out their responsibilities and mutual burdens too.

To become one to be the People of God: Ezekiel 37:15-23

People of God are divided in the past due to political reasons. Judah and Israel the divided nations went apart after their own political motifs because of their political leaders went against the covenantal relationship. The leaders of the nation created divisions not only in political or national borders but also in serving their God too. It was the promise of Yahweh that united Israel nation is His People. Without Judah there is no meaning for Northern Israel. Similarly, Judah has no existence without Israel even though it survived for several years. But now God brings out His intention to reunite His people. Therefore the wooden stick of Judah and Israel would become one in the name of Sovereign Lord (v. 20). Becoming one is a radical change. In the process of change, they have to forsake their divisions created by their ancestors. Moreover they have to leave their gods and purify themselves (v. 23) because God Himself will purify them. It is God’s promise that the one nation will have a one ruler and they will obey Lord’s laws faithfully (v. 24). This brings fruitfulness to the nation (v. 26).

This vision of substantial unity reunites the community of God and reestablishes God’s rule over them.

United in Christ by the Spirit of the Lord: 1 Cor 12:12-27

Church is the body of Christ. Christ unites all people whether they are Jews or Gentiles, whether slaves or free. They are united as one body by the Spirit of the Lord. Here Paul uses the image of body and many parts to bring unity among the Church. The parts of the body failed to respond to the needs of the other parts and they failed to carry responsibilities of the whole body (vv. 21-22). This attitude among the parts of the body caused to damage the unity of the body. The body of Christ has been torn apart due to the differences among the parts of the body. This disunity among the parts of the body makes other parts weak and finally the whole body in itself. In this regard Paul urges Corinthians to be united in Christ through the help of Spirit of the Lord which they received in baptism (vv. 12-13). He calls them to accompany each other by breaking the barriers in the name of their professions in the ministry of God.

Kristu Jignasa
Being united we shall bear fruit: John 15: 1-8

The metaphor of vine and branches told by Jesus was to bring unity among his disciples so that they may be firm in facing the troubles and temptations of the world which may come after his departure from it. Since he was final teaching to his disciples, he consoled them and strengthened them with teaching and promise of Holy Spirit.

Here Jesus uses vine and branches metaphor to build the cordial relationship between the disciples and him. There is no existence for a branch without the vine. But a branch should remain in vine so to bear fruit. Jesus gives importance to bear fruit. He calls his disciples to abide in him and to bear fruit in him. “I am the real vine” a branch should find its strength through the vine (v.1). The purpose of the branch is to bear fruit. The disciples should believe in the words of Jesus and they should follow his commands. By bearing fruit they will become his disciples.

How to bear fruit in Jesus? Jesus said “Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you” (v. 4). Disciples will bear fruit only if they remain in Jesus, the Guru. Jesus set an example to be united. By revealing his bond with the Father he taught his disciples to abide in him. Because abiding in him means united with the Father too. Having this transcendental unity with Jesus and Father makes disciples to bear fruit. If the branch fails to bear fruit, the Father has right to prune the branch. Disciples have no existence unless united in Jesus and bear fruit. Therefore we have to unite ourselves

Reflection:

Churches in India have several differences in their worship, tradition and culture. But differences should not lead to divisions. As we are called to be united in reaching our mission, we should fight our divisions and we should overcome our differences. Though we believe in baptism and take part in communion, we are failed to fight the enemy which harms the whole body of Christ due to our own vested interests.

Today Churches in India should unite together in order to fight against the injustice and fundamentalism in the nation. When they unite they become true disciples of Jesus and together they can confront unjust structures. Exclusivism breaches our unity on the other hand it makes our lives miserable. Disunity leads to harm our existence and destroys our harmony. Finally it distorts the aim and purpose of the mission of God. Christ called us to remain in him and bear fruit. Therefore the metaphor of vine and branches exhorts us to be united in Christ.

Unity strengthens our relationship and yields more fruit. This unity should be formed through the help of the Spirit of the Lord.

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The girl child is discriminated against boys from the earliest stages of life through their childhood and into adulthood. The birth of a female child is often regarded as a disaster. Socially, boys are preferred, girls are neglected due to dowry demands. In most Indian households, girl child is discriminated and neglected for basic nutrition, education and health care. These are all indicators of high preference for a male child due to the belief that girls are less of an asset and more of a liability. Against this background let us look into the bible passages.

DARING AND BRAVE YOUNG WOMEN – DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD: (Num.27:1-11)

Zelophehad, the father of these young women had died in the wilderness. He had no male progeny. His daughters felt that their father’s name should not be taken away from the clan for no fault of his and for want of male progeny. They were excluded from the list of successors to the property of a deceased father. All five sisters were unmarried and fatherless. They were courageous to even challenge the highest authority of the land, Moses. They had bypassed all the formalities of feminine modesty which the patriarchal society had inflicted on them.

