CHURCH OF SOUTH INDIA

KRISTU JIJÑĀSĀ

Vol.III

THEMATIC SERMONS

Based on the First Cycle of
Common Lectionary of
CSI, CNI and MTC

Editor
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The views expressed in the book are those of the authors and the publisher takes no responsibility for any of the statements.
“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 Jijñāsā 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 Jijñāsā, 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
Moderator, Church of South India
Foreword

From time immemorial, humans have been searching for the ultimate truth, the God of the Universe. This curiosity to see God or know about God is innate in every human. God of the Bible has revealed himself in many ways so that people would acknowledge him alone as God and worship in Spirit and truth. Scriptures reflect the mind of God and his purposes for human kind. The more we read, the more we understand God. The Sermons preached every Sunday, based on the CCI Almanac have the potential to reveal God in new ways. As we people of God come to the Churches with great desire to be touched by the word of God, let the Kristu Jijnasa (Thematic Sermon Outlines) become a useful tool towards that cause.

I express my deep appreciation for the fervent work placed together by the Presbyters of Church of South India, representing four South Indian languages. Their rich experiences of ministering to the people of diverse walks of life namely farmers, farm labourers, unorganised sector labourers, employees, people in governance, bureaucrats, politicians, and many more, is reflected in their writings.

I place my appreciation to the Department of Pastoral Concerns, its director Rev. K. James Cecil Victor, for keeping his patience in relentless persuasion for collecting the sermons from about 70 number of authors and compiling them into a beautiful book form titled “Kristu Jijnasa”.

I thank the officers of the Synod, particularly the General Secretary Rev. Dr. D.R. Sadananda under whose able leadership a quality resource book for pastoral ministry is prepared.

It is my prayer that all these sermon outlines for the liturgical cycles A (first cycle) will strengthen the preaching ministry of the Church of South India.

Rt. Rev. Dr. Vadapalli Prasada Rao
Deputy Moderator, CSI
Preace

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
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. Hence, understanding God and God’s purposes is pivotal for understanding Human relationships and relationship with the nature around.

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 Jijñāsā (read ad Jignasa) is believed to quip the pulpits to become effective servants of the Lord. The inquisition to know Christ should be increased in all through the meditation and reflections on the word of God.

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

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

Rev. K. James Cecil Victor
Director, Pastoral Concerns
New Year (Covenant Day)

God's Continuing Covenant with All
(Feast of Circumcision)

Collect: Loving God, who has established an eternal covenant with Your whole creation, we pray that You cleanse our consciousness from acts that lead to death, with the blood of Christ, the cup of the new covenant, So that, as children of Spirit, we may continue to live in covenantal relationship with You, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

After 20 years of unchanged existence, one fine morning a plant in my garden shot out a stalk. It bloomed and brought forth saplings. As the mother plant dried, a feeling of sadness shook me before I could look around to see a hundred new saplings bloom to life. Sadness transitioned into celebration. As we enter into a new year, the old wears out as it makes the future bloom. There is in this creative presence of God a strange but inevitable way of putting a comma, in life, as life continues in full bloom, not only for humans but for all creation.

Covenant reveals God’s compassion

Genesis 9 talks about this continuance through a covenant. ‘11. I establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all flesh be cut off by the waters of a flood, and never again shall there be a flood to destroy the earth.’ Humans were wrong, they had to be destroyed, and so also was every other part of creation that sustained human life. But God repents for the great pain induced into human life. God’s compassion is beyond human comprehension. Through every covenant God revealed to the creation that God is compassionate.

God can even find fault with God’s own self to find an excuse for a human to be forgiven. God’s compassion is sacred and the divine love is steadfast. Therefore in this New Year God reaches out to us, however and whoever we might be and tries to bring us back to the warmth and goodness of God’s love.

In Covenant, God steps down

A covenant is between two equals: one who can give and one who has the capacity to pay and receive. But in the love of God, God gives and then God brings Godself down to become equal or even below humans to become acceptable to a sinning human who is liable for punishment. This extraordinary covenantal relationship is based on the consideration of God’s grace. God says never again will I do this.

As the old year fades and has left us in a lot of questioning realities of demonetization, loss of leaders, cyclone and other very challenging situations, God makes this new beginning a sign of hope, a promise of continued sustenance and guidance in Christ who decided to step down and bow low for the sake of giving humans and all creation a true sense of hope.

Through Covenant, God transforms

In verse 13 read that God sets God’s bow in the clouds, a symbol of shedding God’s power to bring joy and hope – the powerful weapon of war of its times is changed into a symbol of wholesome diversity, peace and God’s presence - bow to rainbow - today a sign of God’s life in all, including the LGBT communities as well. The unchangeable God “changes” to bring hope for those entangled in threatening situations. When the waters of the flood could wipe
away human life, God transitions this water to be a transforming medium, for light to become colourful, life to become joyous. God’s power is placed on the clouds to seal them from causing further destruction. A single ray of white light is diversified into seven colours, a sign that God looks beyond purity in white to acknowledging that humans are of a varied nature and still acceptable by God as they are the bow in the hand of God, a diversified humanity. God accepts us as we are and then transforms us into a beautiful ray of hope, colourful and meaningful in existence. God makes our challenges into a blessing and God makes God’s case against us into situations of grace.

**Through Covenant, God manifests God’s faithfulness**

In Psalm 145 the entire Hebrew alphabet except for nun is lined up in praise of God, however the second part of verse 13 is the pivotal point for transition. This is the first Psalm of the last psalter in the book of Psalm, sounding the beginning of the Doxology, but to begin a year with that powerful praise is the mighty grace of God. ‘Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations. The LORD is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds. It changes from a powerful and mighty God, to the powerful love of God. It changes from a God above to a God who is always at work to bring fullness into human life, God watches, cares, guides and God is always there by our side. The Psalmist therefore feels that it is not just the human but all in creation that would praise God. ‘My mouth will speak the praise of the LORD, and all flesh will bless his holy name forever and ever.’ God’s concern is for all and God cares for all for God is faithful.

**Through Covenant, God liberates**

Galatians 4 brings forth one of the most challenging allegories – Hagar and Sarah.

It talks about being subject to the law – enslaved as present Jerusalem in flesh - Hagar as against the Jerusalem above in the Spirit of God in the liberation that flows out of God’s Promise. So wherever we have the word slavery it is present Jerusalem and wherever we have the word free or in the spirit it is Jerusalem from above.

We struggle with this passage trying to discuss two religions, which is absolutely not fair, neither is Hagar problematic nor Sarah more blessed, but the struggle in the flesh has to be overcome for freedom in the Spirit. It is an inner struggle of each individual and also an inner struggle of every faith community. God promises liberation. If we are enslaved in our present situations, God makes them spaces of liberation.

**Covenant reveals that God sustains**

In Luke 22 Jesus pours Himself, His blood and body to associate with human life. It is indeed a wonderful beginning when we realise that the one who sustains us is not an external force, but an integral part of life, as we receive a God who not only, steps down, not only transforms, cares, liberates and sustains, but becomes a part of our being making us aware of divine presence and guidance on earth.

As God nourishes us let us become, God’s covenantal presence on earth, taking the warmth of God into the whole creation, and helping them move forward with the same confidence and peace that God has installed in us.

*Rev. Dr. Kruba Lilly Elizabeth*

*CSI Madras Diocese*
Epiphany
Manifestation of Christ

Isaiah 45: 18- 25                           Psalm 67
Revelation 21: 22-27                  Mathew 2: 1-12

Collect: God of all, Who by the manifestation of Your inclusive love, through Your Son Jesus Christ, has made all of us one, We pray that You gather us to the radiance of Your incarnate Word which illumines our lives, So that we may be baptized into Him and walk as one in His light, as continuing manifestations of Your glory and love, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

When we say Epiphany, all the lectionaries place this account of Herod, the magi, and the new-born Jesus in Epiphany. They thereby invite us to consider the most familiar passage from the Gospel according to Matthew 2:1-12 from this perspective and to preach accordingly. This direction indeed seems more useful. The word “Epiphany” emphasizes “showing” or “making known” or “revealing” divine purposes. And also means “the manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles as represented by the Magi” (Matthew 2:1-12), It encapsulates, in part, that deep-seated longing for encounter with a gracious and life-giving God, and in part, embraces that invitation for all people to know and make known God’s life-giving purposes; this perspective of Epiphany puts worship and mission on the forefront.

1. Epiphany is an act of Removal of Spiritual Barriers: Isaiah 45: 18-25

Isaiah 40-55 is common with polemic against those who, refuse to recognize the reality of the one God, and created their own gods. Idol makers are portrayed in Isa 45 as both destined for disgrace (vs. 16) and ignorant (vs. 20). They refuse to see that there is no ability to save or even predict the future on the part of either these lifeless images or the gods and goddesses they are meant to represent. The existence of deities other than Yahweh is an illusion, a futile choice. The Glimpses of the nature of the only God are given in Isa 45:14-23. The reality and power of the God of Israel is demonstrated in two primary areas. First, Yahweh has purposefully created the heavens and the earth to be inhabited (vs.18). The act of creation implies ability, lordship, and uniqueness. Second, the God of Israel predicts the future and makes it come about. After summoning the remnants of the nations together in v. 20, God demands that they declare what is to take place (v. 21). Salvation is a clear desire of the one God. Yahweh’s role as savior expands throughout this passage. In vs. 15 the epitaph is “O God of Israel, the Savior.” Those shamed for their trust in idols are contrasted in vs. 17 to Israel who will be saved by Yahweh. In vs. 21 the description of “a righteous God and a Savior” is with no reference made to Israel. The extent of God’s salvific activity is radically extended in vs. 22 with its invitation to “all the ends of the earth” to “turn to me and be saved.” This universal offer of salvation is logically linked to the existence of only one God. If salvation is to be had by any human, according to Isa 45:14-23, it must be found in submission to Yahweh, whose intention is to save humans and restore all of creation.

The offer in Isa 45:22 is not for universal salvation in the sense that all people are saved automatically by the one God. There is still a notion of human freedom that requires a turning to God on the part of those seeking salvation. The choice has been narrowed, but a choice
still exists. No longer is access to God limited by birth, ethnicity, participation in the history of God’s dealings with one people, or other obstacles. The offer is to all who will turn to the universal Savior. The opportunity to refuse submission to the one true God evaporates in Isa 45:23. God has declared, on the authority of the divine character itself, that every knee shall bow before and every tongue confess to God alone. The sovereignty of God will not be overthrown by human choice.

1.1. The New Testament Connection: The call of the Sovereign God to all Nations and People
Particular significance to Christian communities is the very prediction that all will submit to God, which the New Testament takes from Isa 45:14-23. Particularly the verse 23 is cited in Rom 14:11 and Phil 2:11. In Rom 14:11, the declaration that all will bow before God and confess God’s name is used as a caution against Christians judging other Christians. It is the judgment of the God who intends to save that counts. More interesting thing is the connection of Isa 45:23 is coupled with Phil 2:5-11. The connection of Phil 2:5-11 with our passage has two-fold homiletic possibilities. Firstly, Isa 45:23 is quoted in Phil 2:11. Paul writes that every knee will bow to Jesus Christ and every tongue will confess him. Secondly, the more general connection is the apostle’s conviction that the call of the sovereign God to all nations and peoples mentioned in Isa 5:22 is made pre-eminently through the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

1.2. Epiphany Indicates the Vision of Spiritual Triumph
The opening words of address in vss. 20-21 have set out to establish a case that Yahweh, the God of the relatively small people of Israel, must be seen as the one and only true God. This drawing together of the lines of prophetic argument provides the build-up to the visionary portrayal of the ultimate goal of all faith and all religion: With the most solemn oath formula (“By myself have I sworn,” vs.23) God affirms, “To me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall swear.” This is what the ordered world and the human beings who live upon it were created for: that they should acknowledge God to be God. In so doing it would be an act of fulfillment, and in the very deepest sense, the final act of creation itself. What God began long ago when the physical world came into existence and when the mysterious phenomenon of life appeared upon it, was only an initial step of the divine creative work. God is unlimited and inexhaustible power. By power he created the world; by power he upholds it, and by the strength of his power alone he will bring it to its intended goal.

2. Epiphany is a sign of God’s saving presence in Jesus: Matthew 2:1-12
Matthew’s narration discloses the epiphany of “God with us,” of God’s saving presence in Jesus (1:21-23), precisely in the midst of these imperial power structures. However, Matthew’s scene presents this epiphany not as happily associated with, but as threatening to, those structures. Vs. 1, for example, declares the threatening location of Jesus’ birth in Bethlehem. The threat lies in evoking David’s anointing as king (1 Samuel 16) and Psalms proclaiming the Davidic king as on his good days- the representative of God’s just purposes among the poor and needy (Ps 72:2-4). Vs. 2 presents a further threat as the not-wise “wise men” inquire about the one born “king of the Jews,” a title used of Herod. Surprisingly, Herod is “frightened,” and when the king is frightened, everyone was afraid, it expresses the truth that human has been brought from far and by many ways to worship Christ. It also breathes the sense of wonder and thanksgiving that through the birth of this child, and his subsequent life, death, and resurrection, the world has been redeemed.
2.1. Bethlehem indicates the Sovereignty of Christ
It means “house of bread” that is to say, the village in the grain fields; and the meaning is driven deeper by Christ, who is the bread of life. To Matthew the name Bethlehem signified the sovereignty of Christ; for Bethlehem rich in tradition, was the wellspring of a royal stream. For us Bethlehem means lowliness, smallness: “O little town of Bethlehem” (Mic. 5:2). So it was a fit birthplace for a meek king. For he was thus, identified with all the seeming pettiness of our common days. He has made it both a “well of Bethlehem” and a “house of bread.”

2.2. Epiphany Initiates the Universal Scope of the Gospel
For Matthew’s Gospel, God’s liberating love, revealed to Israel and embodied in the person and ministry of Jesus, ultimately breaks beyond the boundaries of Israel and is offered to all the Nations. The turning point for this will be the death and resurrection of Jesus, but already during Jesus’ ministry there are signs of what is to come. Those Jews who stand on the margins of the community- Matthew the tax collector (9:9-13), the lepers (8:1-4), and the disabled and sick (15:29-31) are drawn by Jesus into its center. Moreover, the few gentiles, Jesus encounters in his ministry already experience the full scope of God’s salvation: the insistent faith of the Canaanite woman who demands that Jesus heal her daughter insures that his mission will no longer be confined to the “lost sheep of the house of Israel” (15:24). It comes as no real surprise that in the concluding scene of Matthew’s story the community is commanded to proclaim the Gospel to all Nations (28:16-20).

2.3. Epiphany is fulfilment of God’s promise
For Matthew, the story of Jesus is at once the story of the fulfilment of God’s promises to Israel through Abraham, David and the prophets and the fulfilment of the longing of all human hope for salvation. This story shows that, although Jesus comes as the Jewish Messiah, the advent of the Christ is the fulfilment of Gentile hopes as well. Even those who do not have the bible and the tradition to know what they are looking for is still in quest for authentic life and human community, Jewish hope before one can come to the messiah and accept him as Lord. In following the light they have, the magi find the goal of their quest in bowing before the Jewish messiah. The task of the church is often to discern the ultimate quest that is expressed in non-biblical and non-theistic ways in contemporary life, and continue Matthew’s witness that the yearnings even of those who do not know fully what they seek are met in the act of God at Bethlehem. The hopes and fears of all the years, true to the Jewish heritage of Jesus and of Matthew's own community, the evangelist emphasizes that the gospel calls for transformed lives and responsible action. In God’s eyes, status or race or even religious identity means little compared to compassion and justice on behalf of those in need. Here is a remarkable gospel principle that allows Christians to build bridges of understanding with people of good will everywhere.

3. The city of God and the Lamb (Revelation 21:22-27): Be brought to New Jerusalem
The center of gravity in this passage is 21:22-27, which answers the urgent question, giving them a reason to endure in faith. No longer will those names are written in the book of life hide in the darkness, for now they will live in the light. Whereas the Nations once trampled their holy city (11:2) and worshiped the beast (13:4), they will now walk in the light of the New Jerusalem (21:24). The kings of the earth, who were once associates of the evil Babylon in persecuting the faithful, now bring their gifts to the heavenly city, fulfilling the prophetic
hope that the Nations will bring gifts to Zion (Isa 60:6-7). Those whose names are written in
the book of life, who were once the oppressed minority, now join the kings of the earth in a
universal celebration. The current situation will not last forever, for the whole world will
acknowledge what the faithful minority has recognized already: that the beast does not have
the last word. Despite the appearances, the people of God participate in a story that ends with
the triumph of God in the New Jerusalem.

It must be emphasized, however, that the erasure of the barriers between the holy and the
mundane does not mean that John’s city has no entrance requirements. Though the gates are
always open (21:25), nevertheless some remain outside the city (21:27; 22:15). In fact, the
unrighteous are threatened with banishment to a burning lake of fire and sulfur that
represents.

In short, John replaces ethnic or ritual distinctions with ethical demands, a move made most
explicitly in 21:27: “But nothing unclean will enter it, that is, no one who practices
abomination or falsehood.” Thus while imaging an eschaton in which sacred boundaries are
no longer relevant, John delineates sharp ethical boundaries to motivate his hearers’ enduring
resistance (υπομονή; 13:10; 14:12) and to assure them that the idolatrous and deceitful
empire in which they currently live will not persist.

In this context, John’s description of the extravagant wealth of New Jerusalem is striking. The
foundation of the wall is adorned with every jewel (21:19-20), and the streets are pure gold
(21:21). Moreover, just as all the ships on Dead Sea brought their cargo to Babylon (18:11-19),
all the “glory and honor of the nations” will now be brought to New Jerusalem (21:26).
Jerusalem is the new economic center of the earth. The economy of this city, however, is in
marked contrast to that of Babylon. Whereas Babylon, seated on many waters, used “her”
mastery over the sea to extract wealth from distant lands (18:19), in New Jerusalem the sea
has disappeared (21:1). As Barbara Rossing notes, this text voices “a longing for an alternate
economic vision in which sea trade in luxury goods will be supplanted by an economy that
provides the essentials of life ‘without payment’. Wealth in New Jerusalem comes not
through oppression but rather as a free gift of God (21:6; 22:17; cf. Isa 55:1). In this vision,
then, John has deconstructed the false dichotomy between wealth and justice that haunts the
experience of his hearers.
Conclusion
John’s vision of New Jerusalem reinforces the antithetical relationship he posits between loyalty to the Roman Empire and loyalty to God. By depicting the bride-city in direct and detailed contrast to the whore-city of Babylon, John’s narrative forces his audience to choose sides. After narrating the destruction of Babylon, the world his auditors reluctantly inhabited, John must provide a new dwelling place for God’s people. By creating a world in which the glory and wealth of Rome foretell its destruction and the hardship of the saints signals. Their victory, he provides the motivation and nourishes the courage his audience needs to sustain their ethic of resistance (ὑπομονή). John provides a world of wholeness that stands over against the conflicted lives of his audience. And this experience should not be understood as a communal illusion or a flight from reality. As David Barr insists, “The liturgical recital of the Apocalypse becomes a real experience of the Kingdom of God.” In so far as John’s audience persist in the worship of God and in the ethical resistance he advocates, John’s vision transports them from the fragmented world of Babylon to the wholeness of New Jerusalem.

Rev. Pratap
CSI Dornakal Diocese
Honouring the Body as Temple of God

Ecclesiastes 6: 1-12                                Psalm 1
1Corinthians 3: 16-23        Mathew 5: 21-30

Collect: Holy God, who has redeemed us from the empty way of life, not with perishable things, but with the precious blood of Christ. We pray that You help us to remain holy, by not walking in step with the wicked, not standing in the way that sinners take, not sitting in the company of the mockers and not craving for the food and drink that are deceptive, For, our bodies are Your temple, in no way to be made unholy by our passions and lusts Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: Shortly after entering Jerusalem at the beginning of His final week, Jesus entered the temple - Mt 21:12-14. Angered by the presence of the money changers and merchants, he drove them out. He decreed their turning the house of God into a den of thieves. With the temple cleansed, He then healed the blind and the lame. Jesus had cleansed the temple before – Jn 2:13-17. It was during the Passover, three years before. Then He rebuked them for making the house of God a house of merchandise. In both cases, we see Jesus' anger for their misuse of the temple. Not that there was anything inherently wrong with buying and selling but it was not the proper place, or use of the temple. Moreover, unjust practices were part of the trade that always exploited the weak and the poor.

How about our temple? Is it being properly used? Does it need cleaning? Are we aware that we even have a temple? As with the temple in Jerusalem, it is to be used in the service and praise of God.