The Daughters of Zelophehad claimed for their well-deserved rights pleading, “Give to us a possession among our father’s brothers.” (Num. 27:4). Moses received the divine guidance from God to resolve this matter. God stated that the sister’s demands were perfectly justified and God gave a new law to the people. The Daughters were now given the inheritance rights. In other words, if a man died without a male progeny, the daughters had the right to inherit the property. Moses executed the law and it became a legal precedent for equal property rights for women in a society dominated by male chauvinism. This new law marked an important milestone for women’s rights in a society where women had no property rights at all. The daughters of Zelophehad raised their voice against unjust laws and fought for their legitimate rights. Faith in God was the source of their courage and determination. This is empowerment.

REMARKABLE PROPHETESSES – DAUGHTERS OF PHILIP: (Acts.21:7-14)

In the history of the early church, it is the first time that female prophets has been mentioned. These four unmarried daughters were the children of the well-known church leader, Philip. The daughters of Philip prophesied. A Prophet is the one who speaks to God, calling people to repentance and warning people of future judgement. So prophets are chosen by God, who open’s their spiritual ears, gives them a message and directs them as to what and to whom to speak. Perhaps these unmarried daughters prophesied on Paul’s troubles and may have instructed him as to what he should do. The daughters of Philip had received the imposition of apostolic hand and were now functioning in the church as inspired proclaimers of word of the God. The prophets in Acts, are clearly all men but the four daughters mentioned are exceptional. In the Acts of the Apostles women were given an opportunity of how they might break that patriarchal and hierarchical structures and attempt to build a life dedicated to God. These young women were so well known that the writer could not avoid mentioning them. The bible makes no distinction between the prophetic ministry of men and women. Prophesying is an activity that can be done by both men and women as they are led by the Holy Spirit. A prophet whether male or female is a God’s servant. In Acts chapter 21 verse 9 “And the same man had four
daughters, virgins, which did prophecy.” The daughters of Philip are examples of true Godly prophets.

JESUS CARE FOR A GIRL CHILD – DAUGHTER OF JAIRUS (Mk.5:35-43)

The ministry of Jesus was mainly among the sick and the oppressed. This is a story of a father’s love for his daughter. Jairus, the synagogue ruler pleads Jesus saying, “My little daughter is dying, please heal her” Jesus assures Jairus by saying, “Do not fear, and only believe.” (Mk.5:36) Jesus goes to his house and heals her. Here we see Jesus giving life to a girl. Jairus wanted his twelve year old daughter to live. Every girl child need such fathers who are willing to accept a female child.

“Saving the Girl Child”, is a social initiative in India to fight against the practice of female infanticide. According to recent statistics in developing countries such as India infanticide of female is common. The reasons for this are social practices like betrothal and marriage related expenditures like dowry that leads to extreme financial hardships.

The fact is that we need to realize that the girl is also a human, she has the right to live. Her life is a God’s gift. Jesus loved children and he cared for them. Girls define the sole existence of human race. They are as important for society’s existence. Still they are discriminated at every stage of upbringing right from their birth for no reason. At every stage of life men and women define each other’s existence. Girls not only need care and love but our society should make them feel safe and secured. The church has a responsibility to affirm the worth of the girl child in every sphere of her life.

Rev. Jacqueline P Kumar
CSI Karnataka Central Diocese
Celebrating the Promises of God

1Sam.2:1-10  Psalm 66
Eve. Ex.15: 19-21/Isa.11:1-9  Gal.4:4-7

Introduction: This particular passage is widely known and accepted as the song of praise and gratitude of Mary the Mother of Jesus, hence labelled as ‘The Magnificat’. The formal parallelism between the two infancy narratives is maintained at this point of their intersection: both women are miraculously pregnant, and each is aware through supernatural revelation of the other’s condition (vv 36, 41-45); Elisabeth’s blessing of Mary and her unborn son (vv 42-45) is balanced by Mary’s praise of God (vv 46-55)

Secondly, it explains the new Exodus typology. The content of god’s saving intervention is expressed negatively as the scatter of the proud and positively as the taking of the part of Israel. The strophe concludes with mercy of God which he promised to the patriarchs.

Echoes of 2 Sam 6: 2-19 are to be found in vv 41, 43,44 and possibly v 56. The magnificat at times marked by specific OT allusions, but more commonly OT motives and language are used in a fresh coinage which evokes more generally the whole thought world of OT faith and declares its eschatological fulfilment, at least in principle, in God’s present activity with Mary. The song belongs to Mary as a response to her miraculous conception. No wonder, then that this hymn was probably transmitted and adapted in a Christian worship setting.