I. Our body is a Temple

A. A Temple for God to indwell...
   Our physical body is a temple of the Holy Spirit- 1Cor 6:19. This "indwelling" refers to a special relationship between us and the Spirit by which God strengthens us (Eph. 3:16). By whom we can deal with the power of sin Rom. 8: 11-13. As Solomon recognized with the temple in Jerusalem, no physical dwelling can contain the omnipresent God 2Ch 6:18. Yet the uniqueness of the Spirit's presence in the life of a Christian is such that it is proper to speak of Him as "indwelling" the Christian .Such is true of the Spirit of God Ps 139:7-12. What is said of the physical body, is also said of the church as a whole - 1Cor 3:16. What is said of the church as a temple, is also true of the body - 1Cor 3:17. Defile the temple of God, and we incur the wrath of God! For the temple is to be holy!

B. A temple for devoted service to God...
   The temple of Jerusalem was to be a place of prayer. Mt.21:13; 2Ch 6:19-21. So our temple, including both body and mind, is to be devoted in service to God. Our body is to be a living sacrifice - Rom 12:1. Our mind is to be renewed, focused on things above – Rom 12:2; Col 3:12
C. A temple that can be abused...

We have seen how the temple in Jerusalem was abused. A place designed for prayer, turned into marketplace. A place that need to be cleansed, once and again. The same can be true of our temples. We can become guilty of setting our minds on earthly things. We begin serving our bellies (carnal appetites), rather than Jesus. We find ourselves unable to abide by will of God - Rom 8:5-8. We can begin offering our bodies to that which it does not belong, Some which is inherently sinful 1Cor 6:13-18. Other things (cares, riches, pleasures of life) which detract us from our true service and hinder our ability to serve God with our bodies Lk 8:14

What is the condition of our temple? Perhaps we are in need of a "major overhaul" (salvation). Perhaps we need some "spring cleaning" (restoration and rededication). In either case, the principles for cleaning are similar.

II. How can we honour the body

A. The presence of Christ...

Jesus cleanses the temple, even more so, our bodies and spirits. He knows that it must occur from the inside out - Mt 23:25-27. He died, that He might purify us - Titus 2:11-14. His blood is the cleansing power to purify us from all sin- 1Jn 1:7. We ensure the presence of Christ in our "temples" through faith – Eph. 3:17, through obedience Jn. 14:21,23; 1Pet 1:22. For the non-Christian, such faith and obedience includes baptism for baptism unites us with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed - Rom 6:3-4. For in baptism we put on Christ - Gal 3:27. For the Christian in need of cleansing, faithful obedience includes repentance and prayer Act 8:22. Repentance, as Christ counselled the Laodiceans - Rev 3: 14-19. Prayer, through which the Lord is invited into our hearts - Rev 3:20

B. The power of Christ...

Jesus exercised strength to overturn the tables and drive out the merchants. Even more so, does He offer strength for the believer. Without Him, we can do nothing  Jn 15:4-5. With Him, we can do everything  Ph 4:13. Thus we need to stand strong "in the power of His might" Eph. 6:10;

C. Our participation with Christ...

While we are dependent upon Christ for our cleansing, we cannot sit idle but "pursue holiness" – Heb. 12:14 This involves both "putting off" and "putting on" things in our life as counselled by James - Jm 1:21, instructed by Peter - 1Pet 2:1-2 and commanded by Paul - Eph 4:22-32. Our cleansing will be greatly facilitated by what we allow in our minds. For things that are worthy of praise and virtue will ensure God's presence in our lives Ph 4:8-9. Our transformation will take place as our minds are renewed- Rom 12:1-2

Conclusion

In what condition is our "temple"? Is it a place where God, Jesus, and the Spirit can reside? Is our body and mind "a place of prayer", one that brings glory to God? Or have we allowed the mundane things of life to preoccupy our "temple" that it is not what God intended.?
If our temple needs cleansing, then let us look to Jesus for only he can provide the cleansing we need. He also provides power for godly living. A cleansed temple must be filled with prayer, praise, virtue, and godliness. Otherwise our "temples" will soon be filled with idols.

Rev.Dr.T.Sampath Bagavan Doss
CSI Madras Diocese
Called to Unity

Ezekiel 37: 15: 23                Psalm 133
Ephesians 4: 1-6            John 15: 1-12

Collect: God of all, who has called us to be Your people living together in unity. We pray that You enable us to abide in You and You in us and keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. So that there be no divisions among us, rather be perfectly united in mind and thought and thus bear much fruit. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Division, fragmentation and polarization are the common phenomena that we are seeing everywhere. The nation, society, church and family where we live together and stay together have already been fragmented into small units. Some says divisions help us to grow and multiply. They believed that division is a process of growth. But in reality it is true that division always causes disunity and disharmony in the society that ultimately threaten the life of the people.

Indian Churches- its reality today

We, the Indian Christian mainly divided in the name of caste, race, ethnicity, language, denomination gender etc. These divisions rightly affected the total growth of the Indian church. These divisions are the major challenges that the Indian Churches facing today. These challenges would finally affect the existence of Indian churches.

Formation of CSI was a great attempt for unity

Here, we the CSI Christians are proud of to say that we are the members of the united church as well as the uniting church. The prime focus of the CSI church is to bring unity. The formation of the CSI church is popularly called as a second Pentecost. It was a great event because we noticed the immeasurable sacrificial act behind of this Church union. During the process of church union our great ancestors and church leaders have withdrawn their own Church tradition, faith documents, and theological stand. For the sake of union they were ready to release their wealth, possessions and positions. Hence, this was a total surrender before God and obeying the commandment of Christ, ‘love your neighbor as you love yourselves’. They ignored the dividing factors and sought the connecting factors through which they accepted each other and understood each other. Hence, creating unity is not at all an easy task. We need sacrifice and greater commitment to bare the pain which causes for bringing unity.

Christ and Unity

Right from the birth to death Jesus mission was to build up unity among the people. The birth scene of Jesus and babe in the manger was really a symbolic presentation of the unity. The Shepherded, the wise, the east and the west, the celestial and earthly, the wise and the ordinary, human beings and animals come together in a common place just before the baby Jesus. His mission started from the manger and went up to the cross where we see again the sacrificial act for building up the unity. The death of Christ is the symbol of Eucharist. It was
an act of uniting together. The Eucharist event is inviting us to continue the act of unity among us. Jesus already instituted this act in the Calvary.

**Unity is an act of God**

Almost all the lectionary texts today’s meditation called for the need of unity. The Old Testament lesson Ezekiel Ch.37 mainly speaks about the concept of unity. It was the mission of God to unite Israel as one nation. The first part of this chapter (ch. 37:1-14) says about the Valley of dry Bones and second part of this chapter (ch.37:15-28) says about the Two Sticks. When Israel became captive during the exilic period they were divided, split and polarized by their masters. Here, God wants them be united. God exposed the reality through the prophetic vision. The spirit of God sent the prophet down in the middle of a valley; it was full of dry bones. Then the Lord asked to prophet a question ‘can these bones live’?(v.3). Here the prophet did not respond with negative energy, he did not say no but he answered ‘O Lord God, you know’. Then the Lord commissioned him to prophecies them. The text rightly says that the dry bones are none other than the whole house of Israel, the chosen people (v.11). They said, ‘Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely’ (v.11). Therefore prophesy, and say to them ‘Thus says the Lord, God; “I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves. O, my people, and I will bring you back to the land of Israel”(v.12). The prophetic mission of this text was to empower Israel and unite them even if they were in the captives. The latter part of the text also speaks about the urgency of unity among the tribes of Israel. The two sticks symbolizes here is ‘Judah and Ephraim’ the two tribes of Israel (v.19). It is the time to unite each other rather than divide each other. The Israel needs to unite together for coming back from their horrible exilic life to their own land; the land of freedom and God will make them one nation in the land. God says, “I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king over them all. Never again shall they be divided into two nations, and never again shall they be divided into kingdoms. I will save them from all iniquities and I will cleanse them. Then they shall be my people, and I will be their God.”(V.22-23).

**Jesus’s teaching on unity**

St. John Ch. 15; is also speaks about the concept of unity. Here, the Gospel writer says about the integrated and inter-related unity. The vine, vinegrower, vineyard, branch, fruit are closely inter-related and integrated each other. In the Palestinian context these symbols are familiar with the common people through with Jesus speaks about the urgency of unity. To interconnect all these symbols Jesus repeatedly used the word ‘Abide’ for bringing out the original idea. Abide means ‘accept, endurance, obey etc. Jesus tried to bring out the in-depth meaning of the word ‘abide’ and practice it through our daily life. For Him uniting is nothing but to accept others as they are and be ready to listen what they speak that will help us to be united in the midst of differences.

**Unity - a mission of God**

This unity Sunday Christ again asks us to build up unity in the church and society because we are the called out community to continue His mission to the public. He already inaugurated this mission in his public ministry. We hereby acknowledge that God called us to be His
people living together in unity. Many at times we tried to minimize the universal nature of Christ mission within the boundary of our church denomination, or four walls building.

The reality of the present Indian church is miserable. The church has divided in the name of denomination, tradition, caste, culture etc. within a compound having two or more churches of the same denomination is the Indian reality. The unity that the Christ proposed to us is beyond the religion, ethnicity, language and culture. The situation is really challenging us to abide with others.

**Conclusion**

Remember we are the ‘called out community’- A community called out for bringing unity. The attempt in the unity is not to draw together. The differences and label unity but it is an attempt to heal one of the major divisions to sacrifice, to release forgiveness, reconciliation is essential to engage with the act of unity. Abide means ‘tenting in the midst of others’ help us to heal the wounds that causes by divisions.

- A community called out for bringing new culture. They form an inclusive community through integrating and inter-relating all creation.
- A community called out for accepting each other, respecting each other and uniting one another.
- Hence creating unity is Gods mission to bring greater peace, closer fellowship and fuller life to all creation. Whereas the destructive work of unity is an ungodly element which always threatens the constructive image of Gods.

**Revd. Dr. Bhanu Samuel**

CSI Kollam-Kottarakara Diocese
Ecumenical Sunday

Unity in Faith and Action

Joshua 3: 9-17
Acts 9: 20-25
Psalm 53
Mark 1: 21-34

Collect: God of all, Who has called us to be Your people living together in unity. We pray that You enable us to abide in You and You in us and keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace, so that there be no divisions among us, rather be perfectly united in mind and thought and thus bear much fruit. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

1. To cross the waters

The people of Israel were standing on the banks of river Jordan. Joshua reminds them how they are going to enter the land of Canaan. ‘God, the Lord of all the earth will go before them. The priests will carry the ark of the covenant. When their feet touch the waters, the water will divide and pave the way for the people to enter the promised land. People believed the words of Joshua. They all crossed the river Jordan and then the waters returned to flow towards their destination. People believed in the mighty deeds of God and it was reckoned to them as faith. When people moved into the water, what was faith, it became an action. Faith and action must be united.

It was a great debate when Paul emphasized faith and James emphasized action. It is true Paul had a context when he said that we are saved not by our actions, but by our faith. The pharisaic hypocritical activities was the context behind. James had a different context when he had to say that faith without actions cannot be a living faith. It was the context of the rich and poor in the infant church. However, these claims can often become exaggerated when they are taken out of their contexts. Faith and action must always be united.

2. Action depends on faith

When Paul began to preach the gospel of Christ, people were confused. They spoke to each other,’ is this not the man who was persecuting the Christians?’ Is this not the man who came with orders to bind Christians and drag them to Jerusalem? Paul before the Damascus journey had no faith in Christ. After the Damascus journey, he received his faith from the encounter of Christ. Now the activities are the opposite. One who persecuted others is now offering himself to be persecuted for the sake of Christ.

Today, a new generation of Christians are emerging who think that they can live a good life without faith. They say, we believe in God. We know that there is God. But we do not want that knowledge to have any relation with our life. They call themselves as secular as in the western nations. Faith has become irrelevant to many people. But gospel repeats in many places that faith is basic to all aspects of life.

Faith must begin and grow in our lives. Paul describes this as, when I was a child, I thought like a child. When I became a man, I have given up the things of the childhood. Peter says
that he cannot be expected to repeat the infant food to them. Once they grow, they must be prepared for the solid food. Mature faith and mature actions are two sides of a coin.

3. **Faith and Action with unity**

Isolated lives of faith and action cannot lead to the achievement of the purpose. In the judges period, each one did what was right, but what was right in his own eyes. In the end, the community perished. Unity is the basis of all ecumenism. Jesus prayed, ”That they may all be one”. The scope of Ecumenism has widened in our times. What began as unity between the mission bodies, later between churches has now grown into the ‘justice, peace and integrity of creation’. One God and One humanity! Beyond religions, beyond continents, beyond genders, beyond human, we have a rediscover a new spirit of ecumenism. We must become faithful and be united towards this unity.

4. **Unity and Purpose for all**

One of the most powerful statements that I ever heard was that the Church is always destroyed from the inside and not the outside. It is destroyed by contentions within the church. It is destroyed by self interests. It is destroyed by people that are too busy worrying about what they want and like, that they miss the purpose of why God established the church.

Win Arn did a survey among over 1000 churches and their members. When he asked the question, “Why does the church exist?, 89% said, “The church is to take care of my family’s and my needs. Only 11% said, “The Purpose of the church is to win the world to Jesus Christ. William Barclay once said, “Christians are people drawn together because they owe a common debt to the goodness and grace of God.”

Rev. Dr. John Samuel Ponnusamy
Ecumenical Christian Centre, Bangalore
Republic Day

Participation in Nation Building

Nehemiah 2: 11-18
1Peter 2: 13-17
Psalm 101

Collect: Almighty God, who dwells with us in this land and whose eyes are always upon us, We pray that You give us a passion to rise and build our nation, to grant us the wisdom to use our freedom responsibly, to fear God, to honour the authorities, to respect everyone, to share our resources, to remain contented. So that our nation would see a new order where justice and truth shall prevail. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Once I asked a question to a school kid regarding the importance of Republic Day. Since I got confusing answers from him, I reframed the question as to what is the difference between Republic day and Independence Day. Then the kid started explaining things about the flag hoisting, chocolates/sweets, public holiday, Indian freedom, famous speeches of Gandhi and Nehru, etc…. Like that kid, many of us are not aware of the exact difference and importance of Republic India. When we talk about Republic day, Democracy is an important word to be defined. India became Democratic on January 26th 1950. The word Democracy is derived from the Greek ‘Democracia’ with the meaning “rule of commoners”. Oxford Dictionary defines democracy as “government by the people: rule of majority”, “a government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through system of representation”. The definition clearly denotes that in a democratic country, Nation building is not vested in few people in power but on everyone in the country. As we are in democratic state of India, every citizen is vested with power and responsibility in Nation building. Let us look into the passages and understand what God wants us to do in Nation building.

1. Vision to build Nation

From 586 BC, Jews were in exile in Babylon under King Nebuchadnezzar, during that time the Jews were not allowed to return to Jerusalem. In 539 BC, Cyrus, King of Persia captured Babylon, in King Cyrus’ reign; Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem. From the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, we can see that the people who returned had a vision to rebuild the temple and the wall. It was not simply the vision of the two persons Ezra and Nehemiah, but it was the vision of the community to build the temple and the wall. They gathered every resource they got and in spite of various stumbling blocks they fulfilled the vision of building the temple and the wall. Their vision and will power to build their nation, teaches us the responsibility we have in building our nation. It is not just in the hands of few leaders, but it is in our hands to build our nation. As Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam says, “…… Dream is something that does not let you sleep”, our vision to build our nation must not allow us to sleep.

2. United to build Nation

Nehemiah’s words “Come, let us build the Wall of Jerusalem” v.17, made the Jews to come together to build the wall. These words united the people to say “Let us rise up and build” v.18. They stood together and built the wall within a year. Nehemiah not only united the Jews but also united the King in building the walls. He spoke to King Artaxerxes and got permission for him to leave Babylon v.6. With King Artaxerxes, Nehemiah united the Keeper
of the forest, Asaph and the Governors of the provinces beyond the river v.7 for the people’s safe journey. Nehemiah united many people for building the wall. It is a call for us to unite everyone to build our nation.

3. Respect and Abide to build Nation
The present Christian generation, in general, thinks that we are not of this world; and that we must strive for the greater world, i.e., heaven. Subsequently people in politics, activists, social welfare activities, etc are considered as those working against the kingdom of God, but Peter (I Peter 2) clearly denote that every Christian must be a good citizen to the country. Christians are to be subjected to every civil authority. God is giving us power to each and everyone, so we have to respect and obey the people who are in power v. 13. At the same time, we are given freedom not to sin but to choose good. V.14 and 15 describes the will of God, that God gave power to people, to punish evil and to praise the good. This explains us that, if the authorities or the people in power are against the will of God, we have the power to oppose them and to detain them from the power. The passage calls us to respect and obey the leaders if they are doing the will of God in Building the Nation.

4. Endeavor to build Nation
Vision, Unity and Respect alone are not adequate to build nation but, with vision, unity and respect; Effort, attempt and action must be included. Yes, as Indian citizens our vision, unity and respect must make us to act for the development of our country. As a church, as a society, as a community, etc we must make ourselves involved in the development. In our democratic country, the first and foremost action to build nation is our voting right. How many of us casted our vote in the last election? Only 66% voted in last election, we are conveniently reluctant to perform this easy and most important task of voting. But through our voting right, we have the power to build the nation by electing right leaders.
We must unite to accept the good and to oppose the bad in building our Nation. The present government’s initiation to cleanliness, pollution control, etc must be appreciated and at the same time, policies like new education policy, saffronisation, and attacks on minority, religious riots, etc must be opposed unanimously and strongly. We must get into action, at least by raising our voices against these policies, which are against the oppressed and minority people and in turn building the kingdom of God in our democratic country.

Yes, as we celebrate this Republic Day, let us have a clear vision to build our nation as Nehemiah did, let us unite people of all the sectors to build a stronger nation, let us be great citizens to fulfill the will of God by getting into action. Let this Republic day re instigate our call to be good servants of God in building his Kingdom. Amen.

Rev. Iniyan Joshva
CSI Trichy Tanjore Diocese
Collect: God of all Goodness we thank you for your son Jesus Christ, who laid His life to transform the world. Enable us to realise that true piety is not fulfilling our religious duties but living upright with pure heart and clear conscience and to lead a life that is worthy of our calling. We plead you to grant us your grace to mend our behaviour, our relationships, live in communion with you so that your light may shine in and through our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

The word “Piety” comes from the Latin word Piaetas or Pius which means “Devout” or “Dutiful”. But the bible gives the meaning – having or showing a dutiful spirit of reverence for God and It’s all about “Living the Godly Life “. The word ‘Piety’ will provokes us to think about the historical background of the religious movement “Pietism”.

Originally a German Lutheran religious movement of the 17th and 18 centuries, pietism emphasized heartfelt religious devotion, ethical purity, charitable activity and pastoral theology rather then sacramental of dogmatic precision. The term now refers to all religious expressions that emphasize inward devotion and moral purity. With roots in Dutch precisionism and mysticism, pietism emerged in reaction to the formality of Lutheran orthodoxy.

In his Pia Desideria (1675), Philipp Jakob Spener proposed a "heart religion" to replace the dominant "head religion." Beginning with religious meetings in Spener's home, the movement grew rapidly, especially after August Hermann Francke (1663 - 1727) made the new University of Halle a Pietist center. Nikolaus Ludwig, Graf von Zinzendorf, a student of Francke's and godson of Spener, helped spread the movement. His Moravian Church promoted evangelical awakenings throughout Europe and in North America in the 18th and 19th centuries. John Wesley and Methodism were profoundly influenced by pietism.

A recurring tendency within Christian history to emphasize more the practicalities of Christian life and less the formal structures of theology or church order. Its historians discern four general traits in this tendency:

(1) Its experiential character, pietists are people of the heart for whom Christian living is the fundamental concern
(2) Its biblical focus, pietists are, to paraphrase John Wesley, "people of one book" who take standards and goals from the pages of Scripture
(3) Its perfectionist bent, pietists are serious about holy living and expend every effort to follow God's law, spread the gospel, and provide aid for the needy.
(4) Its reforming interest, pietists usually oppose what they regard as coldness and sterility in established church forms and practices.
God always looks for the true piety or true Godly living persons, not the people who strictly follow the traditional religious activities in their spiritual lives to satisfy themselves and covers themselves to be recognized by the others as they are good at every area of their lives. The bible says in Psalm: 42: 5 a true piety will trust in God and will have the hope in God. When others or the difficult situations compiles to go away from the god’s path, a true godly man will never see the situations but looks unto god, trusts and will have the hope and praise God at every situation of their lives. “As with a deadly wound in my body, my adversaries taunt me, while they say to me continually, "Where is your God?"

Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my help and my God” (Psalms: 42:10, 11 & 12:1)

If a person has a true piety/ true Godly life, he/she must have separated his/her life from the worldly sinful nature and must live a pleased life in God’s sight. What is the true piety which acceptable in God’s sight? Let’s look into the scripture portions, which will helps that what is the true piety in God’s sight is.