Blessedness of Mary: Elizabeth does not wish or offer blessing, but recognizes blessedness. Mary’s blessedness is that she is carrying the messianic child who is in turn blessed because of his unique identity and role. Elizabeth’s question echoes 2 Sam 6:9 in its expression of reverence in the face of God’s action and presence. However, Elizabeth is blessing May’s faith, which is implicitly contrasting Mart’s glad surrender to the will of God with her own husband’s unbelief.

On the other hand, Mary’s song opens with declaration of her intention to magnify God in song which stands parallel to the affirmation that she has found joy in God who, enabling her in a miraculous way to become pregnant with the child of messianic hopes, has now intervened as saviour. It is not that Mary has some personal and individual affliction; her affliction is simply that of God’s people awaiting his saving intervention on their behalf.

The content of this saving intervention of God is thus pointing towards God’s kingdom wherein the hungry are fed and rich are sent empty. A dramatic example is the story of Brutus and Coriolanus from Rome. Brutus is one of the poor who revolts against wealth, the humble against the eminent, and humble poor attain the new office of tribune to protect them! The poor man Brutus is elevated to the most powerful offices in the state. Coriolanus, the most successful Roman general of his age, opposes the humble Brutus and is banished, reducing to “nothing” because he hated poor.

From this we grasp that the justice of God is established as a paradigm of reversal of the world order. The salvation announced has already been accomplished (1:69, 71), more characteristic of Jewish Christians than of other contemporary sects of Judaism. The hope in the promise of God is thus manifested in the celebration in the life of Mary in particular and in the lives of the humankind at large. In the world of disorder and oppression, the faithful hold on to this promise of God in hope and celebrate life.

Rev. John Sunder Matoori
CSI- Medak Diocese

Kristu Jignasa
Andrew, Apostle and Martyr

Amos 7: 10-15       Psalm 67
Philippians 1: 3-11   John 12: 20-26

Andrew was one of the first disciples of Jesus Christ along with Peter his brother. It is said that his father’s name was Jona and his mother’s name Joanna. Jesus called Andrew to follow him while he was in his family business of catching fish on the Sea of Galilee. He was one of the important disciples of Jesus Christ. He moved very intimately with his master Jesus Christ and was always in favour of him. It is also noted that just as John the Baptist introduced Jesus to the nation of Israel, so Andrew is noted for having introduced Jesus to individuals. The apostle Peter became the fisher of men in mass where Andrew was a fisher of individuals. In his later ministry, it is believed that Andrew went to the foothills of the Caucasus Mountains (present day Georgia in Eastern Europe. While there he preached to the Scythians as far as the Caspian Sea. He also went to Byzantium which is present day Istanbul in Turkey and from there, to Greece. In fact, he travelled to Thrace and Macedonia, down through the Corinthian Gulf to Patros; it was in Patros that Andrew was martyred on the last day November 69 AD.

Now as we turn to the Bible passages read to us for meditation in the book of Amos, Amos was called by God while he was gazing the sheep to proclaim the curse which is about to come upon the people of Israel for their wrong doings. Here Amos was not accepted by people as God’s Prophet but God used him as His instrument in communicating His word. God uses the least and the unprivileged to show His might for His glory.

As we meditate the Psalms, the psalmist praises God for what we are, though we are unworthy, God lifted us high before the gentiles to make known that he is the mighty God.

In Philippians 1:3-11 we see Paul teaches the people of God in Philippi to always be thankful to God in what we are so as to stay blameless and righteous till the day of Christ.

In John 12:20-26 we see the most important act of Andrew could be noted as when Philip requires the help of Andrew who brings the gentiles and introduces them to our Lord. During those days of opposition especially at the time of night is a bold achievement. They come at a time more or less not to be noticed by any of their own peers. These Gentiles most likely were of Phoenicia or Syria, or perhaps inhabitants of Decapolis, near to the lake of Genesareth and Bethsaida; and therefore they addressed themselves to Philip, who was of the latter city, and probably know to them.

Andrew and Philip brought the gentiles to Christ knowing that Christ accepts them as His people. Where self-love prevails, and the honour that comes from God is not sought, this union never exists. Bigotry often ruins every generous sentiment among the different denominations of the people of God. Like Apostle Andrew we should be bold enough to bring change in society, God used a fisher man like Andrew to proclaim His gospel for His glory, so also we should commit our lives to the Lord and be His instruments in bringing God’s Kingdom Amen.

Rev.B.B. Pavn Kumar
Karimnagar Diocese

Kristu Jignasa
Advent reminds us of the need of preparation for receiving the Lord. Second Sunday in advent is observed as Bible Sunday. A few Sundays from today we will be celebrating the birth of Jesus, the word incarnated. The Bible is inseparable to every Christian as he/she prepares himself/herself to receive the Lord. Before we go deep into the meaning of the text given for meditation, let us look at some of the remarkable facts regarding the Bible:

The Bible is referred to as a single book, but it is a collection of 66 books.

The Bible has single author, but is written by many

Most printed but most persecuted

Most loved but most feared

Most comforting but most confronting

Cultures and civilizations transformed…

We may add many such exceptional qualities regarding the Bible. In the Bible, we have many passages about the power of ‘the word of God’. One would notice that it was “the word” which God used to some extent as an ingredient in the act of creation (John 1:3) In Hebrews11:3 we read “Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear”. The word is so powerful that it could create something which was not before. Hence the word can create a universe out of nothing. Now let us look at the Bible portion for our meditation, Hebrews 4:1-12.

The writer of Hebrews insists the backsliding first century Judean Christians, that they should hold fast to the faith in Jesus Christ. He places Jesus above Moses, angels and Aaronic priesthood. Chapter 3:1-4 is about Christ’s supremacy over Moses. Chapter 4 speaks about a rest promised for his people. But to receive this rest one should be obedient to the Lord, this section concludes with one of the beautiful verses regarding “the word of God”.

v12. “Indeed, the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two edged sword, piercing until it divides soul from spirit, joints from marrow, it is able to judge the thoughts and intention of heart”.

1. The Word is ‘Living and Active’

   John 1:14 says “the word became flesh, lived among us and we have seen his glory, the glory, as of a fathers only son, full of grace and truth.” The word lived among humankind in Jesus Christ. The word is living because Jesus is living. The word is living and continue to live as the person behind the Word is living. The life the word possesses is the life of Jesus .

   There are three major words used in the NewTestament for life; Zoe, Bios, and Psuche. Bios is life as duration, measure of life and manner of life. Psuche, on the other hand, is the individual life, or breath of life. But zoe is life of that being, life as ‘father has it’. This is the life the word has. In John 1:3 and 4 we read, “in Him was life and the life was light of all people”. The living and active word is the life and light of the world.

Kristu Jignasa
The Hebrew word used for “word” is dabar. Whenever the word dabar is used as ‘the word of God’, an action is followed. The word is active that it will never return empty. It will fulfill the purpose for which it has been send by the father (Is. 55:10-11). In fact God is watching over his word to perform it (Jer.1:12). Every use of the word guarantees an intervention from God Almighty.

2. The word is ‘Piercing and discerning’

In the Bible we have references of using word and sword together. In Eph. 6:17, the word and sword are related. The word probes the consciousness of humans and would subdue the impulse to sin. In the book of Revelation 1:16; 2:12, Jesus and sword are used together. In Hebrews 4:12 the symbol ‘sword’ refers to the perceiving power of the word that can penetrate deep even into the marrows and transforms an individual. It is said that all books give information but the Bible gives transformation. “Separating bones from marrows” is a strong message that the marrow, placed in the cavities of human bones, representing the deepest and secret areas of human life, is not hidden from the Lord. The word can pierce the strong bones and touch the marrow. The marrow is the place where the blood cells are formed. It is an astonishing fact that the word of God can alter any character trait which a person inherits hereditarily through his/her blood. The word is capable of transforming any person belonging to any background. The piercing power of the word is transforming power of the word.

Conclusion

The word of God is a gift from God. Let us thank God for the people who sacrificed their lives for the translation and the spread of the word around the world. Let us continues to read, meditate, teach and live the word. It is living, active and piercing and there by transforming. May the word of God transform us thoroughly and prepare us to receive the Lord.

Rev. George E. Mathew
CSI Kollam-Kottarakkara Diocese
**Promise of Immanuel**

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<tr>
<td>Isa.7:10-17</td>
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<td>1 Pet.3:8-16</td>
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The sweetest word in this world is one’s own name. Have you ever thought about your name and its meaning? Does it suit to your life and character? Most of the time it is not, right? When it comes to Jesus his name goes with very much to his character and mission on earth. Let’s us meditate on how the name Immanuel becomes a promising one in our life situations.

**A promise that fulfilled**
The name Immanuel gives hope and encouragement. In Jesus we see the fulfillment of this hope and encouragement. While describing the meeting with the angel and Joseph, Matthew says “All this took place to fulfill what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet” (Mt 1:22). All this incidents took place are strange and mysterious to human understanding. Virgin birth and Messiah in a manger are strange things to the human logic. Even Joseph was confused. But God uses these confusions and doubts to work out his promised project- Immanuel. God acts in a very strange way in our lives whatever may be the situation. God will keep his word. Let Immanuel enable us to go forward in our endeavors with the strong hope that “I am not alone”.