1. Be a righteous before God (Micah: 6:1-8)

People of God always must have the qualities which God expects and they should have an exemplary life so that the God’s name can be shared to the other faiths who do not know the real God in their lives. Here in Micah: 6:1-5 is talking about The Indictment against Israel because the people of Israel were not upright in their lives, though they were chosen by God, loved by the god the father Yahweh and have seen many miracles in their lives. Here we see the Lord’s Indictment or Accusation against the people of Israel. People of Israel were supposed to please God through their life style before the other nations, and they were supposed to satisfy their God by their spiritual lives. They were chosen by the Lord with a great purpose. Vs 6 – 8 are talking about The Nature of True Piety / Godly life. A true Christian should know that, what God Requires from our spiritual lives. A true piety is not offering something and fulfilling our religious activities but we must please god through doing what is right in god’s sight, knowing and going according to the requirements which God is really expecting from our lives, doing justice, having the live and kindness and moreover humbling ourselves under the mighty hands of God and walking with Him.

2. Live a practical Christian life (James: 1:19-27)

The whole chapters in the letter of James are totally talking about the True Piety. A true piety is not only hearing the word of God but doing what we heard from God and going according to the will of God Vs.22. The true piety will be seen through inviting or having the power of God’s word in to our hearts and leaving the wickedness, unrighteousness and displeased life before God. The true piety before God is: “to care for orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself unstained by the word”.

3. Be a model like Jesus (St.Matt: 6:1-8)

Our God is the God of Generosity, who sent his begotten son in to this world, and His Jesus Christ who gave his life as ransom for many. Jesus’ earthly ministry shows how he was
extended his love towards the poor, sick and needy. In this section of the book we are in the middle of the Sermon on the Mount. The subject matter in these verses focuses on personal piety in the areas of giving, praying and fasting. The initial reading of the passage will show that the basic teaching of Jesus will be to avoid the ostentatious show of piety and to seek to please God. The first four verses cover the subject of “almsgiving” (as it has been traditionally called), or giving to the poor. The general warning is not to do acts of righteousness before other people, to be seen by them, for then there will be no reward. Of course, many good deeds that people do are out in the open necessarily. But Jesus was here speaking about intention--not to do them so that people would see and therefore think that you are spiritual. That is one form of hypocrisy, for in doing it that way you would not be seriously interested in doing the good deed, but in appearing to be doing good deeds.

**Conclusion**

Finally according to the St.Matt:6:24 serving and living for the god and the world is not acceptable in God’s sight. We must devote our lives as a living sacrifice unto the Lord. St.Matt: 7:21”Doing the will of the Father is the true piety”, we must be pleased in God’s sight through our life style – 1Timothy: 5:4. May the power of the God almighty will lead us into the true piety / true Godly life by filling us with the Holy Spirit, so that we may become channels of Christ for the extension and glorification of His kingdom!

Rev.Karunakar Dachi
CSI Dornakal Diocese
Christ: The Rhythm of Life

Exodus 15: 1 – 21  
Psalms 149  
Ephesians 5: 15 – 21  
Luke 8: 26 - 39

Collect: Almighty God, Heavenly Father, who through your Son Jesus Christ has liberated us from the bondage of sin and slavery, let your praise be on our lips at all times. Help us to be thankful to you for varied gifts you have bestowed upon us to experience and share your unfathomable love revealed through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God world without end. Amen.

Christ inaugurated a new lifestyle of dignity and freedom of life to promote joy, justice and peace. Neither the Jewish religious leaders nor the state had any sort of genuine programme to sensitize the people’s need of freedom during the time of Jesus. There had been religious backed oppression in Israel in the form of gender bias and untouchability or segregation (fishermen, women, shepherds and lepers), similar to the situation in the US and South Africa in the middle and latter part of the 20th century. The biblical teachings of justice and peace which the God of liberation intended to be the focus of religious practice among the people of Israel ended up with false practices, devoid of true freedom. The biblical truths of equality, freedom, justice, peace, love and forgiveness were not taught by those who claimed to be teachers of the law. The failure of the religious establishment and the agony of common people led Christ to take up hermeneutics to explain the Old Testament laws, making himself accessible to the victims of religious and social oppression. Christ’s teachings and his identification with the vulnerable and neglected in society had challenged the dominant leaders, aiming at the rhythm of life which he called the Reign of God, an order of life where there is freedom and dignity of life for all irrespective of gender, region or language and without discrimination on the basis of caste or segregation in terms of ethnic background. Let us reflect on the given theme under three sub-titles based on Christ’s healing of a demon-possessed man.

1. Irregular life negates the nature of rhythmic life: vv. 26-28
2. Irregular life nullifies the values of rhythmic life: vv. 29-32
3. Irregular life is numbed by the spirit of rhythmic life: vv. 35-36

Irregular life negates the nature of rhythmic life - Luke 8: 26-28

“What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I beg you don’t torture me!” (Luke 8:28)

This man created in God’s image wanted to be under the influence of the demon as he happened to be controlled by it. He didn’t favour life in fullness through Christ, and instead had gone to the extent of responding to Christ’s “freedom of life” as “TORTURE”. He prefers to be a slave rather than a liberated person. He reveals the wish to live in the tombs among the dead rather than in a house as a living human being. He prefers to go without clothes, which a normal person never would. This move by the demon-possessed man is a clear indication that such people are against the human life granted by God whose creation
favours life in its fullness. They negate the very spirit of the rhythmic life which God intended to be the experience of every human being on earth.

He negates the presence of Christ even though he knew who the Christ was – “SON OF THE MOST HIGH”. This is a sheer indication that he favours false living and fails to realise the true life for which we are all created. Many of us wish to languish in false living with or without the knowledge of the rhythm of life which God our Creator intended for us. Many are unaware of their state of slavery in its various forms in society or the intensity of its influence over us, like the demon-possessed man who was satisfied with loneliness and without rest.

This is evident in the context of our consumerist society where we live with unwanted products and buy them when they are not relevant to our immediate needs. We choose useless products and want to be isolated from people. But we are reminded of the fact that Christ didn’t respond to Peter at the time of Transfiguration when he proposed building three tents, as Jesus wanted to return to the people on the plains. Isolation, loneliness, a chained life and restlessness are not the rhythm of life that Christ has promoted, but the opposite.

Irregular life nullifies the values of rhythmic life - Luke 8: 29-32

Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. (Luke 8:30)

Irregular life is the result of the influence of the demon, and it controls the man who has been possessed by it. The encounter of Christ with the demon-possessed man reveals the constant struggle between good and evil. The function of evil is to nullify goodness and to demoralise human dignity by underestimating the image of God in human beings. The man possessed by many demons underestimates the values of the rhythmic life granted to him and opposes the presence of Christ who was there to renew his life. This incident, recorded by St. Luke, an evangelist and medical doctor, gives significant information from which we can learn the causes of irregular life and the need of the help of a facilitator. The demons have no purpose in the world except to carry out malfunction in the healthy lives of human beings, thereby creating chaos by disintegrating society. The demons which became the cause of irregular life in the man were willing to endanger other living beings but were not ready to lose their character of destroying the lives of others. This happened when they were ordered to go into the pigs as per their wish: the herd of pigs rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned. Demons always act as a force of destruction, against the wish of God who always promotes respect for life. The pigs which were killed were in no way a threat to the demons, and so we understand that demons are always a threat to the life of all living beings. Jesus would not have dreamed that those demons would cause the death of innocent pigs. In our society innocents always become the target of the dominant and become victims of their mischievous designs. The dominant never care for the lives of others, and the vulnerable in our society are always targeted whether it is through drought or flood (natural calamities) or man-made scarcity of food. All forms of demonic works need to be annihilated, and for that demons need to be identified. All forms of irregular life or those designs in society that act as threats to the life of living beings are demons. That may be a rich unhealthy person or the evil plans of a state, which are all oppressive elements in society leading to develop irregular life as against the rhythmic life that God our Creator wishes to popularise among all living beings.
Irregular life is numbed by the spirit of rhythmic life – Luke 8. 35-36

The value and spirit of rhythmic life is more powerful than irregular life if it is understood and realised by human beings. The man who was once possessed by demon has restored his values of life. He is now a transformed person as a result of his encounter with Christ. Hence he got dressed, and was found to be in his right mind. He was found to be sitting at the feet of Jesus whom he had requested: “I beg you don't torture me!” The man when he became devoid of demons realised the features of human life and no longer opposed the presence of Jesus, but rather chose to be with him. Irregular life cannot chain a person for ever: there is an end to it. Rhythmic life will overpower irregular life by presenting the meaning of the true life which a person can experience, becoming like the rest of human beings. God is the source of rhythmic life, and Jesus taught this very essence of life. This is evident from the approach of the healed man who wished to be with Jesus, although this was declined as his presence was essential among his own people to be witness of healing; it was more important that his new understanding of the values of life was taught to his own people. The values of life need to be taught to those who are not aware of them, and hence Christ responded to the healed man: “Return home and tell how much God has done for you.” The unwanted man has been made into a pleasant man and has became a promoter of the meaning of human life and nothing short of an Evangelist, inducted by Christ into his own salvation. Christ who was called to serve among people to build the reign of God with the true participation of the people always negates the works of demonic factors and opposes them by confronting their evil designs. The present day church is reminded of God’s plan of building a just society where there will be no people suffering under the influence of demonic spirits. The spirit of God is to bring a spirit of freedom for which Christ was crucified and rose from the dead.

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CSI Madras Diocese
Sabbath as the Culmination of Creation

Isaiah 65: 17- 25              Psalm  8
Hebrews 4: 2- 13              Mark 2: 23- 28

Collect: God of creation, Who after creating us with glory and honour, rested from all works, thus blessing and sanctifying the Sabbath. We pray that, by observing Sabbath, instituted as an opportunity for us, to remember the goodness of Your creation, and honour You, as the Creator, who dwells with Your people, So that, the whole creation be filled with peace and holiness, that we may experience a ‘new heaven and new earth’. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

Sabbath as the Culmination of Creation: The first chapter of the book of Genesis gives us a graphic description of how God created all that exists. Day after day, each day there was something particular that God created and God saw it was good. Since human beings are thought to have been created last, they, with their erroneous anthropocentric thinking, have always claimed that they were to be the crown of creation and held a misconception that all else only existed for their sake. But a closer look at the first chapter of Genesis gives us in fact a different picture. In the order of creation the last thing that was created was the Sabbath on the seventh day. So human beings are not the last of the creation but it was the Sabbath that was the last created of the creation. Sabbath is the most sacred institution in the creation of God. God rested from work or in other words ceased from work, and it is ordained to all created beings that they too rest on the Sabbath day. In Jewish liturgy Sabbath is treated as a ‘queen’ and ‘bride’ thus enhancing its importance in our rhythm of life.

The Promise of New Heaven and New Earth: Isaiah 65: 17- 25

In this passage of Isaiah 65:17-25, we see God is continuously creating. Sabbath rest empowers one to resume work. Those who work need to rest and those who rest need to work. Jesus Christ once said, I am working since my father is working (John 5:17). God is continuously involved in the process of creating. The verb ‘to create’ used in Isaiah 65:17 is the same Hebrew verb ‘bara’ used in Genesis 1:1, which puts us in the sequence that God is still creating. God promises to create new heavens and a new earth in Isaiah 65:17-25, where the old grievances will vanish. That will be the New Jerusalem, which will be devoid of weeping and crying (v.19); long life will the characteristic feature (v.20), there will be satisfaction and people will enjoy the fruit of their labors (vv.21,22), they will see their children being blessed by God and the generations that follow them (v.23). People will enjoy God’s presence and they are close to God that God will hear their prayers even before they are uttered (v.24). God is at work establishing a new kingdom of peace.

The kingdom of peace is not just for the human beings but for all created beings, human beings are inclusive in the whole creation, the establishment of this kingdom of peace permeates into the animal world, further, peace between human beings and the animal world. There is not going to be any violence in this new heaven and new earth or as said in all God’s ‘holy mountain’ (v.25). God is understood in the grammatical sense of a verb as ‘creativity’ as against what we are used to understanding God as a noun, which is more of a static being.
God understood as creativity is more a dynamic understanding of God. God is at work, dynamically involved in creating a new heaven and a new earth, which is the New Jerusalem; it is not a renovation of the old Jerusalem but a creation of the New Jerusalem all together with the principles of peace.

‘Dominion’ as Seeking the Welfare of all Creatures: Psalm 8

From Psalm 8 we need to do some un-learning and some re-learning, here again one verb is reflected such as ‘to have dominion’ in verse six which is from Gen.1:26-28, it is the Hebrew verb ‘radah’.

6 You have given them **dominion** over the works of your hands; you have put all things under their feet,
7 all sheep and oxen, and also the beasts of the field,
8 the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea, whatever passes along the paths of the seas (Ps.8:6-8)

This does not any way reflect having power over animals but only means to look after the welfare of the animals. Thereby it does not warrant humans to subject animals to any violence of any form. Thus we ought to practice the principle of the non-violence right here and now to be worthy subjects and peaceful citizens of the new heaven and new earth of the New Jerusalem. Sabbath is for the welfare of the creation, a practice that brings all created beings together to live in peace. Peace to all sheep and peace to all oxen, peace to all beasts of the field, peace to the birds of the air, peace to the fish of the sea and peace to all who travel along the paths of the seas. This is in the making of the new heaven and the new earth. The Sabbath rest becomes the way of life to all beings including human beings into the future.

Jesus Christ the Lord of Sabbath: Mark 2: 23- 28

In the Jewish tradition and legislations Sabbath was governed by umpteen numbers of stipulations. There were also many relaxations when it came to saving life and particularly saving the life of animals, feeding them when they are hungry, protecting them from cold and pulling them up when one fell into a pit. So Sabbath is cessation from work, resting, enjoying the presence of God and fellowship of family and giving rest to the animals and land too. When the Jewish religion was loaded with rules in keeping a Sabbath, Jesus reminds us that the institution of Sabbath was made for living beings and nor living beings for Sabbath. He demonstrated with the example of David who had to override the law in order to sustain life, so also the Lord of the Sabbath Jesus Christ was re-creating or healing people and catering wholesomeness even on the Sabbath. Sabbath enhances life and creates abundant life in an individual, in a family, in a congregation, to the creatures and to the whole society, thus Sabbath ought to become the means to restoring and re-creating life; life that is worthy of making a New heaven and new earth.

Sabbath Culminates in Eternity: Hebrews 4: 2- 13

We live in hope for the Sabbath rest to culminate in God. Just as the way God finished the six day work and then rested on the seventh day, so also God will cause us to finish our work and enter into the eternal rest. This is the culmination of the Sabbath that extends into eternity far
surpassing the Sabbath of the seventh day. This is the rest of grace a great comfort and a rest of holiness in the very divine presence, it is the culmination of our faith leading to a heavenly rest which is a once for all liberation from the all the labor and troubles of this world. This is the rest in its culmination when the Lord Jesus Christ shall appear in his glory. This is a gift for those who believe given as grace in this world and glory in the world to come, possessed only through the faith in Jesus Christ, who is the only way of entering that eternal rest, the culmination of Sabbath for all creation lived in the New heaven and new earth the New Jerusalem.

Rev. Prof. Dr. Chilkuri Vasantha Rao
Principal Designate, UTC, Bengaluru
Healing Ministry Sunday
Compassionate Love and Healing

Isaiah 42: 1-9
James 5: 13- 18

Collect: Compassionate God, Who neither breaks a bruised reed nor snuff out a smouldering wick, who heals all our diseases. We pray that You sustain us through our difficult times, heal our sicknesses, and further, give us and a loving heart, listening ears and praying lips to be channels of Your healing. So that our health would be restored and we would praise You, walking and jumping. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

It is not uncommon for people to become unwell – in fact it is only more common now for people to become unwell with some illness or other. What do we do when people are unwell as Christians what is our responsibility?

It is not easy to care for the sick because everyone is very busy with their own problems – every one has their own problems that we find it difficult to care for others.

Today, the bible readings point to us a responsibility as God’s children – the responsibility to heal people in need of healing.

Jesus in his ministry did a variety of things and one of the important components of his ministry was healing. He would never pass by a suffering person but would reach out to the person with healing. Healing is a form of restoration of the person. Healing is not merely a medical problem it has a psychological and spiritual dimension to it. And that is the reason Jesus gives us a role in this important task.

When we are unwell our body mind and spirit is afflicted and we experience total suffering.

In early Christianity the Christians possessed miraculous powers, including the power to heal was given to the church (Acts 2:22; 3:16; 4:30). Paul mentions gifts of healing in his list of spiritual gifts (I Cor. 12:9, 28).

1. The healing ministry of Jesus

From the beginning of his ministry Jesus performed healing miracles (Mark 1:29-32, 40-45). Luke in his gospel would say that "The power of the Lord, was with him to heal" (5:17). Jesus said it was of God who heals (Matt. 12:28; Luke 11:20). In the power of the Spirit he began his ministry (Mark 1:10; Luke 4:18-19), proclaiming the kingdom (Mark 1:14-15), and affirming that healing was a sign, among others, that the rule of God, the "acceptable year of the Lord," had been inaugurated (Matt. 11:5; Luke 4:19; 7:22), the predicted character of the new age realized (Isa. 35:5-6; 61:1-2).

Therefore healing is more than the restoration to health. The power to heal is the experience of a new age inaugurated by Jesus Christ himself and Jesus would invite his disciples to participate in this messianic work and therefore he gave his disciples the power to heal. Jesus not only healed but he gave his disciples the authority ‘to heal every disease and every infirmity" (Matt. 10:1).
2. The healing ministry of the Church

The healing activity of Jesus and his disciples explains the place of healing in the primitive church. The gift is conferred by the Spirit I Cor. 12:10, 8. To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, the Spirit is given by the exalted Christ (Acts 2:33);

The mighty works, including healing, are signs of the messianic age (Acts 2:16-21; and Christ's power has been delegated to all who believe on him. People are astonished at the healing work of Peter and Paul and Philip (Acts 3. 11) While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished. The result was that 'they even carried out the sick into the streets, and laid them on cots and mats, in order that Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he came by’. (Acts 5:15; 8:9-13; 14:8-10).

3. The responsibility of every believer

Faith in of Jesus is the foundation for healing in the name of Jesus. (Acts 3:6, 16; cf. Matt. 9:27-31; Mark 5:34; 9:14-27), Therefore the responsibility of every believer is to help in the process of healing by introducing a life of faith in Jesus. The second responsibility is to pray and anoint the sick with oil as James advises the church. (Jas. 5:14-15; cf. Mark 6:13),

The "laying on of hands" is an act of compassion of God and that helps in the process of healing as the sick could feel touched by the grace of God. (Acts 9:12, 17; 28:8; cf. Matt. 9:18; Mark 5:23), all belong to the healing process. Yet another way to help in the healing of the sick is to proclaim the forgiveness of God and the acceptance of God. Healing and the forgiveness of sins go together (Jas. 5:16; cf. Mark 2:3-12; Ps. 103:3).

Rev. Deborah Prem Raj
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Collect: God of compassion, Who has created us to bear good fruit. We pray that You grant us the power to resist our inclinations to commit wickedness and disobedience, and our desires not to do the good You want us to do. In order that we do Your will alone, bearing good fruit as disciples in Your kingdom and preparing ourselves to receive the eternal life. Through Jesus Christ, who lives, and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

The creation accounts of Genesis manifest the purpose of creation. The purpose was never to bestow a once for all factual narration of how the world of nature, animals, creepers and human beings came into being. But the original purpose was, and remains to give settings for God’s covenant with Israel and with all people; further to establish the basis for human responsibility by using the created world in the mode of prudent stewardship unto God. The term fall and violation are closely connected with alienation and aloofness. Unfortunately, both liberation theology and contextual theology seem to have an absolute blind eye towards psychological aspect of liberation. The psychology and theology in interrelated and two sides of a single coin. The fall and violation of human beings concretely communicate the message of requirement of emancipation and reunion in order to continue the coherent process of creation towards ultimate perfection which need holistic liberation based on qualitative life. Psychological reshaping of human cognition regarding creation and its divine purpose is mandatory to make creation unique.

The mandatory purpose of creation is self-awareness

The fall and sad stories of Adam and his descendants has rightly emanate the lack of awareness of their self or inner personality. They had lack of awareness of self, inner being, likeness of God and their prudent stewardship. The term prudent stewardship has channeled with an idea of disciplined responsibility of handling the self and resources of cosmos with deep sense of care and the future. The fall of confined him in to the compartment of self-centeredness and short-sighted. Both Adam and his descendants failed to understand their merits and demerits, consequences of likes and dislikes, limitation and possibilities. They were satisfied with their immediate needs and availabilities. This is the continue trend of human beings in all age, generation and even today. This trend may be defined as fast food, ready-mades, freak spirituality and so on. But one thing is factual fact that man became psychologically dissatisfied and disfigured in a long pilgrim journey of life on earth. The heavenly being made a relationship with beautiful woman on earth due to lack awareness and eagerness meet the immediate needs and instant satisfaction. But God became discomfort in the short comfortness and convenience of man but finally man became discomfort forever. The sense of over greedy, eagerness for luxury, intention to conquer the privacy of others, readiness to compromise for micro gains by conveniently forgetting all ethics and ethos even the new system of live in relationship are the result of lack of awareness of self and the
prudent stewardship. God placed man on earth neither to conquer nor to confiscate the available resources for self-satisfaction but to serve the society giving space for eco-spirituality with long vision and mission.

**The mandatory purpose of creation is self-discipline**

God created man as the crown of the rest of creation with choice, freedom of selection and priorities. The purpose of creation was pointed at the quality and holiness. The quality and holiness of life are statutory to self-discipline. When man and woman cross the line of control fixed by God the man and his partner even descendants are disconnected and started to govern by the law of world. As the consequences man lost the moral ethics and value system. In short, man was psychologically disfigured, sociologically dehumanized and biologically became weak. The common cognition of man started to contradicted with cosmic law, Value system, self-confidence and self-esteem. Therefore, he tried to hide out from the very presence of God instead of self-correction from corruption. The aloofness further led to the wrath of God. Man should have a resisting energy to overcome the influences of attraction. The attraction is cosmetic in character. Only a self-disciplined man can over the influences, immediate satisfaction, intention to know the unknown, and worldly powers. Searching the safe zone in order to hide the fact and justify the weakness are the common cognition of man from the very beginning. We, the Christians are called out community to sacrifice ourselves to serve others like a candle stick. we can visualize a disciplined Christ on cross who made himself empty to make others rich in God the father. His salvific praxis was very disciplined from the very beginning to end so the Christians need to serve the self by self-discipline in order to reshape to regain the fullness of image of God, depending on the grace and mercy of cosmic covenant of the creator executed with Noah because the Lord was pleased with Noah.

**The mandatory purpose of creation is self-affirmation.**

The Bible says that God created man in God’s own image to bear fruit. The nature of fruit is adding taste and suppling energy to others. In another sense, God gave His own image for the wellness of others. God created us not for us but for others. The fruit is subjected to provide life to lifeless by disappearing itself. The fruit can be symbolically defining as the core of human personality. Before the fall of Adam, who had a common personality that is absolutely divine. The violation made man inactive, unproductive, non-artistic in all perspective of all. In another words man lost the dive aspect of personality. The human made law became mandatory in the place of cosmic law. So the rhythm of creation started to mismatching. In the long process the man forced to stay at out of coverage area and pushed in to the pool of crisis, confusion, non-clarity and challenges. He started to bear his own fruit instead of bearing fruit according to the will of lord. His choice, priority and praxis became different from the purpose of creator and creation. The personality and track of cognition of fallen man also started to shaped and reshaped according to his own choice, priority and praxis. The ego and complex pushed him from the Centre of society to the border. Unless man get rid off the chain one cannot bear fruit. One can reshape the perspective and praxis by relating with right person who is God. In this point of view self-affirmation is coming back to the original source of life and reflecting the same by bearing fruit of righteousness. Jesus about to conclude his sermon on the mount by revealing who he is. He is one who incarnated as human beings to perform what his father in heaven wants to do. Doing the will of God is the
right attitude of right personality. The right attitude is the visible expression of self-affirmation.

**Conclusion**

In spite of all the changing psychosocial and economical context, the Christians are specially called by God to manifest the kingdom of God by self-awareness, self-discipline and self-affirmation. God graciously placed us on earth to do the will of God by correcting ourselves, giving priority to God’s plan.

Rev. Rajan Moses  
CSI East Kerala Diocese

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**Lent: A time of Transformation**

Isaiah 44: 21-28  
Romans 11: 13-24  
John 2: 1-11

**Collect:** God of grace, Who sweeps away our offenses like a cloud and our sins like the morning mist, We pray that You do not rebuke us, but deliver us from our iniquities, pour out Your grace upon us, transform us and graft us to You. For, we all belong to You, who sent Jesus into the world to save us, so that, though once sinners, we would believe in You and receive eternal life, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Lent is a period of self-directed spiritual exercises aiming at purification of mind and spirit. It is a religious observance that begins with Ash Wednesday that continues for about six weeks and ends up with Easter. It involves doing prayer, doing penance, repentance of sins, almsgiving and many Christians commit to fasting or giving up certain luxuries as a form of penance. Lent is being observed in commemoration of forty days Jesus spent fasting in the desert. Repentance means change of mind, turning from courses or ends hitherto preferred, to seek other ends or try other ways. In the O.T. God is represented in few occasions as repenting, changing his intentions (Amos 7:1-6; 1Sam 15:11), or undoing his own work through disappointment with the result (Gen 6:5, 6). More generally repentance is on human’s part Godward; it is turning from the evil life of disobedience to God to the path he has set.

Jesus calls humans to repent (Matt 4:17; Mk 1:15), to change their mind, purpose and expectation concerning God. Repentance is not merely an act but a full experience, including abhorrence of the sin from which one turns and a constant disposition toward complete amendment of life (2Cor 7:9, 10; Act 26:20). Let us reflect on the passages assigned for today.
God pleads with humans for repentance (Isa 44:21-28/ Ez.18:25-32)

The O.T. readings for today very clearly portray the grieving heart of the creator God who calls for withdrawing from the corrupt life style of the people. An unrighteous person’s end is death. This condemnation is not something externally brought in for the sake of punishing His created being; on the other hand it is an integral part of the creation itself. Sin has relation not only to a law, but also to a law-giver. It is not merely a departure from what is right, it is treason against God. Whoever transgresses against conscience and God misses the true aim and scope of his/her life. Sin has a darkening power- “I’ve blotted out as a thick cloud” (Is 44:22); every evil deed tends to obscure and to hide from us the face of God; and every evil deed tends to unfit us for the reception of the blessings that come down from above. Redemption is not a matter which has to be settled; it is already settled. God pleads, “Return unto me; for I have redeemed you (v. 22).”

Sinful people usually charge God with being unjust (Ez 18:25). But the scripture says that whatever God does is right. At the last judgment, every mouth will be stopped and every tongue will have to confess that God’s ways are righteous and just and in accordance with truth (Rev 19:2). God urges people to repent for four reasons: first, repentance is the only way to escape eternal separation from God; secondly, whoever will not repent shall surely perish; thirdly, God does not delight in the death of the wicked; and finally, he who repents will live for ever (Ez 18:30-32).

Future of the unrepentant (Rom 11:13-24)

Paul’s use of the olive tree revolves around faith and unbelief. When the Jews would not receive the Gospel, Paul turned to the gentiles and had his success as the ‘Apostle to the Gentiles.’ But the gentiles, in their turn, are to contemplate the restoration of the Jews to God’s favour, and to work for it. The apostle warns the gentiles that their engraffing into the olive tree of Christianity carries with it serious responsibilities (vs. 17-24). The Jews who were part of God’s olive tree have been removed because of their unbelief. Gentiles who came from wild olive trees have been grafted into the stock of Israel because of their faith. Paul gives the hope that someday the Jews would see what Christianity had done for the gentiles and repent and return to God. They may be re-grafted into the true tree; and gentiles can be removed if they abandon their faith. If it was possible for a wild olive to be engraffed into the garden olive tree, how much more is it possible that the olive tree’s own natural branches can be grafted in again! The paradox of human’s freedom and God’s sovereign election remains. Believers must respond to this by giving God thanks and praise for his inscrutable ways.

Transformation through obedience (Jn. 2:1-11)

The ‘miracles’ or ‘signs’ were not only intended to help people; they were intended to bring people to salvation. Jn 20:30, 31 says, “these miracles are recorded so that you will believe that he is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that believing in him you will have life.” Christ’s miracles were unique in that he performed them by virtue of his inherent power; all other miracles by God were made possible by delegated power, as stated in Acts 19:11, “God gave Paul the power to do unusual miracles.”

Turning water into wine symbolises the transformation Jesus brings in the life of a person who welcomes him, anxiety into peace, bewilderment into comfort, condemnation into
appreciation. He wants to see people that whenever he comes into a person’s life, a new quality emerges, a life which is vivid, sparkling and exciting. It is easy to transform one’s religious faith into legalisms and regulations. True faith is not obeying/observing religious regulations but being filled with the fullness of God’s grace, love, Spirit and Truth which is possible through complete submission to him. The transformation at Cana is the promise for those who are pretty much on the right track—those with a basic level of faith in God, who treat their neighbour with respect and mercy, who live a life of integrity, gentleness and self-control.

Lent is to be observed not as a religious rite, but as a spiritual exercise of transformation which begins internally through repentance and manifests in behaviour towards others, nature and God. May God help us to respond to God’s compassionate invitation to go through this process with the sense of submission and obedience.

Rev. Dr. Malhia Joshua
Union Christian College, Aluva
Ash Wednesday

Cross: A Call to Repentance

Isaiah 1: 16 – 20
2 Corinthians 7: 8- 16
Mark 1: 12 – 15

Collect: Merciful God, Who according to Your unfaithful love and compassion forgives our transgressions. We pray that You give us a contrite heart to repent our sins of resisting and rebelling against Your will. So that we would rejoice in gladness, always living in eagerness to do good and readiness to do justice, realizing that the Kingdom is at hand. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

Ash Wednesday marks the beginning of the holy season that calls for introspection, repentance and reconciliation. 40-day period which is an allusion to the separation of Jesus in the desert to fast and pray is adopted for Lent. The 40-day period of repentance is also analogous to the 40 days during which Moses repented and fasted in response to the making of the Golden calf. Ashes were used in ancient times to express grief. In the Old Testament we see that when Tamar was raped by her half-brother, "she sprinkled ashes on her head, tore her robe, and with her face buried in her hands went away crying" (2 Samuel 13:19). The gesture was also used to express sorrow for sins and transgressions. In Job 42:3–6, Job says to God: "I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye see you. Therefore, I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." The prophet Jeremiah calls for repentance by saying: "O daughter of my people, gird on sackcloth, roll in the ashes" (Jer 6:26). The prophet Daniel recounted pleading to God: "I turned to the Lord God, pleading in earnest prayer, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes" (Daniel 9:3). Christians continued the practice of using ashes as an external sign of repentance and turning to God.

Cross continues to be the sign of hope for it calls for repentance and thus for reconciliation and peace. Cross that was a sign of shame, guilt, punishment and death has been transformed into a sign of forgiveness, reconciliation, hope and life. Cross displays victory rather than defeat. Eph.2: 16 says that Christ has reconciled us to God and with one another through the Cross. He has nailed the hostility to the cross so that we may not live in conflict with God or with fellow beings.

Repentance is a Change of Mind and Behaviour

To repent means to change, or “have a change of mind.” In the New Testament the subject repentance chiefly refers to repentance from sin which involves both a turning from sin and a turning to God. This change of mind is a change of attitude and mental perspective, which results in a change in behavior. It means turning from the way of life that is contrary to God’s law, and turning to the way of life that is defined by God’s law. Repentance means to surrender one’s life—one’s whole being, both mind and body—to God’s will as expressed in His revealed Word.

Isa.1:16-20 says that God does not want to condemn and destroy his people. He offers full forgiveness and pardon if they would only repent, put away evil, strive to do right and obey
his word. God’s forgiveness is available for all who, though they have sinned, confess their sins, repent and accept God’s cleansing through the blood of Jesus Christ. The fruit of repentance can be visibly seen in one’s deeds. When people asked John the Baptist saying, ‘What shall we do then?’ He answered and said to them, ‘He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise.’ Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, ‘Teacher, what shall we do?’ And he said to them, ‘Collect no more than what is appointed for you.’ Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, ‘And what shall we do?’ So he said to them, ‘Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages’” (Luke 3:10–14). Hence, repentance is change, not only change of mind, but change of behaviour, as well.

**The Call to Repentance is at the Heart of The Kingdom Message**

John the Baptist, the divinely chosen herald of Christ’s first coming, came preaching a message of repentance: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matthew 3:2). Jesus too said, ‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand’ (Matthew 4:17). The apostle Paul went to the Jews and Greeks alike preaching the kingdom of God, a message of “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21, 25).

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus expounds the characteristics of the heirs of the Kingdom: They are not given to anger, violence, or pride; they mourn the injustices of society; they long for fairness and justice; they are merciful; they eschew immorality and perversion; and they are willing to endure hardships of every sort rather than compromise what they know to be right (Matthew 5:1–12). Heirs of the Kingdom are called upon to acquire these qualities, but obtaining such qualities is not possible for the impenitent. Repentance is required.

The whole of the Sermon on the Mount concerns the question of what one must do to enter the Kingdom of God. It provides an overview of the changes of mind and conduct heirs of the Kingdom are required to make: They hold God’s law in high esteem (5:17-20); recognize that sinful acts such as murder and adultery begin in the heart and sometimes require radical preventative measures (5:21–30); honor divinely ordained institutions such as marriage (5:31-32); highly value truthfulness (5:33–37); are always willing to put aside grievances and bear extra burdens in order to turn bad relationships into good ones (5:38–48). They closely examine their own motives and priorities, seeing to it that in all they think and do they “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness…” (6:33). Mark 1: 12-15 also indicate that Christ came to proclaim and bring to completion the kingdom of God. The kingdom and its power were present in the person and work of Jesus the King. Today, the church is called to manifest the power of God and rule in the lives of all who are marginalized and rendered powerless. The good news that ‘the kingdom of God is at hand’ must liberate the captives, restore sight to the blind and empower the weak.

**Repentance is the Fruit of Godly Sorrow**

2Cor. 7: 8-16 talks about two kinds of sorrows. There is a genuine sorrow for sin that leads to repentance and a change of heart. This type of repentance leads to salvation. Repentance from sin and faith in Christ are human responsibilities for salvation. In contrast, the unrepentant often become sorry only for the consequences of their sin; such sorry results in eternal death and judgement (2 Corinthians 7:10). Godly sorrow is contrition motivated by a love for God.
Such sorrow produces repentance. The “sorrow of the world,” on the other hand, is nothing more than self-pity. It “produces death” because it is self-centered rather than God-centered.

Contrition is important, but genuine repentance cannot be measured by how many tears a person sheds. Repentance is based on love and not on self-pity. It is a conviction and commitment, not an emotional state into which (or out of which) a person helplessly falls. Key to true repentance is confession. Unfortunately, our confession is often limited by what we are willing to admit. We hide our motives, not only from others, but also from ourselves. Somehow, we're able to shove our true motives into the darkened recesses of our minds, and pretend that certain of our past sinful actions were prompted by good intentions. Confession means being completely honest with oneself—and with God. King David seems to have suppressed his guilt after committing adultery with Bathsheba and sending her husband to a sure death on the front lines of combat. But once he was forced to face squarely what he had done, he confessed his sin and repented deeply and bitterly (Ps.51).

Conclusion

The cross calls for true repentance for it is at the foot of the cross that our sins are washed away. Repentance is the divinely appointed means of repairing the relationship between God and humankind. It is on the cross that all our divisions were healed and wall of separation has been broken. As we observe the Ash Wednesday, it is the opportune time for us to repent and rectify our relationship with God, fellow beings and even the creation. The Bible says, “Repent and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38). These divinely inspired words, spoken on the Day of Pentecost show that repentance is the first prerequisite for receiving the Holy Spirit. Let us look at the cross to be inspired to lead a transformed and Spirit filled life.

Rev. K. James Cecil Victor
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Department of Pastoral Concerns
The Cleansing Christ

Collect: Merciful God, Who has opened a fountain for us to be cleansed from our sins and impurities, We pray that, with Your unfailing love, cleanse us, redeem us and make us holy through the sacrifice of Your Son, , So that we may no more walk in darkness, but light and have fellowship with You and one another, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

As we are entering into Lenten Sundays we are called to meditate on how Jesus Christ acted as Cleansing Christ, Forgiving Christ, Accepting Christ and Liberating Christ. This first Lenten Sunday we are mediating on the Cleansing Christ. Cleansing has to do with our walk with God. Cleanliness of heart and life is essential to communion and fellowship with God. It is only in the divine nature that we can approach God; this divine nature should rule, and it can only rule as the old is kept on the cross by faith. Let us understand the attribution of this Cleansing Christ from today’s scripture lesson. May god our Lord help us to understand his attribution through this scripture portions.

I. The Cleansing Christ: A Fountain of Cleansing – Forgiveness – Renewing Relationship

“On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity” (Zech.13:1)

There will be a never ending supply of God’s mercy, forgiveness, and cleansing power. Here the prophet Zechariah gives us this picture of a fountain is similar to the never ending stream flowing out from the Temple (Ezek.47:1). The fountain is used in scripture to symbolize God’s forgiveness. In John 4, Jesus tells of his “living water” that satisfies completely. This chapter pictures, the final days of the earth as we know it. For God’s new era to begin, there must be a cleansing all evil must be abolished. On that day on the gospel day, a fountain will be opened, that is, provision made for the cleansing of all those from the pollutions of sin who truly repent. It is a fountain opened; it is open, not only to the house of David, but to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to the poor and lowly as well as to the rich and great. Therefore, idols will be banished, and false prophets will be ashamed of themselves and no longer try to deceive God’s people. Are you spiritually thirsty? Do you need to experience God’s forgiveness? Drinks from the fountain ask Jesus to forgive you and give you his salvation and receive His forgiveness and get into his flock. Through this we can renew our relationship with Christ a fountain of cleansing.

II. The Cleansing Christ: A Power of Cleansing – Forgiveness – Renewing Fellowship

“...we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7b)

Secondly, how does Jesus’ blood cleanse us from all sin?. In Old Testament times, believers symbolically transferred their sins to an animal, which they then scarified (Lev. 4). The animal died in their place to pay for their sin and to allow them to continue living in God’s favour. God graciously forgave them because of their fain in him and because they obeyed his commandments concerning the sacrifice. Those sacrifices anticipated the day when Christ would completely remove sin. Real cleansing from sin came with Jesus, “the Lamb of
God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29). Sin, by its very nature, brings death—
that is a fact as certain as the law of gravity. Jesus did not die for his own sins; he had none.
Instead, by a transaction that we may never fully understand, he died for the sins of the world.
When we commit our life to Christ and thus identify ourselves with him, his death becomes ours. He has paid the penalty for our sins and his blood has purified us. Just as Christ rose
from the grave, we rise to a new life of fellowship with him (Rom. 6:4).

All people are sinners by nature and by practice. At conversion all our sins are forgiven past,
present and future. Yet even after we become Christians, we still sin and still need to confess. This kind of confession is not offered to gain God’s acceptance but to remove the barrier to fellowship that our sin has put between us and him. It is difficult, however, for many people to admit their faults and short comings, even to God. It takes humility and honesty to recognize our weakness, and most of us would rather pretend that we are strong. But we need to fear revealing our sins to God. E knows them already. He will not push us way no matter what we’ve done. Instead, he will draw us to himself with his fellowship. Confession is supposed to free us to enjoy fellowship with Christ. It should ease our consciences and lighten our cares. When we come to Christ, he forgives all the sins we have committed or will ever commit. We don’t need to fear that God will reject us if we do not keep our slate perfectly clean. Our relationship with Christ is secure. Instead we should confess so that we can enjoy maximum fellowship and joy with him.

III. The Cleansing Christ: Filled with Compassion: Restoration in the Community

“If you choose, you can make me clean” (Mark 1:40)

Thirdly, in keeping with the law in Leviticus 13 and 14, Jewish leaders declared people with leprosy unclean. This meant the lepers were unfit to participate in any religious or social activity. Because the law said that contact with any unclean person made a person unclean, too. Some people even threw rocks at lepers to keep them at a safe distance. Even the mention of the name of this disabling disease terrified people. How astounding it was, then when Jesus reached out and touched this man who had leprosy. The real value of a person is inside, not outside. Although a person’s body may be diseased or deformed, the person inside is no less valuable to God. In a sense, we are all people with leprosy because we have all been deformed by the ugliness of sin. By sending his Son, Jesus, God has touched us, giving us the opportunity to be healed.

Although leprosy was incurable; many different types of skin diseases were classified
together as “leprosy”. According to the OT laws about leprosy (Leviticus 13-14), when a leper was cured, he or she had to go to a priest to be examined. Then the leper was to give a thank offering at the temple. Jesus adhered to these laws by sending the man to the priest, demonstrating Jesus’ complete regard for God’s law. Sending a healed leper to a priest was also a way to verify Jesus’ great miracle to the community.