**A promise that has to be experienced**
Through this promise God encourages and motivates his people to live in peace and freedom. In several occasions in the Bible, God has strengthened his children to go ahead of their struggles. Abraham, Moses, Joshua are some of the examples who were motivated by God’s statement ‘I am with you’. God wants to make it clearer that he will be with his children. To do so “Lord himself will give you a sign: a young woman who is pregnant will have a son and will name him ‘Immanuel. “ (Isaiah 7:17) When it comes to Jesus he assured that “For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them” (Matthew 18:20). “I am with you always, to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:20) God’s presence has to be experienced by gathering in his name- in fellowship. Common worship at church is so important to experience God’s presence. This will enable one to experience Immanuel in the life challenges.

**A promise that has to be celebrated**
Immanuel- God with us affirms that Jesus is God. At the same time that God is willing to be present with the humanity at times of joys and sorrow; of struggles and victor. Jesus was with the cries of widow, with the distress of sinful women, with the love of kids, with the hungry multitude, with the joy of a wedding and so on. There is no part of life that his kindness does not touch. This is to be celebrated. Isn’t it? Psalmist says (Psalm 98: 3&4)

v.3 He has remembered his steadfast love and faithfulness to the house of Israel.
All the ends of the earth have seen the victory of our God.
V 4.Make a joyful noise to the LORD, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises.

Immanuel is the fulfillment of God’s promise. But our celebrations should not stop merely with the Christmas greetings, carols and cakes. Immanuel urges us to be with the people and their struggles.

May God bless all of us to be with the struggles of the people and continue to give hop.

*Rev.Stephen Joseph*
*CSI South Kerala Diocese*

Kristu Jignasa
When eyes are filled with tears, hearts with anguish, soul with dithering pain and when the personhood is broken down- the assurance that the one who would wipe any tear, sooth any anguish, comfort any pain and restore any brokenness is coming by restores lot of hope for the people who live in the shadow of death. Micah prophesied in a context of historical turbulence for both Israel and Judah and the neighbouring nations (750-687 BC). Invasions, war, rebellions, power struggles and injustice had affected the very fabric of the moral ethical living of the people. People tended to drift away from a passionate covenantal relationship to God and this coupled with the invaders pushing for their religious code had defocussed the centrality of the House of the Lord. The prophets of the time while warning the people of impending judgement lest they repent and mend ways also affirmed God’s love and justice and assured hope in restoration. Though Micah 4 and Isaiah 2 has striking similarities and scholars have dwelt deep on the textual intricacies therein the text is clearly a call to prepare for the coming of the Lord. This call suggested that injustice cannot prevail for long, hopelessness would soon give way to hope and a change in the circumstances of the world would come. Those in the peripheries and the margins will have a new dawn and good will have a place and space.

It could be beyond mere coincidence that Syria, Palestine, Israel, Egypt- the epicenter of the activity to which the prophet responds -also seem to be the focal points today for any debate on hope, justice and peace.

1. Worship to be central in the preparation for the coming of the Lord.

Promise of restoration of the pre-eminence of Worship is the first step towards any change hoped or wished for. It is when people tend to forget God that they begin to live outside the frameworks of God’s covenantal expectations. The pre-eminence of the house of the Lord has been affected for several reasons, both internal and external. The house of the Lord which once stood highest had fallen in glory. In the changed circumstances people might have tended not to visit the temple much. It is herein the message of hope of Micah becomes relevant. He affirms that once people turn from their ways then in the days to come when God will intervene again the mountain of the Lord’s house will be re-established as the highest of the hills. People would again stream to it. Nations will come and learn the ways and paths of the Divine. They will heed the instruction that goes from Zion.

Though much water has flown under the bridges for centuries the socio political situation today has alarming similarities. The preparation for the coming of the Lord therefore must look into three major elements in relation to worship life of the peoples.

(i) Continued reformation of the Houses of the Lord. While the church is doing a tremendous ministry in nurturing the people of God and while affirming all the positives within the church we should also be prophetic in acknowledging that there are facets that are not in tune with a covenantal relationship with the God of life that has an influence in the life of the church today. Fingers are being pointed at moral, ethical and social flaws and one should have the humility to acknowledge, repent and mend ways.

(ii) Passionate interest for the people in worship. In several nations across the world the pews are becoming empty and churches are being sold. People seem lesser and lesser interested in the matters of the Divine. They become so self-focused and now-centric. The material blessings have distracted several generations from the ways of God and in some instances they manufacture a
way of spirituality that suits their whims and fancies. Once the Lord is to be restored to the place
due to God in the lives of the people they would then stream to the house of the Lord
(iii) Space for the instruction of the Lord. The ways of the Lord and the paths of the Lord need to be
learned with humility and faith. However when generations seem disinterested in the same for
whatsoever reasons the result could be a strange distancing between human ways and the
expectations of God. When the spaces lose credibility and the instructions that comes forth
becomes tainted with vested interests it is but natural that people lose faith.
The call for the preparation of the Lord is therefore a call to recognize the faults and to change the
direction- from a journey away from God to a journey towards God and towards the direction
God points to. For sacred spaces to have spaces in the hearts of the people those spaces must
regain its moral high ground.