Conclusion

Dear believers in Christ when we meditate upon the cleansing Christ we should understand
that the cleansing Christ is forgiving us. Christ has opened a fountain for us to be cleansed
from our sins and impurities. Through his power of cleansing, we receiving forgiveness and
renewing our relationship with god. His unfailing love, cleanses us, redeem us and make us holy through the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of him and his power of cleansing we could able to renewing our relationship with god as well as with human kind. The real value of a person is inside, not outside. Although a person’s body may be diseased or deformed, the person inside is no less valuable to God. By sending his Son, Jesus, God has touched us, giving us the opportunity to be healed. The cleansing is with a view to our having
fellowship with God. There was constant instruction in this truth under the Jewish
dispensation. Even after we have been cleansed from guilt, we need to be cleansed from
impure thoughts and desires, in order that we may be fitted for fellowship with him who is
Light. Our whole dependence for sanctification must be on the efficacy of the blood, along
with the agency of the Spirit. The cleansing is not accomplished at once and for ever. It is a
continual process. The precious blood of Christ exerts its purifying and sanctifying influence
until the heart and the life are thoroughly cleansed from all sin. May the cleansing Christ
help us to cleansing us and pave the way to have renewing our relationship, renewing our
fellowship and restore us in the community. Amen

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CSI Madras Diocese
Collect: Loving God, Who, revealed Your love to us by reconciling us to You through the death of Your Son and who continues to forgive all those who repent of their sins, We pray that, You do not remember our sins and our rebellious ways, rather, forgive us by Your words, “Your sins are forgiven”, So that we put off our old self, corrupted by its deceitful desires and put on the new self, living in holiness, being kind to one another and forgiving each other, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen

God established a beautiful relationship with human beings, but the human nature has polluted the beauty of this relationship. When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, their immediate response was not to ask forgiveness to God when they were caught red-handed. Instead they blamed each one and the other for their situation. The immediate realization of asking forgiveness for disobedience/sins has been substituted to pleading, blaming and pampering God. Human beings have developed these natures and have cultivated it as a habit.

In the OT text, Genesis 4: 8-16 we see the lives of Cain and Abel. Cain because he continued to be in relation with Lord, so bought some fruits of his labour presented to the Lord. Abel too like his elder brother continuing in the Lord’s relationship offered the first born to the Lord and his offering is accepted. In anger Cain immediately implements an action plan and kills his brother Abel. Lord questioned Cain and his reply was, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (4:9b), instead of asking forgiveness Cain justifies a question to the Lord. Therefore Lord declares punishment, Its then Cain pleads before the Lord, “My punishment is more than I can bear”4:13. For the act of his sin Cain did not ask for forgiveness before Lord instead for the consequence, Cain pleads before the Lord to reduce the punishment. Cain did not realize his sinful nature.

Loss of a relationship only makes us realize the importance of the relation in our life. Psalmist had a unique pattern to describe the experience of being in relationship with God and also those moments where Psalmist fails to recognize relationship with God.

- Firstly, Psalms 25: 1-7 tells about the condition of shame and asking God not to remember the sins of the youth vs.7.
- Secondly, God’s magnificent characters like goodness, uprightness, loving, and faithfulness are focused in Vs.8-9.
- Thirdly, a conditional question with answer is asked, who can make a covenant with God, only those who fear Vs.14-15.
- Fourthly, a reminder of the suffering condition and pleading for protection Vs. 16-22. The Psalmist recognizes God’s unique character in the midst of stressful conditions like shame, lost, misguidedness, guilt, troubled heart, lonely and afflicted. Though the Psalmist blames the situation, yet pleads God for the rescue.
Romans 5:6-11: Justification by faith gives us peace through Jesus Christ (Romans 5:1-5). Going beyond human limitation and expectation God has reconciled the broken relation through the justification of the blood of Jesus Christ. Since we have the blessed assurance that Jesus Christ has reconciled us, we try to pamper God. Using Jesus’s influence we try ourselves best at charity, talents, resources rather than seeking forgiveness. Since we failed time and again to realize our sins but busy pampering God, we have remained sinners. (Romans 5:8, while we were still sinners, Christ died for us).

St. Mark 2:1-12: Jesus was in Capernaum again and had come home. (Vs. 2:1) The visit of Jesus gathered crowd and there was no space in that place. In that moment four men carried a paralyzed man and place him before Jesus. The action by four men and the silence of the paralyzed man were clear for Jesus. So immediately Jesus responded, “Son your sins are forgiven” Vs. 2:5. In the presence of Jesus our shortcomings are revealed and in the attitude of meekness, whether we are in action or silent we wait in anticipation for His forgiveness. In the tone of confessional prayer when we ask for forgiveness, Jesus forgives us. He alone has authority to forgive sins, Vs. 2:10. When we realize our sins, all that we need to do is ask for forgiveness. When we receive forgiveness then we will experience movement in our relationship. (Like the paralyzed man who was unable to move, but he took up the mat and walked when Jesus told. Vs. 2:12.) Forgiven state is not a static/stagnant relation; it’s a living/active relationship in Christ.

Stanly, a 12 year old was very naughty and annoying boy at home. Parents made sure to punish him many times. But Stanly did not let go his pranks, day by day it increased. The punishments did not make him realize his faults. To escape from his punishments Stanly had recognized his parents’ weakness; he gained excellence in studies and achieved many merits being a successful student. The parents felt pampered by the achievements and easily let go the punishments. The child never learnt the importance of asking forgiveness as Stanly could not remain in good terms with his parents. The parents-child relationship could not sustain. We too many a times are like Stan trying to impress God with our successes. But God seeks a continuous relationship with us. We have a God who works hard to sustain our relationship. Many a times we try to pamper God with our achievements and merits to sustain relation. God knew the importance of being in relationship with human beings, so gave us a demonstration of the love through the life of Jesus. The very nature of Jesus Christ is to forgive and He has the authority. This nature of Jesus is not His weakness, so we cannot play around with our successes to be in His relation. With meekness and faithfulness when we seek Jesus Christ for the forgiveness, we are forgiven.

Cain pleaded from the fear of punishment and became a wanderer, since he did not repent for his sins. Psalmist blaming the situation asks for protection, not realizing that God is in control of all our situations. To Romans, Paul reminds that justification by blood of Jesus cannot be gained through pampering. Through our attitude of meekness, like the paralyzed man in silence; then the four men in their responsibility for others receives forgiveness. Let us realize-remain humble before the Lord, and Jesus alone sustains the beautiful relations through His very being by Forgiving us. Amen.
Collect: Merciful God, Who has established a covenant with us in righteousness, justice, love, compassion and faithfulness, We pray that, though we have gone astray, accept and restore us. For, we are Your children and You are our guardian-redeemer, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

God, who incarnated as Christ from the privileged lordship and chose to dwell among the imperfect biased aliens, established the radical egalitarian relationship beyond boundaries. The providential care of the creator God never abandon the creation with prejudice. This divine character and Godly love is expressed through Christ Jesus and visualized in His earthly life and ministry. He gave an open invitation to all towards Him and accepted the deprived, delinquent, and all those who are made underprivileged in the society. As Matthew 11:19 says He was identified as the friend of the sinners and tax collectors. And he felt honoured in touching, visiting and dining with the stigmatized and isolated community. This practical outworking of Christ’s love become the objectives for the church to follow and accomplish. Hence church, the community of Christ is called to be egalitarian in nature, by which all who accepts Christ are becoming the members of this body of Christ. This imagery signifies that all are equal in dignity and worth and directs us to be unbiased and have regard and respect for all.

The accepting Christ: restores the lost (Hosea 2:14 – 23)

During the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel, the spiritual morality of the Northern Kingdom of the Israel was deteriorated. They have forsaken their Lord God and violated their relationship with God. Their corrupted idolatrous life wiped out the religious activities. God viewed such idolatry as a form of harlotry. Hosea was prophesying in that adverse situation and addressed the corrupt and idolatrous northern kingdom. God commanded Hosea to accept a harlot Gomer and her children born of illegal relationships and demonstrated His inclination to receive them back. Thus God draws parallel between Gomer and Israel and symbolized Israel’s unfaithfulness and rejection of the Lord. Even though Israel cast off Lord, He promised restoration. In the beginning of the second chapter of Hosea God condemns the spiritual harlotry of Israel and charge them with punishment of destroying their festivals and withdraw the blessings. The second part of Hosea 2 from verses 14 – 23 explains God’s restoration of the Israel. The divine love of God shows His willingness to accept the Israel and summoned them to restore to him from their Idolatry sinful life and renews their relationship. The accepting Christ is still inviting the Lost to get back to Him.

The accepting Christ: retreives the undignified (Philemon 1-21)

The relationship of two individuals – Onesimus and Philemon, of unequal social status is rationalized in the Epistle of Paul to Philemon. The slave Onesimus absconded from his
master Philemon. He met Paul, accepted the gospel and became Christian. Paul renegotiates Philemon - Onesimus relationship by writing to Philemon addressing Onesimus as “my own heart”. In verses 15-16 Paul writes that Onesimus has been separated from Philemon “for a while so that you might have him back forever, no longer as a slave but… a beloved brother.” From the perspective of Philemon Onesimus is a useless slave. And legally he has all the rights to do anything he wants to Onesimus. However Paul approaches it with different perspective and urges Philemon to view it with love and accepts Onesimus in Christ. Although the letter to Philemon has no major Christological images, it is grounded in an Christological understanding that we live in Christ. In Christ we are brought into a relationship of Kinship with one another. Thus Paul praised the faith of Philemon for his Master and commands him to make that faith effective by doing his duty of breaking the class barriers and having a kinship relationship with Onesimus in Christ. The epistle also calls us to have such a relationship with our fellow beings. In the life of multiple social networks, we as participants are not sharing the same status. In particular people in the positions of power and authority are called to rationalize and transform such violent relationships and accept them with respect and esteem.

The accepting Christ: receives the forbidden (Matthew 15:21-28)

Matthew 15: 21 – 28 records Jesus’s encounter with the Canaanite woman. As Jesus entered into Tyre and Sidon, the Canaanite woman recognized Him as “Son of David” and greeted Him and called him to heal her demon possessed daughter. The disciples requested Jesus to send her away. Hearing her Jesus at first did not heed to her, but he refused to send her away. Rather He explains her that His mission is first to the lost sheep of Israel. She kneeled before Jesus, and once again recognizes His Kingship. Jesus compared her status as a gentile to the status of dog. The Jewish people considered Canaanites as untouchables and cursed. Yet she conversed with Him and exhibited her Faith with a remarkable statement. She stated that the Son of David has left over power for this forbidden gentile woman and asked for a crumb from the Master Jesus Christ to heal her demon possessed daughter. Her faith was appreciated and accepted by Christ. Subtly this woman expresses that Jesus Christ is not only for the particular strata of people rather He is the hope of the world. Thus Jesus’ meeting with the outsider Canaanite women and granting healing to her daughter prompts the church to enter new territory and receives the forbidden breaking the boundaries.

Conclusion

Christ revolutionizes the hegemonic clashes in the society and attempts to bring an egalitarian kingdom in the world. Indeed it ought to be the strategy of the church. Sadly the reverse has happened and the economical, social prejudices predominates the church and made the life of the church uncertain. Setting the accepting Christ as the model, Church is called over again to perform its mission to receive the deprived world into Christ breaking boundaries.

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The Liberating Christ

Exodus 3: 1-13
Galatians 5: 1-12
Luke 13: 10-17
Psalm 82

Collect: Liberator God, who always sees our misery and hears our cry, set us free from the yoke of slavery and infirmities. So that, neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from Your love, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

All these biblical portions are immensely rich for contributing profound insights on the theme ‘Liberating Christ.’ Only three insights are mentioned here. These three insights state about the methods of God for liberation.

A Postcolonial Method of God (Exodus 3: 10)
Moses was a shepherd; a powerless person in the society; living under his father-in-law; keeping a status of a servant; not efficient even to speak well; never an administrator; not at all a dominant figure; not a political leader but God called him to liberate a huge community of slaves from the colonial and military power of Pharoah. Usually, liberating mission should be entrusted with a powerful, authoritative, dominant, efficient, influential, competent, political and resourceful person. Here all these characteristics go with Pharoah. He stands as a colonialist who imposes own culture, language, taxes, and military power and controls the lives of others economically, politically, and geographically. As a consequence Israelites were conquered and became slaves under the colonial power of Pharoah. Instead of making an another person more powerful colonial master than Pharoah to liberate the oppressed community God uses an ordinary powerless person, Moses, to liberate the slaves. It means that God is with the victimized, the exploited, the vulnerable, the subjugated, the dominated and the broken. Moreover, God calls persons from the same community to liberate own people or a person, an outsider, who has a mind of solidarity to be with the subaltern. Making leaders from the downtrodden community to stand against the colonial power in order to liberate the victims is a postcolonial method. Therefore, God the liberator is a postcolonial God who demands us to be with the subalterns and to stand against the power-oriented colonial structures and systems. The life and work of Jesus Christ is the convincing example for the same.

A Postmodern Method of God (Exodus 3:13)
Constructing definition and fixing it forever is a methodology of modernity. This epistemological exercise takes place with an intention of establishing power for becoming a master or controller over the subjects, objects, history, events, cultural factors, social moralities, policies and principles which have been defined. If someone defines something authoritatively it means that that person wants to be the master of the same since that person pretends that he or she knows and defines it. The problem of definition is that it makes the things closed and fixed. Constructing and establishing definition is a political notion that brings power to the definer. But postmodernism objects this power-oriented exercise.
Postmodernism wants everything open with fluid in nature. Closing and fixing the boundaries of a matter stops the task for further understandings. If someone claims that he or she knows something perfectly it means that that person is dead in seeking and knowing the next stage of the same thing. Everything is in the process of growing up towards its next state. Nothing can be found out in a perfect state. Therefore, constructing definition is a wrong process. What we understand now is only a sign of present state. It will definitely change in the near future. Understanding, instead of defining or concluding a matter, is the proposal of postmodernism. Moses was asking God that if the Israelites ask him the name of God, what should he say? God, instead of defining God, just said that “I am who I am.” It means that I do not want to define me and at the same time nobody has any right to define me. God does not stand for defining God’s own Being because Being is becoming. Let everything open is the position of God. It is clearly a postmodern method. Faith should be open and should not try to define God from liberation perspective. Jesus Christ kept an open faith in order to declare solidarity with the downtrodden communities. Jesus Christ challenged the closed and fixed boundary of the faith of Judaism in order to accommodate others as a part of the mission of liberation.

An Existential Method of God (Galatians 5:1)

Existentialism seeks the nature of existence of human beings with a deep analysis of the survival factors. Furthermore, existentialism struggles to bring freedom to the individuals and at the same time it reminds about the responsibility which is embedded within the frame of freedom. The passage vividly states that God has set us free for establishing freedom (v.1). In existentialism everyone should experience freedom with responsibility but does not talk about the one who sets freedom. Otherwise, this philosophical notion would like to believe that human freedom is based on the basis of human efforts. God wants to correct it by saying that God has set human beings free. The question of responsibility, it has been also acknowledged in existentialism, is clearly mentioned here. You have been set free for becoming a channel of freedom for others. Here, freedom is the existential experience of human beings given by God. Standing for others’ freedom is the existential responsibility of human beings set by God. This vision gives us an insight that God is the existential ground of creation. In short, freedom is the nature of human existence and extending freedom to the lives of others is the mission of human existence. This should be seen as God’s existential method in order to experience freedom which is already there in the existence of human beings and to take up the responsibility for respecting and being with the freedom of others and becoming a channel of freedom of creation.

All these three methods of God stand for the liberation of creation. The life and work of the incarnated God, Jesus Christ, re-establishes this target of God.

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United Theological College, Bengaluru
Presbyter, CSI Cochin Diocese
Passion Sunday

Cross and the Restoring Christ

Job 42: 10 – 17  
Ephesians 2: 1-10  
Psalm 126  
Mark 10: 46 – 52

Collect: Restoring God, Who out of Your great love for us, releases us from all kinds of captivity, Forgive our transgressions and make us alive, So that our sight is restored to acknowledge You as our Lord and follow You, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

The Gospel according to St. Mark can be divided into three parts. While the first part deals with the public ministry of Jesus in Galilee (1:14-8:21), the second part consists of the journey of Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (8:22-10:52), and the third part is set in Jerusalem where we read about Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection (11:1-16:8). And then there is an epilogue (16:9-20) providing a summary of various post-resurrection appearances. The above passage (Mark 10:46 - 52) falls within the second session where Jesus Journey from Galilee to Jerusalem is mentioned, and as we know that is a journey towards Cross. In the Cross, we find a 'restoring Christ', who restores the whole humanity by defeating Satan, conquering sin and abolishing death. As Jesus walks towards this Cross, where the whole humanity is restored, He never ignores any opportunity to restore many who approached Him for spiritual, material, social, psychological and physical restoration. Here, we find Jesus on His way to the Cross, restoring the sight of the blind man by name 'Bartimaeus'.

The three highlights in this incident are:
(1) Realizing the Restorer
(2) Realizing the Restoration
(3) Realization of the Restoration

1) Realizing the restorer

"When he heard that it was Jesus of Nazareth, he began to shout, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” (Mark 10: 47).

Bartimaeus, son of Timaeus, was blind but he realized who the real restorer was. All these years there were many to 'offer' but no one to 'restore'. He had never seen the people who had offered him coins, but even as his eyes were blind, he could see the one through whom he could be restored. And therefore he cried to Jesus to have mercy upon him. It is the need of our time to realize the True Restorer, who alone could restore our sight. Today, though our eyes are open, inwardly we are blindfolded, that we overlook or ignore or forget Jesus as the Restorer. We are carried away by the 'offers' of this world that we tend to remain away from Jesus who restores. The comfort that we get through our friends, social networks and pleasures of this world are good to a certain extent, but never enough to restore us. Let us on this Passion Sunday, come to Him and to the foot of the Cross, to be restored, physically and spiritually.
2) Realizing the restoration

*Throwing his cloak aside, he jumped to his feet and came to Jesus.* *(Mark 10:50)*

Bartimeus' plea never went unheard. Jesus said, "Call him", and the disciples ran to him to tell him "Cheer up! On your feet! He’s calling you." Though we read that the restoration happens only a few moments later, Bartimeus already had the feeling that his restoration had already begun. The fact that Jesus has heard his prayer, gives him the confidence that he would be restored and therefore, he throws his cloak aside, jumps to his feet and comes to Jesus. He realizes that he no more would require that cloak which he had used to receive the worldly perks. He realizes that he no more was destined to live at the mercy of others. He realized his destiny was to change in a moment. Yes, our Lord hears our pleas and prayers and he is there to restore us. No more we need to depend on the 'cloaks' of this world, because the the Lord is at work to restore us. Therefore, let us leave our 'cloaks', jump to our feet and go to Jesus to be restored, physically and spiritually.

3) Realization of the restoration:

*Immediately he received his sight and followed Jesus along the road.* *(Mark 10:52)*

Bartimeus goes to the 'Restorer', realizing that his 'restoration' had already begun. Jesus asks him, what Bartimeus wanted Jesus to do for him, to which the latter replies, "I want to see". Bartimeus was very clear about what he expected from Jesus and therefore he puts it very succinctly, 'SIGHT'. And Jesus responds positively by saying, "Go, your faith has healed you." At the first reading we feel that the sight Bartimeus had sought and that which Jesus had restored is mere 'physical'. However, the the verse 52, which refers to Bartimeus' response gives us a broader version of the 'sight' that Jesus had restored. It says, when he received the sight, he 'followed Jesus along the road'. As we have already seen, this road was the road to the cross. He could have gone back to his family or his friends, rather he chose to follow the path of the cross. the 'realization of restoration' should lead us to walk with Jesus, and that is definitely the way of the Cross. This year's Passion Sunday, once again reminds us to take up the cross and follow Jesus and not just about Jesus who has restored us physically and spiritually.

Conclusion

On this year's Passion Sunday, let us realize
1. Jesus, who upon the Cross laid His life for us to restore us, is our only Restorer.
2. Jesus, who upon the Cross laid His life for us to restore us, has already begun our restoration.
3. Jesus, who upon the Cross laid His life for us to restore us, is calling us to join Him.

Rev. Viji Varghese Eapen
CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese
Palm Sunday

Christ: The King of Peace

Zechariah 9:1-12
Ephesians 2: 11 – 22
Mark 11: 1-11

Psalm 24

Collect: Almighty God, the King of glory, Whose rule extends to the ends of the earth and who proclaims peace to all, May You triumphantly enter into our lives and destroy the barriers and dividing walls of hostility among us, So that we become one body, one humanity, and Your holy temple, built together to become Your dwelling place, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

It was a day of grandeur in the city of Jerusalem. It was a day of excitement and joy for the masses. It had always been a day of zeal and expectation for the politically minded people. Our Lord Jesus Christ co-opts the symbolisms and the expectations of the day to enact a deconstruction of the Messianic Expectation. Far from the military messiah looked forward by the people, Jesus assumes the Zacharian posture of a humble king who “shall command peace to all nations,” (Zac. 9: 9,10). The passage in Zachariah is a unique one that coalesces the vocabulary of war and peace together, i.e., “triumphant and victorious” “humble” “command peace”. This is what Jesus tries to do on a day which witnesses the nationalistic zeal reaching a feverish pitch. “Riding on a donkey, on a colt, the foal of a donkey”, Jesus recasts the messianic image as a Prince of Peace.