2. **Peace to be the goal in the preparation for the coming of the Lord:**

The prophet envisages the coming one judging between many peoples, arbitrating between strong
nations far away. Weapons of destruction being transformed into weapons of sustenance and
creativity and nations ceasing lifting up weapons against each other and stopping learning war.

The key elements that need to be discussed today are

(i) A proper interaction between the “many peoples” of the world is an important aspect. Peace
becomes impossible when the other peoples around are not acknowledged, when the differences
are not celebrated and when the freedom of the other to be the other is not affirmed. Faith and
Religion is all about Peace but when they are politicized for different intentions of selfish natures
they could be potently very dangerous combinations. Politicization of religion and religionisation
of politics happens with the core idea of “othering the other”. The vision of peace in the
preparation of the coming one therefore affirms the “manyness” of the peoples.

(ii) The role of strong nations far away in the affairs of small nations is another crucial aspect to be
noted. Many a war in the small terrains are planned in war rooms’ miles away. It is a fact that it
is the interest of the strong nations far away that determines the geo-politics of the smaller
nations. Even guerrilla war fares in small forests cannot be acted out without clear support from
big players including training in war tactics and provisions of weaponry and technical support.
Preparation for peace therefore is the courage to take on big nations and tell it to their face that it
is you who are the real “war makers”

(iii) The place of weapons of mass destruction. A very crucial question that bothers everyone is this,
how is it that such weapons are available for the people to destroy? Shooting in schools and
public places, bombing in civilian areas, killing people in the land, skies and in the seas. Killing
continues. The makers of weapons it is said also decide the war policies of nations. Herein the
vision of Micah becomes very significant. They will beat swords into ploughshares and spears
into pruning hooks.

(iv) A culture that educates against war. Another key element that the world needs today is education
and awareness building against war. When the prophet says, neither shall they learn war any
more he also implies that war is in fact taught to people. It is our systems of education and
upbringing that creates in the minds of people a culture of war and therefore the preparation for
change ought to be a radical remodeling of the very educational system of the world, a system
that would have peace and peaceful co-existence as core value.

3. **Justice to be the core in the preparation for the coming of the Lord.**

The prophet envisages that when the coming Lord takes dominion and authority people would sit
under their own vines and under their own fig trees and no one shall make them afraid. When we
read the text today

(i) In a context of displacement people are not able to sit under their own vines today. Several
people are being internally displaced be it in the name of war or in the sophisticated name of

Kristu Jignasa
development. Migration patterns affect the flora and fauna that are so central to the psyche of the people and people in the lands of the fig trees are forced to live in spaces where there are no fig trees at all. Human trafficking, gender violence and systemic intolerance continue to drive people away from their figs.

(ii) The vision of the prophet also calls for a radical moving back of the people who had to move away to the spaces that truly belongs to them, spaces where their ancestors rest. This would demand justice being made the core of human interactions, where people are safe secure returning to their own vines and fig trees, and are made to feel welcome and accepted.

(iii) The vision also envisages that no one would make them afraid. In a context where everyone is afraid of the other, where people live in constant fear, where religion is attributed to fear and terror, where border securities operate under the premise of fear the prophetic vision of living without fear demands structural transformation. From fear of domestic violence to fear of another World War people have had enough. People in the margins and the peripheries to be able to live without fear would mean structures of injustice are broken down.

(iv) All the people to walk each in the name of its god and yet the people of the prophetic call to walk in the name of the Lord our God forever and ever is possible only when each acknowledges the other, when plurality is affirmed while acknowledging the uniqueness.

Even as the world prepares for the coming of the Lord yet again the prophetic vision of Micah stays ever relevant and fresh and perhaps more relevant today than in the days in which the prophet prophesied. But it also demands a response from each of one. Acknowledgement of wrong doing, Repentance, Trust in the restoring grace of God.

Rev. Vinod Victor
CSI Melbourne
The message of Christmas, though is one of love, humility and peace, the event of Christmas is filled with rejection, dejection, pride, envy, arrogance and violence. The context today, is not different from this, where our world celebrates another Christmas in a time when terrorism, fascism, casteism, racism and violence against women and children are on a huge rise. Though our world and nation have tremendously advanced in terms of technology and communication, we seem to be failing miserably in terms of ethics, morality and human rights. Ecology too is immensely subjected to exploitation and violence. It is in this context that we meditate on the ‘Prince of Peace’, who came to live among us filled with grace and truth. Yes! He came to embrace us with ‘Grace upon Grace’.

But, what does it mean to say, ‘Grace upon Grace’, in a context of ‘cries after cries’? Who is Christ in the midst of crises? What is ‘Peace’, when we live in ‘Piece’?

1. GRACE IMPLIES GOD CHOSE US (Deut. 6:1-9)

   This passage speaks about God’s command to the Israelites that they should love their Lord God with all their heart and with all their soul and with all their strength. The word for love used here refers not to an emotion, but action. Scholars say that this word ‘Love’ should be understood in relation to the then political treaties, where to ‘love’ one’s sovereign meant ‘loyalty’; to be obedient and faithful. But often such loyaalties happened not out of love but fear. Therefore, when God gives His command to His people, He asks them not to fear Him, rather love Him, the reason being, “It was not because you were more numerous than any other people that the Lord set His heart on you and chose you - for you were the fewest of all peoples. It was because the Lord loved you…” (Deut.7:7-8).

   In other words, it is not by their merits, that they were chosen as God’s people, but because of His grace alone. Christmas reminds us of this relation between God’s Grace and our status as a chosen race. As it is said in Titus 3: 5-7, “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy…so that, having been justified by His grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.” In fact, it is because of the same Grace that He came down from heaven to love us and to be loved by us, called to be His heirs. On this Christmas day, let us rejoice, for we are His chosen heirs, through His grace.

2. GRACE IMPLIES GOD ANSWERS US (Psalm 20)

   The whole focus of this Psalm, attributed to David, is the quality of God who answers our prayers. The Psalm speaks about the Lord who answers in distress, by protecting, helping, supporting, remembering, accepting and granting. It affirms the presence of a Lord who gives the desires of our hearts and helps us to succeed in our plans. However, the climax of this Psalm is vv. 7 -9, which say, “Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God…Answer us when we call!” It speaks about God’s Grace in answering us, when all our sanctuaries, refuge and weapons fail us. Ultimately it is not our chariots or horses that answers us, but God alone, by and through His grace.

   The story of Christmas reminds us of a nation which was subjugated by the Roman Empire, and also of their prayer for the coming of a Messiah to liberate them. There have been a number of attempts by the various Jewish sects to gain freedom from the Romans, using their own ways of weapons and arms, wars and fights, plans and plots. But all these failed repeatedly as the Roman government suppressed those using military. But God answers a people in distress, by sending the ‘Messiah’, meaning the ‘anointed one’. God’s answer to their prayer for a ‘Messiah’ to help them
comes as the ‘Emmanuel’ (God with us) and ‘Jesus’ (God saves). Christmas therefore, reminds us for God’s grace that works as answers in our times of pain, distress, anxieties and tensions.

3. GRACE IMPLIES GOD SAVES US (Matt.2:13-23)

Grace not only refers to a God who chooses us and answers us, but also a God who saves us. Matt. 2:13-23, portrays a God who saves Joseph, Mary and Jesus, amidst the ‘voices heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning; Rachel weeping for her children, and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more.’ Though this incident need not have happened during the birth of Jesus, rather may be within two years after His birth, this incident, which is included in the ‘Infancy Narratives’ in the Matthean Gospel, has reference to what grace is. On King Herod’s order, all the Jewish male children below the age of two were massacred by the Roman soldiers, but God miraculously saves Baby Jesus and His family to escape to Egypt. This incident seems to have lots of parallels on how Baby Moses was saved, following the order of Pharaoh, “Then Pharaoh gave this order to all his people: “Every Hebrew boy that is born you must throw into the Nile, but let every girl live.” (Ex. 1: 22).

In a crisis situation, God interferes and saves Moses and Jesus, and this definitely is God’s grace. But, if this grace is understood as very exclusive and not in a broader sense, we could fall into the danger of personalizing grace. Here, grace is not just that act of God saving them. Rather, it also includes a call, i.e., God saved them to continue the mission to liberate and save many. The Christmas event mentions Mary, mother of Jesus as a woman of grace. Her grace was that she was called to participate in the salvific mission of God. Therefore, Christmas reminds us not only about the grace of God that saves us, but also about the grace of God that saves us to continue His mission of enhancing that grace to many around us. And it is then, that Christmas becomes a mission mandate for the Church to engage in God’s mission of spreading the good news of grace and peace.

CONCLUSION

God’s grace has come in search of us, and we are filled by grace upon grace, that chose us, answered us and saved as despite our falls and failures. As it is said in today’s, Epistle reading, “But because of His great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions—it is by grace you have been saved.” (Eph. 2:4). As Paul says in v. 9, we are God’s handiworks, not only because He has created us, but also re-created us “in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” Therefore, Christmas is not only a time to celebrate, but also a time to recommit ourselves to continue God’s mission of welcoming, loving and living in solidarity with the poor and needy. As Pope Francis says, “Christians cannot force anyone to believe, but at the same time, no one can force Christians to stop being welcoming, loving and living in solidarity with others”

Christmas calls us to become an alternative community, a community that trusts not in chariots and horses, but who believes in Christ, who for His love to the world, was born as one among us, laid in the manger, lived among us, filled with grace and truth, loved the last, least and lost, was crucified and rose again from the dead, to come again in glory. Only then we could practice what we preach, the message of love, humility and peace in a context of violence, corruption and discrimination in the name of age, gender, caste and race. On this Christmas day, shall we make our hearts, mangers for Him to be born and laid, in order to experience and express ‘Grace upon Grace’? Then and only then, our families, churches and communities could live the meaning of Christmas in its fuller sense. May I once again wish you all a Grace-filled Christmas and Spirit-Filled New Year.