1. Peace as Reimaging our Expectations

The most disconcerting truth about our Lord Jesus was that no one could use him to promote their purposes. He refused to fix into anyone’s expectation. That was so, because the life of Jesus Christ was set to the scheme of Shalom set by God, His father. The messianic scheme of Shalom, which the prophets foretold in the Old Testament, was radically opposed to the Jewish expectation. The image of a warrior messiah was recast by Jesus “humble” and “riding on a donkey”. The town of Jerusalem was teeming with people. Those who looked forward to the divine Shalom promised by Jesus shouted hosannas for him. Those who wanted a political leverage within the present setup were worried and angered by the exuberance of the masses. It was a day to choose either to be with the Lord or on to be on the opposite side. Over the centuries, this day, the Palm Sunday, has been calling us all to evaluate our expectations in the light of God’s scheme of Shalom for the whole earth. If found to be on an opposite course, we are called upon to recast or reimage our expectation to ensure that we are on our Lord’s side.

2. Peace as Recovering the Ideals of Worship

In the history of the Temple of Jerusalem, the worship of Yahweh is its primary focus and function. When Moses demands liberation of the Hebrew slaves form, the reason was to worship Yahweh. When the people of Israel carried the make shift Tabernacle along with them in the wilderness, it was to worship their Lord who travelled with them. When the Temple of Jerusalem was planned and executed, it was ostentatiously for proper worship of the Lord. However, it failed from its inception to have worship as its focus and central
motive. It rarely served as a place where people could connect with the Almighty. More lamentable was the fact that the Temple has become an ethnic marker. It was used more to exclude people and keep them afar from its holy place. While cleansing Jesus, in his righteous indignation, uses an expression from Isaiah 56, “...for my house shall be called a house of prayer of all peoples”. The quote is from a chapter that promises a covenant to be extended to all people who obey the Lord. This promise in effect overturns the prohibitions made in Deut. 23. Jesus believes that a proper worship of God is possible only when all the people of allowed to participate in the affairs of the sanctuary without any discrimination. Secondly, it is important to recover the dimension of prayer as the primary function of the Temple, since it is prayer, which promises the true relationship with God.

3. Peace as Reclaiming the Place of Worship

The Temple of Jerusalem has accrued to itself a singular eminence among the Jewish community. The monopoly of the Temple was so complete during Jesus’ times that it had failed to notice how far it had deviated from its original purpose of functioning as the place of worship. The Jerusalemites and the ruling echelons of the Jewish society have conspired to exploit the religiosity of the people to promote their lust for power and wealth. When the kingdom of Judah was nearing the end of its existence, the Temple was thought to be an impregnable presence of God promising security for the ruling elite from all forces. Making use of the phrase from a fierce diatribe against the ruling class that arrogate saying, “This is the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord”, Jesus voices God’s anguish echoed through Jeremiah (Jer. 7). As the prediction of Jeremiah (Jer. 7:12-15) came true in the history of the First Temple (2 Kin. 25), Jesus too predicted the destruction of the Second Temple (Mk. 13:2) and it came to pass in CE 70. Like Jeremiah, Jesus’ condemnation, too, is against the powerful for their exploitation of the place of worship for promoting their own agenda. Those who want to wield power and trade off shall never abuse the place of worship. This day, the Palm Sunday, is a stern warning against any such abuse of the place of worship, which is condemned by our Lord. For how can anyone think about peace without being able worship in peace?

Conclusion

We all would like to devote upon a Lord who would always assure us peace no matter what we do. We use this day more to parade our witness in front of the world than to seriously introspect and evaluate ourselves in the light of the severe condemnations pronounced on this day, the Palm Sunday, upon the spurious religiosity. We do not want a Prince who would “command peace” from a Church which has lost its focus as the “house of prayer for all people”. Only when we re-imagine our expectations and recast the purpose of our religion, place of worship can we radically reclaim the ideals of worship in truly connecting with the God of Shalom.

Rev. Benjamin Inbaraj
CSI Madras Diocese
Maundy Thursday

Christ: The Life Giving Bread

Exodus 12: 12-20
1Cori 11: 23-29
Psalm 116
John 6: 47 – 58

Collect: Enlivening God, Whose dear Son, on the night before He suffered, instituted the Sacrament of His Body and Blood, who in these holy mysteries gave us a pledge of eternal life. Mercifully grant that we may receive it thankfully, proclaiming our deliverance from slavery and death. So that, we lift up the cup of salvation, call on Your name and walk before You, in the land of the living. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction:

Bread is the primary source of nourishment. Throughout the World it is the basic form of food. The type of bread may vary but the fact is that all human beings need bread and everyone’s life revolves around securing bread for their life. Still millions of poor people are struggling for their bread when some people have enough bread and yet seek cakes and other confectionary.

It is in this context we are meditating on Christ as the life-giving bread. ‘Cake is for a few but bread is for all’. Jesus is the savior of the World. Jn 4 :42.

1) New Bread: The Israelists were slaves in Egypt. They ate the bread of toil, suffering and pain. The life of a group of people who believed that they are children of God, became miserable and for about 400 years - for many generations their living bread came to them by hard labour and losing all their dignity and identity. They were provided with bread - but not for them to live - for some one else’s benefit. This led to the prayer of freedom.

Our OT lesson takes about the Passover meal which they ate just before leaving the land of oppression. The preparation is very clearly narrated in the Exodus reading. The people of god were instructed to eat unleavened bread. The leaven / yeast / bacteria of the land of slavery need to be removed. Not just one day, seven days of eating bread without leaven! ‘No trace of your past life and past slavery should be part of the bread you eat’. What a wonderful, well planned journey of freedom! The new bread which they eat will be made by them and without the trace of their past life a new life in a new land begins with a NEW BREAD.

2) New Covenant: In the life journey of the Israelites covenant made with God was their life line. The covenant God made with Abraham was transformed and elaborated on Mt. Sinai. The Sinai covenant which was thought to be ‘New’ was predominantly ‘moral’ and ‘ethical’. However the ‘knowledge’ of God and His deeds were the motivating forces for the people in the journey to fulfill the law. However inspite of God providing bread and water in the wilderness, the people were never content with the provisions of God. The promise ‘I will be your God and you shall be my people’ needed to be reminded again and again. Jer 31:31-34
is an example of continuing acts of slavery and God’s attempt to bring freedom and new life through the New covenant.

It is in this continuing story of salvation / freedom the new covenant made with us all in the blood of Jesus gains importance. Every time we celebrate Eucharist we give thanks for the divine love which enfolds us. The sacrificial love of Jesus is inviting us to the table. He is the bread and the wine. His body and blood is offered to us. It is our willingness ‘to know’ him and to relate to him which will qualify us to continue in the journey of life as people of the new covenant.

3) **New Life** : People who were slaves in Egypt, found a new life. People who were in bondage in Babylon, found a new life. People who were under Roman rule and the clutches of Jewish law found a new life. People who were in the shadows of death found a new life. People who were in darkness found a new light and life. We were ‘No people’ but we found new life. Jesus is the ‘bread of life’. It is not like the bread which our forefathers ate and eventually died. When people accept Jesus - the life he offers is eternal - everlasting. It is a life based on love. It demands commitment to the covenant. It is not by our might. The ability to live a new life comes through his Grace. People who have a personal experience of this ‘new life’ radiate the newness to others. The Church which is the body of Christ - consists of such radiance. The task for anyone to have this new life is to come into the fold and relate to this divine process.

**Conclusion**: We call the main earning members of the family as “bread winner”! Bread is essential for this temporary life on earth. We need Bread daily. We pray ‘give us this day our daily bread! But Jesus said ‘I am the bread of life. Are you winning Bread for your life?

Are you winning Jesus for your life?

If you realize Jesus as the living Bread you will never grow hungry.

Rev. A. Suresh Kumar
CSI Trichy-Tanjore Diocese

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Good Friday
Cross: Self Giving Love

Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12
1 Peter 2: 21 – 25
Psalm 22
Mark 15: 22 - 41

Collect: Ever Loving God, Who, taking up our sin and bearing our suffering, lived among us as a suffering servant, even unto the death upon the Cross. By Your wounds, may we be healed and by Your self-giving at the Cross may we die to sins and live for righteousness, to pour out our love for all, the broken humanity. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction
Good Friday is the festival of the Cross. We call the day Good Friday in the sense it is the day of the Good Lord, the originator of the goodness. Good Friday is also called the Big day because the person who died on the cross is great in the world. In Roman empire, cross was the symbol of the shame. Cross was used to crucify the cruelest offenders for severe punishment. Hence, for the first three centuries of the Christian church, cross was not distinguished to remember the sacrificial death of Christ. Firstly, fish was used as a symbol, basically been a symbol of Christ. Then boat was used to denote the saving grace of God to signify the redeeming act of Noah as commanded by God.

Emperor Constantine identified cross with Christ’s love. Constantine was convinced that the Christian God was greater than any other God or Roman emperors. Before his victory at the Melvin bridge battle, Emperor Constantine saw a vision of the cross in the sky and heard the voice saying “Conquer with this sign”. Immediately he replaced his eagle sign with the sign of the cross. As all the gospels narrate, Jesus was crucified and died which was accounted as the most degrading form of punishment. Ever since such a symbol of insult became of symbol of forgiveness and dedication to Christians (Gal. 3: 13, 6 : 14, Phil. 2 : 8)

“The Self Giving Love” of Jesus on the cross can be developed for meditation in a three dimensional approach. I. The Servanthood of the Lord, II. The Submissiveness of the incarnated Lord, III. The Sacrifice of the Crucified Lord

1. The Servanthood of the Lord (Isaiah 52: 13 – 53: 12)
This passage of prophecy explains the servanthood of Jesus Christ who suffered for the sake of God’s will and so was highly exalted by the Lord. Humiliation and exaltation, suffering and glory are the key themes in this prophecy. Jesus purchased salvation for His followers on the cross. The cost of discipleship is proved through all kinds of humiliation. Before experiencing the actual crucifixion, Jesus looked at the crowd who wanted to follow Him and said, “Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me (Mark 8: 34)”. Come immediately after Jesus, Take up the cross, and follow Jesus” is the prediction of His experience of carrying the cross. Jesus also called the disciples to take up their cross. “Take up the cross” is coupled with “denying oneself” and taking up the cross”. Jesus was asking a new orientation to life and our relationships. Our natural inclination is self-preservation and it leads to self-centeredness, a complete pre-occupation with one’s own self. Jesus is very conscious of this process. The cross is the supreme moment
in which Jesus revealed that His whole life is oriented towards the lives of others, towards building others, and saving others. The supreme love of Jesus on the cross leads in the culmination of our discipleship which must reflect His servanthood. Yes, the Son of man came to serve others, but, not to be served by others. Do we take up this concept His?

2. The Submissiveness of the Incarnated Lord. I Peter 2: 21 – 25
We notice in this section of the letter the virtue of Jesus’s submission. This is seen from I Peter 2: 13 to 3: 6. It involves Christians “submitting” to the people around them, taking note of the position in which God puts them (See. I Peter 2: 13 &14). The greatest example in this matter is Jesus Himself. Paul says that Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death even death on the cross. The greatest characteristics in the life of Jesus are humility, obedience and self-renunciation. He wanted not to dominate men and women but only to serve them, he wanted not to exalt Himself but only to renounce all His glory for the sake of the world. This must be the hallmark of Christians. Yes, the followers of Christ must think always not of themselves but of others, not of their own glory but the glory of God.

3. The Sacrifice of the Crucified Lord (Mark 15: 22 – 41)
The above scriptural passage speaks about the crucifixion of Jesus. The gospels tell the story of death of Jesus very briefly, the gospels’ simple purpose is to say that He was killed and there were many witnesses. Why did Jesus die? By His death on the cross, He made it possible for us to be forgiven by God. Our sins deserve punishment, but Jesus took the punishment upon Himself. That is why we say that He died for us (Isaiah 53: 4 – 5), I Cor. 15: 3). He did at that time what we could not do for ourselves. What He did will never to be done again. A Christian is someone who knows that he has been forgiven. Since, Jesus won and the power of evil was broken forever, we will never be overcome by it. Jesus died because He loved us. He showed us our own sinfulness. One of the incidents that happened during the journey to crucifixion is that of Simon of Cyrena who was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. Simon’s carrying for Jesus brought him worldwide honour and fame. His cross bearing brought him honour to himself too. He might not have enjoyed it at that time but it brought him the high privilege of relieving Jesus of some suffering at the time of His crucifixion. Mark’s picture of crucifixion of Jesus is that he is crucified with the criminals - a very unorthodox picture. We are so used to worshipping Jesus in the sanctuary of Churches and Cathedrals, and so used to seeing Jesus among the saints. But this picture of Jesus with the criminals is a revolutionary one. Thus the intensity of God’s Sacrifice and love is expressed in God’s togetherness with the suffering.

Dr. K.C. Abraham, a leading third world theologian’s quote is an apt conclusion for this meditation: “The cross always comes with a challenge to us to move beyond the limits and borders which we set to accept the other. Our solidarity with a person in need is more important than asking all kinds of questions about the circumstances and justifying our failure to act”.

Rev. Dr. Stephen Lionel
CSI Tirunalveli Diocese
Holy Saturday

Hope for the New Life

Daniel 12: 1-4               Psalm 4
1 Peter 4: 12-19           Mathew 27: 62-66

Collect: God of hope, Whose face shines upon us and who fills our heart with joy, Grant us the grace to rejoice as we participate in the sufferings of Your Son while leading many to righteousness, So that our names would be is found in the book of life and we awake from the dead to the everlasting life, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

The day after the crucifixion and burial of Jesus Christ was not a regular day in the life of the faith community in Jesus’ period. It was not just Jesus who was crucified and buried but also the long awaited hope of the people, those who were waiting for Messiah who will redeem the people of God that was assumed and revealed in the life and the ministry of Jesus Christ was thwarted and the disciples were left in darkness. In nutshell, it was a hopeless eve for them. But they do not know that there is a possibility of light after this staunch darkness and there will be a dawn after this night. And that was assured in the next morning with a message from the open and the empty tomb. Therefore this day calls us for a self-realization that there is a possibility of new life even in the midst of unpleasant circumstances. Indeed there is a hope for new life in Christ in the midst of hopeless situations. And it is our faith that works and stimulates this hope in Christ. The death can never be an end in itself; rather it is a new beginning that springs with a new hope and a new life in Christ. The given lectionary gives us the exploration of what this hope would really bring in our lives.

The hope we have in the life and resurrection of Jesus has three dimensions.

Hope in Redemption…

Hope in Rejoicing…

Hope in Eternal Life...

1. Hope in Redemption

The message that was communicated through the life of Jesus Christ was nothing but the liberation of people from the bondage and from the clutches of the sin. Here after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, the same kind of bondage and the imprisonment was laid for the tomb of Jesus. The Gospel text Matthew 27:63-66 exemplifies what kind of protection was laid to keep the power of resurrection behind the closed tombs. Yet, nothing could stop it. The hope that is laid in this eve behind this closed tomb is that it will be opened tomorrow. The same way, our life can also never remain in bondages and behind the closed walls; there is a hope for new life, that we will be redeemed through the power of Jesus Christ.

2. Hope in Rejoicing
For the disciples and the followers of Jesus it was not a festive eve; but it was a evening in which they were left without hope and mourning. They never knew what was laid ahead of them, and what the morning would bring in their life. But the hope that Jesus gave in their life is that, their mourning will be turned in to rejoicing as mentioned in 1Peter 4:13, and that has become the central message to the life of the disciples in their future ministry. They realized that, we are partners with Christ in sufferings and He gave us the hope to rejoice even in the midst of sufferings. Therefore this calls us also to understand the fact that there is celebration awaiting after this mourning. So let us not just stay behind this grave situations in mourning and prepare to become partners in Christ not only in sufferings but also in celebrating his victory over death through his resurrection.

3. Hope in Eternal Life

Before the resurrection of Jesus Christ, for the people those who witnessed the cross of the Christ, death is an end in the life of human beings. And there is no hope left after the death of a person. This hopeless situation was changed through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The opened tomb communicates the message that there is a life everlasting. As said in Daniel 12:172, the people will be redeemed and will arise with the hope of eternal life. This was assured in this eve. Our life is not going to be end here within, but it is going to have a new shape and a new meaning with the hope in the resurrected Christ.

Therefore this eve, is not an evening to stay behind with mourning and to observe it with sober and sadness but to celebrate it with hope for new life that is assured in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Mr. J. Andrews Christopher  
CSI Thoothukudi-Nazareth Diocese

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**Collect:** God of Life, Who through Your dear Son Jesus Christ, overcome death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life; grant that we who celebrate with joy, Christ’s rising from the dead, be raised from death to life, So that, our natural and perishable bodies sown in dishonor and weakness be raised as spiritual and imperishable bodies in glory and power, and inherit the Kingdom of God, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James and several other women who were part of the Jesus movement had centred their lives around the mission and ministry of Jesus. Several of their personal lives were transformed by Jesus and they were all passionate about the Messianic dream. But the cross and the death abruptly disrupted their plan and their dream. They almost gave in to the melancholy of death. Celebration paved way to the rituals centred around death and dying until at the tomb they encountered the gospel of resurrection and new life.

**Easter Transforms the Symbols of Death into Symbols of Celebration**

When the women set out on their journey the symbols they had in mind were all centred around death. They were going to the tomb, they had with them spices that were to be anointed on the body and they were worried about the stone.

However the dawn on the first day of the week had something very different in store for them. They saw the stone rolled away and when they went in they did not find the body but two men in dazzling clothes standing beside them and proclaiming a message of new hope.

Symbols can sometimes be potent and powerful pointers to realities beyond generations and across time. We live in a context where the dance of death, be it in the name of religious fanaticism, terrorism, state sponsored massacres or war is on the increase. The tombs continue to be the resting place of hopes and aspirations of the peoples. The body- which loses its identity and essence once life is taken away -is many a times made part of the political weaponry and arsenal. There is quite a lot of weeping around death of dear ones in the world today at inappropriate timings and in cruel ways. The agony of the cross is being re-enacted in multifarious ways around us today. Spices for the body and the stone at the tomb continue to instill the pain of the nothingness beyond and the abruptness of the end.

It is herein the dawn becomes a symbol. There is no darkness of the night that will not give way to the new dawn. The first day becomes in itself the possibility of a new beginning, a fresh start. The stone rolled away becomes the powerful pointed to the new beginning and at the rolling away of all that would keep life at bay. The open tomb and the stone rolled away
become a symbol of celebration of a new beginning- a fresh lease of LIFE. That is the essence of Easter.

**Easter Transforms the Message of Death into a Message of Life**

The death of Jesus, that too in a very gruesome manner of public disgrace, would have shattered the women. The burial would have been a devastating experience for each of them. Several questions about death would have haunted them. Mary Magdalene who had seen the life changing intervention of Jesus in several lives including hers would surely have had serious questions as to why the power of Jesus seemed so limited on the cross. Joanna who was part of the inner core team of Jesus would have thought if it were all in vain investing so much on the movement. Several questions, several doubts and the smell of death that permeates the tomb would have been still fresh in the minds.

But the stone rolled away and the men standing by them sharing the message of life would surely have been a life transforming experience for them. The men asked a very pertinent question- Why do you look for the living among the dead? The Easter message was then very clearly proclaimed He is not here. He is Risen.

Looking for the Living among the dead has become the order of the day. Religion becoming institutionalised has brought with it the big danger of the “deadness of institutionalism” and people who have not had the life transforming encounter with Christ continue to look for the living among the dead. Searching for a Living Christ among the dead has been one factor that took away the focus of the God search of generations. The message of Easter- HE is not HERE, He is RISEN must fall afresh in the lives of the seekers today when they confine their search to places where the risen Lord is not while being omnipresent.

**Easter transforms the journey of gloom into a journey of remembrance and Hope**

When the women set out on a journey that was a journey aimed at anointing the dead body of Jesus. That would surely not been what they would have wanted to do under any circumstances. All the gloom the death of a dear one can bring in could have been their life experience. But the encounter of the men in the tomb was a life transforming encounter.

The Journey became a journey of remembrance. The men in dazzling cloths reminded them of what Jesus had already forewarned them while at Galilee- of the handing over, of the cross and more so of his resurrection. On hearing this they remembered and were astonished and amazed. They returned to the other apostles and disciples- the eleven and reported to them their experience. The journey on the way back was them a journey of new found memory and new found hope.

The pointer to the forgetfulness of the people around Jesus of the core message of the Master is something that should be taken seriously. Words like being handed over to sinners and be crucified are still anathema for even the prosperity preachers. But the Easter reminder was focussed on “on the third day- rise again.” Celebration in Christ can happen only when we understand the essence of this Life- that cannot be contained by the death or the tomb. The excitement of the women in reporting their experience was met with responses of disbelief and brushing it aside as idle talk. But Peter did run to the tomb, looked and saw the clothes as
the women shared. The journey of Hope becomes a journey that draws others to the resurrection experience.

The role of the two men in dazzling clothes should also be closely looked. They came beside the women in deep distress and gloom. They shared with them the core of the resurrection story- He is not here. He is Risen. They reminded them of what had told them and they were instrumental in transforming the focus of the journey from seeking the body of a dead colleague- to seeking the resurrected Lord and Saviour.