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Kristu Jignasa
Come the Lord is Good

Nah. 1:1-5                  Psalm 34:1-10
1 Pet.2:1-10                John 7:37-39

“… surely you have tasted that the Lord is good. So come to him …” (1Pe.2:3,4)

That was St. Peter calling Christian communities, located in the five provinces of Asia Minor, to remain faithful to their standards of belief and conduct in spite of the threats of persecution they faced. To be loyal to Christ and live by Christian virtues has become a challenge in the face of injustice, lawlessness, materialism, hypocrisy and permissiveness. Peter reminds the people of God who have tasted God’s goodness that they cannot easily give up living in communion with Christ whatever be the circumstances. The Lord has been good to them all through their journey of faith with Him. Tasting the goodness is not by receiving whatever we desired for, but by knowing His love, mercy and grace. He is good not just because He supplies all our needs but He is gracious even when we are found wanting and not living upto His expectations. In His gentle rebuke Jesus said, “Where is your faith? Why did you doubt” and repeatedly encouraging, “Do not be afraid! Take heart! Your sins are forgiven!”

The Lord is good, dependable

The Lord is the living stone (1Peter 2:4), able to hold the spiritual temple built up by the people chosen by Him. He is the corner-stone (1Peter 2:6) the unshakable foundation of the faith community – “a people claimed by God for his own” (1Peter 2:9). In the midst of overwhelming storms and floods, faith in the Solid Rock our Lord has enabled us to stand undeterred. Human tendency is to depend on human strength and ability without realizing that they would not last long. Human relationship, material assets, intellectual ability, powerful positions all fail. The Creator God alone is dependable. He will come to our rescue when all else fail.

The Lord is good, transforming

Our Lord declared, “If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me … streams of living water shall flow from within him”(John 7:37,38). When Christ comes into our life the longing of the dry and thirsty soul gets filled with an overflowing experience. The attitude of grumbling, complaining and blaming, changes into a nature of rejoicing, appreciating and praising. The one who lived with greed and selfishness becomes a person of selfless service and generosity when Christ becomes the dominant force within.

The Lord is good, covenant keeping

In his prayer Nehemiah addresses, “LORD God of heaven, great and terrible God faithfully keeping covenant with those who love him and observe his commandments…” (Neh.1:5). He is great and awesome God who preserves His covenant of mercy. Nehemiah said this prayer when he heard about the plight of the remnants of Israel who survived the captivity and still lived in the province of Jerusalem. They were facing dire trouble and derision, the walls of Jerusalem were broken down and its gates had been destroyed by fire (Neh. 1:3). They would have wondered what happened to the promises of God.

To call Him a covenant keeping God, when the situation seems that God has left them to their plight, is an evidence of Nehemiah’s personal knowledge of God’s goodness. It is implied here that people often break the covenant relationship with God, while remains unchanging. The suffering we faced, the humiliations we underwent, the losses we incurred make us sad, distressed and depressed. But God would prove Himself as the covenant keeping one even as we go through distressing situations.

Kristu Jignasa
The Lord is good, long-suffering

Nahum portrays God as a Mighty One with authority over the nature and who would punish the guilty. But His goodness is in His long-suffering, slow to anger (Hab. 1:3). Fredrick William Faber elucidates this in his Hymn:

“No earthly father loves like thee;
No mother, e’er so mild,
Bears and forbears as thou hast done
With me, thy sinful child.”  *(Hymn: My God how wonderful thou art)*

Everyone is able to approach the Holy and Mighty God, unworthy as they are for God overlooks our sins and failures. His grace abounds in the life of the sinful people. Where else could we seek for succour?

At the end of an year we recall God’s goodness we have discovered in and through the struggles of life. Every situation added new insight in our personal knowledge of God. Yet when we step into unknown future, the New Year we need to come to our Lord again, beseeching Him to accompany us in our journey of faith. May God go before us to show us the way. May we also follow Him without hesitation but with obedience to His guidance.

Father we do not know our way into the future;
but we do know that you have set the plan and purpose of our life.
Help us not to forget that we are in your care and you will continue to be our God dependable, transforming, covenant keeping and transforming.
May we trust you and remain in your presence always through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

**Rev. D. Justus Moni**

**CSI Medak Diocese**