The Rev. Vinod Victor
Priest-in-Charge
St. Matthews Anglican Church Ashburton & Melbourne CSI Church
Affirmation of Christ as Lord and God

Collect: O Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, who has given Your only Son, the first born over all creation, to die for our sins, grant us so perfectly and without any doubt to believe in His resurrection, So that we continue to be faithful on this firm foundation, not allowing ourselves to be shaken from the hope that we have heard and learned from Your Gospel, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen

Affirmation is a faith statement, a belief system based upon the conviction of the fact. Christianity is a belief system built upon the faith in God and his son Jesus Christ as the Lord and Savior of the World. To affirm Christ as the Lord means to be under the influence of the Lordship of Christ and Christ alone. The readings that were set apart for this day are intended to facilitate the deeper understanding and greater meaning of our Christian faith living as believers or followers of Jesus Christ who has risen and lives forever and ever. With this brief understanding, let us look at the readings to understand what does it mean to affirm Christ as Lord and God?

1. Affirmation of Christ as Lord and God deepens our faith (Exo. 3: 13-17)

Exodus chapter 3 talks of God’s appearance to Moses in a burning bush while he was tending sheep. It seems a very poor employment for a man of his parts and his education. From childhood, he grew up in the Pharaoh’s court as Prince. Yet he was satisfied with it and thus learns meekness and contentment. While Moses was engaged in his responsibility of tending the sheep, came across a great surprise, Moses saw a bush burning without the fire to kindle it. The bush burned and yet did not burn away. He was interested to see it. Therefore, he moves forwards to see and understand the situation. In that process, God gave a gracious call to Moses to which Moses returned a ready answer. God asked him to put off his shoes and putting off the shoes symbolized a token of respect and submission in order to draw near to God and to know Him very closely. Moses obeyed to the divine instruction and then God introduced Himself to Moses by saying “I am the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” By this, God strengthened his belief and reveals His divine agenda about the people of Israel who were under the bondage. God told to Moses that he saw the afflictions of the Israel, their sorrows, their cry and their oppression and has come down to deliver them from all their afflictions.

In verse 10, God said to Moses, “Come, I will send you to Pharaoh; to bring my people from the Egyptian bondage.” Formerly Moses thought himself able to deliver Israel and set himself to the work too hastily but when the invitation came to Moses from the divine and Almighty God, Moses knows his own weakness. This was the result of the more knowledge of God. Formerly, Moses depended upon or trusted “his self” but after receiving the invitation from the God who is “I am that I am”, his self-confidence has turned out to be great reverence to God, humility or humble recognition of “his self” without the help of God, the creator. God strengthened Moses by promising His presence and that is enough for Moses to carry on the Mission of God. God reveals His name: a name that denotes what he is in himself, I AM...
THAT I AM. It means that God is Jehovah, self-existent, eternal and unchangeable and always the same, yesterday, to-day, and forever. God is also incomprehensible and faithful and true to all His promises, unchangeable in His nature as well as in His word and let Israel know that, the God called “THAT I AM” has sent you. It is a faith statement given by God to Moses and Moses has to believe and take this name or pronounce it and affirm the goodness and mighty power of God who is “THAT I AM.” He was asked to tell to the elder of the Israel that the God, who is “THAT I AM” had sent him and called him to deliver people from the bondage on behalf of God who is his strength and source of faith and inspiration. This name was given so that Moses must revive among them the religion of their fathers, which was almost lost and then they might expect the fulfillment of the promises made to their fathers. Moses believing in the God whose name is “THAT I AM” and went forward to fulfill God’s will in humble obedience and trust upon Him who has called him. Moses believed it and Moses was used as a mighty instrument in the hands of Yahweh. It was this faith statement, which God has given, enabled and strengthened him to be faithful to God’s invitation and perform mighty acts on behalf of God almighty in the process of Israel’s deliverance from Egypt and work on behalf of God. Moses became a great leader and was filled with spirit and humility before God. In front of Moses, people, Nations and Kings stood in reverence and fear of him; no one dared to stand before him. How did this happen, it was just because Moses affirmed the living name of God, who is unchangeable and Almighty God. His faith has transformed him. As children of God, we need to take this affirmation as ours and move forward fulfilling God’s will.

2. Affirmation of Christ as Lord and God challenges to live for Christ (Col. 1:15-23)

Christ is the visible discovery of the invisible God. One who has seen Christ has seen the Father. We need to adore these divine mysteries in humble faith and behold the glory of God in Christ Jesus. Who is this Christ? Christ was born or begotten before all the creation or before any creature was made. This existence of Christ before all creation represents eternity and which represent the eternity of God to us. All things being created by Him and were created for him. All power and authority belongs to him. The above passage is an Christological hymn, it reiterates the heart of Christian Faith, that the Christ’s suffering and death are central to the salvation of the universe. This is the only place in the NT where Christ’s death is presented as meant for “Making Peace.” Christ as the Mediator is the Head of the body, the church, all grace and strength are from him and the church is his body. All fullness dwells in him. In these verses the method of being reconciled. Notwithstanding the hatred of sin on God’s part, it pleased God to reconcile fallen human beings to Himself. Once we were enemies in our minds by wicked works and that, we are now reconciled to God by the sacrifice and death of Christ in our nature. It is mysterious. Paul affirms that Christ who died on the cross and who rose from the dead and appeared to his disciples, to him, and to many people, saves us from sin. By his Gospel, we are saved. Paul was grateful to Jesus for appearing to him and transforming to be grate witness to the risen Christ. In this Christological Hymn Paul emphasizes the salvific act of God. We need to discern the glory of the plan of redemption and rejoice in the hope set before us. God’s redemptive act reveals the love of God, which is so great to us. What should be our response to God? We need to be fervent in prayer and abound in holy duties and live no more for ourselves but for Christ and Christ alone. Christ died for us why? Should we continue to live in sin? No but we should die for sin and live henceforth not to ourselves but for Christ.
3. Affirmation of Christ as Lord & God lead towards new perception of Christ (Jn. 20:24-29)

The Gospel reading portrays the unique encounter of risen Christ with Thomas, the disciple. Thomas was known for his doubt about Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Thomas did not believe that Jesus was raised at the first instance. When Jesus stretched out his hands and asked Thomas to put his finger in the wounds then only Thomas realized the truth about Christ resurrection. This invitation from the risen Christ has awakened him from his faith slumber and acknowledged Jesus Christ as “My Lord and My God”. What does it imply to affirm and acknowledge Christ as “Lord and God?”

It implies that we are not under any other influence. We have no other Lord and controlling authority over us especially, the power, money, treasures or anything that we hold on to us so dear and precious. When we acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord and our God, we completely come under the control of Christ and our life completely surrendered to Him and Him alone. Jesus becomes our master and we are no more slaves to doubt, unfaithfulness, or sin, money and power. The one who comes under the control of the Risen Christ can alone affirm that Christ is the Lord and God of his/her life. Such life is so wonderful, meaningful, fruitful and a life that is transformed. Accepting the Lordship of Christ is accepting the life style of Christ, accepting the Gospel. Not to be served but to serve and living for others is the life style and motto of Jesus Christ’s life and ministry. If we accept the Lordship of Christ on our life, we need to emulate this life style of Jesus. This is possible only if we wake up from our slumber of faith and then only we get courage to acknowledge Christ as Lord and God like Thomas.

When Thomas the disciple acknowledged Christ as Lord and God, his perception of God and of the risen Christ has changed. He spontaneously became under the control of the Lordship of Christ and his perception of Christ has transformed him and his attitude and made Thomas to become a humble servant of God Almighty, to cross the boundaries and countries in proclaiming HIS resurrection. This affirmation enables us to experience God in our midst and enabling all of us to experience the reign of God.

May the Good Lord be our Lord of life and our Faith on Him alone be our strength and this name may enable us to live for Him and according to His divine will so that His name be glorified in and through us. Amen.

Rev. Dr. P. Bethel Krupa Victor
CSI Karimnagar Diocese
**Invitation to Christ's Hospitality**

**Genesis 18: 1- 10**  
Psalm 15  
**Hebrews 13: 1-8**  
**John 21: 1- 14**

**Collect:** Living God, the ever-loving host, Help us to love one another as brothers and sisters, practicing hospitality to strangers and sharing with Your people in need. Like Your Son, Jesus Christ, who continues to invite us to have a constant communion with You, though we often live as strangers and enemies to You, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen

**Jesus said to them “Come and have breakfast” ..John 21:12**

The shore of Tiberius is not simply seashore this fine morning. For both the parties, Jesus and his estranged disciples, this place is become a place of meeting again after a painful and pricking break ups. This piece of land becomes a point of liturgy where all the elements of meaningful worship is enacted. Nobody in the scene asks the ‘who’s who’ question, because for the Johanine narration of the gospel story, this is a concluding part and this plot of the conclusion of the gospel story seems to be a new beginning, a new start-up for the Jesus’ community. They, the disciples of Jesus Christ, start everything all over again. They experience their guru’s love anew and afresh. As the listeners of the gospel and the followers of the story of Jesus, let us hope that they may not repeat the mistakes in their integrity to understand Jesus as the Savior of the world. The whole message and the crux and the content of the fourth gospel are dramatically and symbolically re-presented here in this Sea of Galilee and its muddy and wety shore. Though the coast is still dark, the dawning sunlight is yet to kiss the mild waves in the sea, everything happens both in the sea and the beach is clear for the readers and the hearers of the gospel. We see, from this side of the event, as a community of faith in the one who waits at the coastline, both Jesus preparing a dining table and kitchen nearby and the toiling friends in futility for the whole night. By seeing this we feel like laughing both at Jesus and the disciples, because at the end of this narrative we see everything in place and everyone at their location. Here at this crucial juncture of the story, Jesus stays still unchanged as he was in the beginning of the story, So much have been conversed and exchanged between them for the past more than three years. However, after all the ordeal in his life and realizing the painful part his disciples in all these, Jesus still stands at the shore with expectation of the coming back of his friends. One or two queries and few short-spoken answers move the whole event with emotion and nervousness. He is yet at the same passion for them, lovingly inviting them for a refreshing dine-in-the-morning light experience. Jesus is hospitable to this community of failed disciples, the people who are called and commissioned to be the fishers of human beings has now turned back as simple fishermen, and they are a failure even in that job. There is no sense of displeasure or grudge, everything movement is so gentle and therefore touchy.

**Christ’s Hospitality: An Invitation for Re-Union**

We see the scattered and disenfranchised disciples even almost at the end of the narrative. This community, which closely experienced the love and fellowship of Jesus, has abandoned him at the decisive moment in his life. The commitment of discipleship that has melted
completely at the Getzemene, they all left them to save themselves from the experience of cross. Though they lavishly tasted the self-giving and out-going love of this man Jesus, at the moment of danger, they all saved themselves and they all loved themselves. We see the disciples, at the beginning of this episode as a bunch of failures, Islanders, self-seekers, quitters from the rally, a group of voluntarily retired people, we even see the sea fails them, for they catch no fish though they tirelessly labored for the whole night. They might, probably, have felt ashamed to raw back to the shore to present themselves for public disgrace and shame. However, at the same time they work in the sea, we see Jesus at the shore preparing the breakfast fort them. Christ, the resurrected from the dead, works in the Kitchen to prepare a warming cuisine for his friends. Christ the Cook, Christ the Chef, what a beautiful Christological thinking to continue. He reverses all the socially held assumptions and value system and he work out new methodologies to continue the mission of God. This Shore of Tiberias is a place where the sprained and strained discipleship is re-built and re-united. Jesus doesn’t consider their qualities and qualifications, in fact his sense of being host for this failures transcends the all the worldly and power standards. He prepares this table of the breakfast himself to celebrate the coming back of this his friends. They are all reunited here on this seashore and they experience the care and concern of their Lord anew and afresh. Everyone has a space in table of Lord’s hospitality.

**Christ’s Hospitality: An Invitation for Re-Assessment**

At the almost center of this episode, we hear a sound from the beach to the fishing disciples, “children, you have no fish, have you?”. This is in fact a humiliating and belittling question. The seeker knows seeking. This query might have psychologically disturbed them. All their energy has been wasted for a catch. They, without any yelling and shouting, simply replied a low voiced “No”. This question might have induced them to look into themselves, their chores as the disciples of their Lord. The answer is implied in the query. It compels them to not only to see their last night activities, rather to see with patience and penitence their life as disciples. Discipleship auditing is essential for us to continue in the hospitality of Christ.

**Christ’s Hospitality: An Invitation for Re-Dedication**

When they have reached the shore, they are welcome with hot breakfast, everything was fresh and hot form the kitchen, only the disciples were freeze and frozen. This hot-platter has invited them to rededicate themselves for the continuance of Lord’s ministry. Jesus models for them the meaning of being hospitable for the tired and impoverished. The disciples have worked for their livelihood; here Jesus becomes the channel of life for them and for the world. We as disciples of Jesus are to continue to break the bread for the impoverished world. We as the church is called to continue the hospitality of Christ by feeding and tending his little sheep and goats. Mission is therefore the continuation of the hospitality of Christ.

Rev. Joseph Samuel
KUTS Trivandrum
The post-Easter kerygma invites the church to celebrate the continuing presence of risen Christ in day-to-day lives. Easter marks the foundational historical event for the faith and doctrines of the universal church. As we live in the post-easter era towards the consummation of God's reign on this earth, the privilege bestowed upon us is that we can inherit to cherish the continuing communion with the risen Christ through our faith in the Christian journey of grace. The Immanuel, "God with us", continues to travel with us as an invisible co-journer but making his presence a spiritual reality. How do we experience the invisible presence of God in the midst of the troubles and worries of our faith journey? Today's biblical passages challenge us to draw insights from the past histories of God's revelation of everlasting presence of God-self amidst the humble and devoted people of God.

1. God's communion is manifested through the co-journeying with humanity in the past history of Israelites (Exodus 40: 34- 38)

The word communion comes from the Latin word, communio, which means sharing in common. The word 'communion' instantly brings to our mind the participation in the Lord's supper, which in turn ensures our close relation with God. As the Israelites were wandering in the wilderness in their journey to the promised land, God reveals God's presence through a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night since the time they left Succoth as in Exo. 13:21. In the passage read to us today, Moses builds a tabernacle to keep the ark of the covenant and places it in the tent of meeting. Now as in v. 34, the cloud sets upon the tent of meeting marking the presence of God to the Israelites, this is further evident by the filling of the glory of the Lord. In v.38, there is fire in the cloud by night. All these were indicators to the ever-remaining communion of God with the people of Israel. God opts to be with a group of wandering people. In the liberation theologies, the book of Exodus is widely used to highlight the 'preferential option' of God to side with the oppressed people. God's communion is assured to humanity, which strives toward the celebration of the human dignity and equality in a world divided by race, caste, class, gender, sexuality and age.
2. God's communion is manifested through participating in the communion /the Lord's supper (Luke 24:13-33)

The risen Lord Jesus Christ accompanies the two disciples (one whose name is mentioned as Cleopas in v. 18) on the way to Emmaus. They recognized him only after Jesus blessed the bread, broke and gave to them (v.31). They instantly remember how Jesus has been interpreting the Scriptures on the death and resurrection of him (v.32). This reminds us of the significant revelation of God's presence through our participation in the Lord's supper. According to Roman Catholic faith, the Lord's supper is a sacrament in which transubstantiation happens. Transubstantiation means that the communion elements will be transformed into actual body and blood of Jesus Christ through the blessing of them by an ordained priest. The prefix trans indicates "change" that the bread actually becomes the body of our risen Lord and the wine the blood. But in Protestant reformed Churches, the bread and wine of communion are symbolic spiritual representation of the body and blood of Jesus Christ, which is understood as consubstantiation. The prefix con here indicates the meaning of "with" stressing the fact that the elements do not change into actual body and blood, but the body and blood of the risen Lord co-exist with the bread and wine. Therefore, participating in the communion itself is a manifestation of God's communion with us.

3: God's communion is manifested through sharing in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ (Philippians 3: 8- 16)

The power of resurrection is experienced only if we share in the sufferings of death of Jesus Christ (v.10). Paul's letter to the Philippians is a prison epistle as Paul writes this letter from jail. There is difference of opinion among Biblical scholars regarding which jail he writes from. It could either be from Rome or Ephesus. The surpassing knowledge of Christ is more important for Paul that everything that privileges him as a Jewish pharisee (vv.5-6) is vain to him. He, being circumcised on the eighth day, belonging to the tribe of Benjamin, a zealous Hebrew persecuting the church in early days and blameless under the law, could have boasted about his glorious Jewish background. But he prefers to consider all of them a loss for the knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This deep understanding of Christology comes from a close communion with the risen Lord which has led him to commit to the ministry to the people of non-Jewish origins. While being imprisoned in the jail for proclaiming the gospel, Paul is determined that he gets to know Christ more deeply through participating in the sufferings of his death. This ensures the hope of waiting for the resurrection after the life on this earth.

Conclusion:

As we continue to celebrate the continuing presence of the risen Lord, let's be committed to recall how God has manifested in re-assuring God-self in the lives of wandering Israelites, the disciples on the way to Emmaus and the imprisoned Paul. Let us be assured of the guidance of the spirit of the risen Lord to enhance a world of peace and justice in and through our faith journeys.

Rev. Dr. Jaya Chitra
TTS, Madurai
Collect: God, our parent, whom we know through Your Son, Jesus Christ, the Way, the Truth and the Life, Help us to believe in Him and be saved, So that we walk in Your light, having fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

In the famous novel named Alice in Wonderland written by English Mathematician Charles Lutwidge Dodgson under the pseudonym Lewis Carroll tells of a girl named Alice falling through a rabbit hole into a fantasy world populated by peculiar, anthropomorphic creatures. In this book there is conversation narrated between Alice and a cat in chapter 6. Alice asks “Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here? “That depends a good deal on where you want to get to,” said the Cat. “I don’t much care where...” said Alice. “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go,” said the Cat. Many of us are like this. We are not sure about the path we have to choose. But really wanted to escape from the unsatisfied life they are leading. The theme challenges us to believe in Christ. Jesus is the Way, the Truth and the Life.

1. Believing in Christ the way leads us to go forward (Exodus 14: 10-20)

The context is exodus of the people of God from Egypt. The Army of the Egyptians was marching after them and they feared greatly. The situation is very difficult to handle by them. In their distress and helplessness their anguish sounds like even at the worst case the people are willing to surrender before the mighty oppressive power of Egypt unconditionally. They realized their powerless and afraid of the power of the oppressor. There is only one option before them was to surrender and go back to Egypt and continue their slavery and bondage. It is easy to fight with the leader at the time of confusion and if there is no way out according to human calculations. Here we see the faith of Moses who recognized the way of God which strengthens him to take the decision of move forward. God speaks to Moses “why do you cry to me? Tell the people of God to move forward. Believe in God means take each steps forward with trust in God. There is no turning back in the faith journey.

2. Believing in Christ the way leads us to Eternal Life (John 14: 1-7)

In the gospel we see Jesus tells about the way which leads to eternal life if one has faith in God and in Christ. The challenge here is not only the depth of faith but faith at the time of one’s heart is troubled. When the threats of life disturb us, we fail to understand the realities of life and we overlook the available possibilities of way out. And in due course we may lose our faith. To overcome troubled situation, we need strong faith in God and in Christ, who prepares us a home in His Fathers place. This assurance shows that even though we do not have place here on earth. There is place available for us in God’s kingdom. Space matters in even day to day life. Do we have space for our children, parents, spouse, friends, neighbors and needy in our heart. Christ challenges us there is ample space in the mansions of the
kingdom. We all have space in the heart of Christ. This is our eternal place. Believing in Christ the way leads us to the Eternal Life.

3. Believing in Christ the way leads us to salvation (Acts 16: 19-34)
Paul and Silas were taken from market place to the rulers. The reason was market economy. There were certain people running a profitable spiritual industry using a young slave girl possessed by a demon. Paul heals the girl and that was the end of the spiritual business. This loss of their profit provoked the owner to act against Paul and Silas. Paul and Silas saved a young slave girl from exploitation of the corporate traders. The crowd joined with the corporate attacking Paul and Silas. They had inflicted many blows and suffered heavy torturing. They were put in the jail. But the joy that gives in believing Jesus which nobody can take away. They were praying and singing hymns to God and the prisoners were listing. God miraculously opened the door and released their chains. Even there were all possibilities of saving themselves from the jail they waited for the salvation of the jailer. Believing in Christ the way leads us not only to our salvation but also concerned for the salvation of people those who are even a part of the oppressive structure.

Conclusion
The Christ is the way. Jesus says “I am the way truth and life. Believing in Christ the way leads us to go forward at the time of extreme difficulty, to realize the assurance of eternal life even at the time of our hearts are troubled and helps us to lead many others to the hope of salvation.

Rev. Dr. T. I. James
CSI Malabar Diocese
Mission as Sharing Christ's Peace

Collect: God of Peace, Who guards our hearts and minds with the peace that passes all human understanding, Show us Your unfailing love and grant us Your salvation, So that You, equip us with everything good for doing Your will, and preach to all through our words and deeds, Your gracious act upon the cross that brought us in peace with You, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

One of the important members of the planning committee of India, while reflecting on land reforms in India, once said that the land reforms can be a reality if only it is undertaken with missionary zeal. While some scholars attribute colonial interest loaded with the word ‘mission,’ some other understand mission as ‘commitment.’ This sermon outline presents mission as a commitment to share peace to the wider society.

As mission is perceived differently by different scholarship, Christ is also understood in diverse ways. Popularly Christ is understood as supernatural person, but, scripturally understood as title given to Jesus the prince of Shalom/peace. Therefore, peace is sharing of Jesus the Christ. What is involved in mission as sharing Christ’s peace?

Christ’s Peace Transforms for Subsistence Purposes:

Peace is mostly limited to state of a person’s mind or personal. Whereas, scriptures explain peace in terms of transforming the weapons of war into agricultural tools. Micah 4: 3b

“… they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore.”

From the above text, it can be inferred that the nations are inclined towards war but, invitation is towards transformative agenda; nations are invited to pay attention to the peace project, which addresses the concerns of subsistence; peace signifies having concern towards poverty, need to feed people with food grains, therefore, engage in agricultural needs of every nation.

Expanding the above discussion on transformative subsistence from a Christ centered approach, peace has to do with nations pay adequate attention to the subsistence needs of its own – poor, orphans, widows and sojourners, etc., as well as to the needs of the nation’s surrounding it; engage in peace project with a mission zeal. It is Christ centred approach that gives an understanding of mission; Christ experience of placing others first than once own interests is at the centre of mission. Transformation towards subsistence, therefore, has to do with choosing subsistence priorities.

Sharing Christ’s Peace, Cast Away Fears
Jesus Christ pronouncing peace goes along with casting away every kind of fear and building faith among the weaker one.

“…Why are you frightened, and why do doubts arise in your hearts?” Luke 24: 38

Jesus worked with people, who were not free from fear and doubt, in spite of their movement with Jesus for quite some time. Pronouncing peace to such people or disciples is aimed at casting away their fears and doubt; leading them into the frontiers of faith.

The story teller highlights sharing food while narrating the pronouncement of peace by the risen Christ. This time, it is not the resurrected Christ sharing food with the disciples, as it was case in many places but, disciples sharing food with the resurrected Christ needs to be observed. Pronouncement of peace goes hand in hand with sharing; sharing with the hungry. This part of sharing story reminds of healing that goes with feeding. Therefore, sharing Christ’s peace has to do with healing and feeding, through which faith is built and fears are cast away.

Once again engaging with sharing of Christ’s peace needs to be undertaken with missionary spirit, which meaning placing others first than oneself.

**Openness to Scriptures, Sharing Christ Peace**

Interaction by the risen Christ with the disciples has brought back importance of Torah and Prophets.

“Then he opened their minds to understand the scriptures,…..” Luke 24: 45.

An understanding of sharing Christ’s peace as mission invites all of us to look into the scriptures- Torah and prophets, which testify to the salvific works of God. It is important to observe that works of Jesus the Christ needs to be understood in the light of scriptures and not independent of itself. Such a correlation between the teachings of Jesus and Torah builds connectivity between the faith of people in the first testament and faith of the present generation; a relationship between the teaching of Torah as well as teaching of Jesus enables the disciples to perceive economy of God’s salvation, which is not limited and not narrow in any sense.

A mission mandate is placed in the text of Luke 24 as “proclamation of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the nations.” It is lack of forgiving spirit and repentance from rebellion against God leads to deprivation of peace among the nations as well as deprivation of peace within the nation. A call to share Christ’s peace therefore, is a call to proclaim repentance and forgiveness of sins.

**Conclusion**

1. Christ is understood in terms of addressing the concerns of nations and not just of a single person.
2. Sharing Christ’s peace therefore addresses the concerns of poor within a nation as well as across the nations.
3. Sharing Christ’s peace is a call to choose subsistence social relationship instead of self-appeasing for selfish ends.

4. The mission dimension is a call to place others first than that of one self.

5. Sharing Christ’s peace is understood as faith building process which involves cast away fears, work towards healing in the communities keeping subsistence on top priority.

6. Sharing Christ’s peace bring closer to the scriptures as well as into a mission of proclamation of forgiveness- a jubilee message of God liberation.

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Bible Society of India Telangana Auxiliary
Collect: God, Most High, whose everlasting dominion would not pass away, and whose kingdom would never be destroyed, Until the coming again of Your Son who has ascended to heaven and is seated on Your right hand, help us to remain in Your presence, worshiping and witnessing You, and Your love, So that the whole creation may realize deliverance and exaltation, in His ascension, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

The story of the ascension of Christ from the fellowship of disciples on the earth reveals His glory and power along as well as the glory and power of God who made Jesus seated on the right side of the Father in the heaven, and this is the core faith of the church. Every Sunday we confess the core faith after a sermon in order to commemorate what our forefathers believed in and baptized with to associate new way of life which has to be continued even in our lives today. The ascension of Jesus is a marvelous event in the life of the early church. Early church realized the life realities in the teachings and miracles wrought through the life of Jesus Christ. The narrative of ascension is about the exaltation of Christ with the acclamation of the new reign in the world. This is an exaltation for the alternative governance of the Christ which contests the worldly assumptions and legitimized frameworks of the imperial structures of the Roman world. Ascension and exaltation are the common phenomena in the Ancient West Asian world.

This can be observed in the Hymns of Baal in the Canaanite religion for assuring the agrarian life of the people with the blessing of early rains and assurance of food and a good harvest for people. In contrast, to the Canaanite legitimized assumption, Israelites have their own exaltation of their God, YHWH as the God of liberation who does surveillance of the life of marginalized in the society. In similar to it, the Early Christian church has raised their voice for society and stood as a witness for the alternativity in all spheres of life, which was never imagined life beyond their minds. The gospel lesson (Luke: 24:44- 53) tells us that, the word of God, prophetic literature and the scripture of Psalms all come to fulfill in the resurrection of Christ. Jesus commissioned his disciples to tell this new understanding in order to make the nations mindful of a new reign of resurrected Jesus.

1. Exaltation of Fatherly God

In the Old Testament, God is always portrayed as king to rule over the others and all the powers are to be submitted to him. This God always engages and re-engages to liberate the people at appropriate times. The Old Testament lesson reveals the imagination of the people of God to be liberated from the imperial clutches and hoping for the new possibility by the Son of God (Dan. 7:9-14). Moreover, The Psalmist (Psalms 68: 5-6) refers to God as having a concern, as a righteous king, for the life of the marginalized widows, orphans, and aliens. This God is the God of justice and righteousness who engages all the time in the history of
the humankind to do justice and brings awareness to people for an alternative vision in social life with new social possibilities beyond their usual assumptions in their limited theological understanding. At this juncture, Jesus in his earthly ministry introduced heavenly God as the heavenly Father. The God of the Old Testament is not about the power but the God of care, fidelity as an earthly father does (Matt.7:9-10, Lk.11:11).

2. Exaltation for the New Economic Possibility

In the Old Testament, the God is portrayed as a liberator from the closed system of Egypt and showed the alternative way in their lives by providing manna in the wilderness, where people cannot imagine life surviving possibilities. Despite that, God made the life through new experiences. God made them to believe that God is faithful in providing the first fruit from their agrarian practices after entering into the Promised Land. At the time of Jesus, the imperial policies of Rome laid heavy tax on the Galilean peasants. The peasants of the Galilee were forced to practice agriculture to fulfill the deeds of elites of Jerusalem. There was no hope for them and they never imagined a life of redemption from their closed system. The ministry of Jesus revealed a life of new understanding by making wilderness as abundant blessings from the little one as from little 5 loaves and 2 fish (Jn. 6:9, Lk. 9:12-15). Therefore, the ascension of Jesus is exalted through acknowledging Christ as the One who gives daily bread and who rescues the life from evil (Roman taxation) systems and leads life towards new possibilities.

3. Exaltation of New Governance

The ascension of Jesus is understood as new governance of Jesus along with the Father sitting at His right hand to intercede on behalf of the world and to bring them together in the grace of God. Before his ascension Jesus commissioned His disciples (Acts1:1) to be a witness for the world for His new governance. Jesus revealed God not just the rider of clouds in the heavenly world but importantly as the One who is in the position to see the troubles, to care, to intervene, to heal, to forgive, to reconcile, and to liberate with new possibilities. In the Old Testament the people of God are enjoined to love the neighbor (Lev.19:7-18), and mandated to love the stranger (Lev.19:33-35), but not to be the enemies to them. Nevertheless, Jesus extended the law even to the enemies in His Sermon on the Mount (Mt: 5.43-48) to include in the Kingdom of God. This was shown by Jesus in his suffering on the cross. This forgiving nature is witnessed by Stephen near death by looking at the ascended Jesus standing at the right hand of the father who is ready to forgive and include the sinners into the kingdom of God (Acts: 7.57-60).

Conclusion

The ascension of Jesus is to recognize the new reign of Heavenly God with a new understanding out of the limited structure. The exaltation of Jesus is the new alternative reality which revealed God through the earthly ministry of Jesus. In our busy lives, we may have forgotten the vision of God in the world. Let us return to God, let us return from our framed economic prejudices, let us return to the orphan, let us return to needy, and finally return to forgive the enemies, such that the world should realise the new governance of God out of our prejudices and see the new life with unexpected and unimagined reign of God in his grace.
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CSI Rayalaseema Diocese
Promise of the Holy Spirit

Joel 2: 28-32                      Psalm 42
Galatians 5:22-26                 John 14:15-21

Collect: O God, the source of life, in whom, our body, mind and soul find rest and hope. Pour out and empower us by Your Spirit, the Advocate, whom You have promised. In order that we see vision and dreams, we bear fruit of the Spirit and witness You through the gift of the Spirit. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they sitting. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” Acts 2:2-4

The HOLY SPIRIT is the third person of the Trinity. The Spirit is generated by the love between the Father and the Son. The Spirit dwells within Christians transforming them into the likeness of God. Many images offer insight into the mysterious realm of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is imaged as breath-in the beginning God breathed upon the waters, drawing forth the creation. God breathed into Adam, bringing him to life.

From the descent of the Holy Spirit at the beginning we may learn something concerning His operations at the present time. Remember at the outset that whatever the Holy Spirit was at the first, He is that now, for as God, He remains forever the same. Whatever He did then He is able to do still, for His power is by no means diminished. As says the Prophet Micah, “O you that are named the house of Jacob, is the Spirit of the Lord straitened?” We would greatly grieve the Holy Spirit if we supposed that His might was less today, than in the beginning. Although we may not expect and need not desire the miracles which came with the gift of the Holy Spirit, so far as they were physical, yet we may not desire and expect that which was intended and symbolized by them and we may reckon to see the same spiritual wonders performed among us at this day.

First I shall call your attention to the instructive symbols of the Holy Spirit which were made prominent at Pentecost. There was a sound as of a rushing mighty wind and there were cloven tongues, as it were of fire.

Wind to vivify/revive (Jn.3:6- “Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit”) Wind is an emblem of Deity and, therefore, a proper symbol of the Holy Spirit. Often, under the Old Testament, God revealed Himself under the emblem of breath or wind. Wind is, of all material things, one of the most spiritual in appearance. It is invisible, ethereal, mysterious, and therefore, humans have fixed upon it as being nearest akin to spirit. In
Ezekiel’s famous vision, when he saw the valley full of dry bones, we all know that the Spirit of God was intended by that vivifying wind which came when the prophet prophesied and blew upon the withered relics till they were quickened into life. “The Lord has His way in the whirlwind”, thus He displays Himself when He works. “The Lord answered job out of the Whirlwind”, thus He reveals Himself when He teaches His servants. Observe that this wind, on the day of Pentecost, was accompanied with a sound – a sound as of a mighty rushing wind, for, albeit the Spirit of God can work in silence, yet in saving operations He frequently uses sound. The Holy Spirit is the vivifying breath of God. The Holy Spirit sustains all creation in being. Should God remove the Spirit from anything created it would cease to exist. The Holy Spirit is the very foundation of our being-as basic as breath. His working is always from above, from God Himself! The work of the Holy Spirit is, so to speak, the breath of God, and his power is always, in a special sense, the immediate power of God. Coming down, therefore, this mysterious wind passed into the chamber where the disciples were assembled and filled the room.

**Water to Satisfy** *(Jn.4:14 – “But whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life”)* When He came from the Father to His Son, Jesus, it was as a dove. Let peace rest on that dear sufferer’s soul through all His days of labor and through the passion which would close them. His anointing is that of peace—He needed no tongue of flame, for He was already all on fire with love. When the Holy Spirit was bestowed, by the Son of God, upon His disciples it was as breath—“He breathed on them and said, receive the Holy Spirit.” To have life more abundantly is a chief necessity of servants of the Lord Jesus and, therefore, the Holy Spirit visits us. The Spirit is pictured as a dove descending over Jesus after his baptism. After the flood this bird of peace brought back an olive branch showing Noah that the waters had receded. The Spirit brings us God’s peace—that peace which only comes through being brought home to our source in God. And the oil of the olive becomes a sacramental symbol of the Holy Spirit and the gift of peace.

**Oil to Qualify** *(for Ministry) *(1 Jn.2:27 – “And as for you, the anointing you received from him remains in you, and you do not need anyone to teach you. But as his anointing teaches you about all things and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit-just as it has taught you, remain in him.”)* The Spirit, and the grace of the Spirit, which they had received out of the fullness of grace which is in Christ; and is compared to oil. Grace is an internal thing, it is oil in the vessel of the heart, and where it once is, it abides; as does every grace of the Spirit, as faith, hope, love, and every other: grace can never be taken away; God will not take it away, where he has once bestowed it, and men and devils cannot; it can never be lost as to the principle and being of it; it is an incorruptible seed; and a living principle, which can never be destroyed, notwithstanding all the corruptions in a man’s heart, the pollution of the world, and the temptations of Satan.

**Fire to Purify** *(1Thes.5:19–“Do not quench the Spirit”)* As Christians we need to remember that we are baptized with the Holy Spirit and with fire. He works as fire, by enlightening, enlivening, and purifying the souls of humans. As fire is put out by taking away fuel, and as it is quenched by pouring water, or putting a great deal of earth upon it; so we must be careful not to quench the Holy Spirit, by indulging carnal lusts and affections, minding only earthly things. We believers often hinder our growth in grace, by not giving ourselves up to the spiritual affections raised in their hearts by the Holy Spirit. Fire, again, is a frequent symbol of Deity. Abraham saw a burning lamp and Moses beheld a burning bush. When Solomon had built his holy and beautiful house, its consecration lay in the fire of God descending upon the sacrifice to mark that the Lord was there, for when the Lord had dwelt before in the tabernacle, which was superseded by the temple, He revealed Himself in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. “Our God is a consuming fire.” Hence the
symbol of fire is a fit emblem of God the Holy Spirit. Let us adore and worship Him! Tongues of flame sitting on each man’s head symbolized a personal visitation to the mind and heart of each one of the chosen company. The fires came not to consume them, for no one was injured by the flaming tongue—to men whom the Lord has prepared for His approach, there is no danger in His visitations. They see God and their lives are preserved. They feel His fires and are not consumed. This is the privilege of only those who have been prepared and purified for such fellowship with God. The intention of the symbol was to show them that the Holy Spirit would illuminate them as fire gives light. “He shall lead you into all truth.”

But quiet and gentleness do not always signify the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is in the gale and the wind as well. The Spirit is the power of God—the only true power. The Spirit builds up creation, sanctifies it, and brings it home to the Father. The Spirit levels all that stands opposed to God and the truth—it is indeed a gale wind. And that wind purifies as it blows—cleansing the creation and preparing it for its redemption. And like the wind the Spirit blows where it will. It cannot be imprisoned; free like the wind, it will not be contained within any narrow word, institution or idea. The Spirit frees and liberates from all oppression and tyranny—even that imposed in the name of God.

Finally the Holy Spirit is free or tongues of flame such as descended upon the apostles’ heads at Pentecost. This flame sets the creation on fire with the power of God. By its power the apostles do what they could not do before: Peter remains steadfast; Peter and John heal in Jesus’ name. And these men carry the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. The Spirit’s flame purifies, burning out the cross. As apostle Paul stated in Galatians “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other”.

Rev. B. Bushan Pavan Kumar
CSI Karimnagar Diocese
Pentecost Sunday  
**Come Holy Spirit Transform the Whole Creation**

Ezekiel 36:24-36  
Acts 2:1-13  
Psalm 29  
John 20:19-23

**Collect:** God of Life, Who breathes new life into the whole creation and sends down the Spirit as tongues of Fire, Inspire and kindle Your faithful ones, breathing upon them the Spirit Divine, So that the whole creation may be reconciled in the love of Christ through the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. **Amen.**

In the Church tradition Christmas is celebration of Love of God the Father who sent His only begotten son Jesus Christ, Easter is celebration of the Life of Jesus Christ and Pentecost is celebration of the Coming of God the Holy Spirit. When these festivals are celebrated much importance is given to Christmas and Easter, but the Church had completely forgotten to celebrate the festival of Pentecost. This festival is also called by another name as ‘festival of weeks’. Pentecost mean 50th day after resurrection. The person of the Pentecost is God the Holy Spirit, the purpose for which He was sent is to fulfill the prophesies, the power of the Pentecost is to communicate, the proclamation of Pentecost is Jesus is Lord and Christ and finally the preparation and pointer of the Pentecost is ‘Repentance and waiting with hope for the final coming of Christ’. The symbols we see in Acts 2:1-13 like Dove which symbolizes the gentleness. Fire symbolizes the presence of God, Wind symbolizes the unseen power of God and finally the tongues symbolizes the Speech or the communication of God the Holy spirit. If there is no spirit in Body a person is dead likewise if there is no spirit of God found in church, the church is dead. As physical body cannot exist without a soul, the Church cannot exist without the Spirit of God.

**Pentecost challenges for unity**

The author of Acts of the Apostles presents the experience of the Pentecost by the followers of Jesus Christ in a very dramatic way in Acts 2. These followers were assembled in the temple precincts or near to it. The presence or the advent of God the Holy spirit takes place when the followers of Christ hailing from multi racial, multi lingual, multi cultural and from other diversities. God the Holy Spirit is Unifier. Tower of Babel divided and the day of Pentecost united every one so intimately in brotherly and sisterly love and the outcome, Church was born. Starting with 12 disciples and 120, now the experience of Pentecost through the preaching of Peter 3000 people accepted Christ, and they were the first congregation. In today’s context this is an emphatic affirmation for us to believe the Church which grows with believers is a clear witness that the Church is united and stands as a testimony that God the Holy spirit is present and hence the church is progressive. The formation of CSI with different traditions coming together is called as the second Pentecost. By the power and brooding of the Spirit of God in and over CSI, despite difficulties, problems, God has blessed our Church with 4.5 million people. Praise God for this United and Uniting Church.
Pentecost challenges us for sanctity

The Pentecost experience records the symbol of tongues of fire. This clearly portrays the very presence of God as several times we see many incidents where God reveals Himself in the form of flames. No believer was exempted from this experience of being escaped from the flames, instead flames got separated and rested on each one present. In Isaiah 6 we come across the prophet saying he was with unclean lips and seraphim bringing burning coal with tongs from the altar and cleanses his lips by placing it. The fire is a sign of sanctity. God the Holy Spirit is God of Sanctity. The presence of the spirit of God, directs everyone to undergo the experience of cleansing. When the fire of tongues rested on each of them they started speaking in tongues. Their communication was understood by all the onlookers as believers spoke in the native language of the people surrounded. Jews of the ‘Diaspora’ were in Jerusalem for the feast. They were dumb shut to hear Jews from Galilee speaking the languages of peoples surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. God the spirit cleansed the tongues and words of life poured from the mouth of the followers of Christ. Church has to undergo this experience of cleansing with the help of God the Holy Spirit. Let us be open in accepting our faults, confessing our shortcomings, failures, trespasses and all un-Gods within us, submit ourselves to the spirit of God which would enable us to celebrate Pentecost experience daily in our lives.

Pentecost challenges us for liberty

The mission mandate of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ found in Luke 4:18ff, which was the manifesto of Jesus ministry read by Jesus at Nazareth is a clear evidence that the presence of God the Holy Spirit will provoke us to carry out the ministry of Liberation. To Proclaim good news, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to recover sight to the Blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed and to proclaim the year of Lord’s favour. This mission mandate of Christ has both Spiritual and social dimensions. God the Holy Spirit sends us out into the world to bestow life to the people who are denied the possibility of life, to heal the wounded, to identify with the people exploited and pushed to the periphery of the society, to be migrant friendly, to care for the orphans, the widows etc. All these ministries could be done only with the power of the Holy Spirit. The initial start of coming together, to be sent into the world by Jesus in post resurrection narratives, is all because of the power of the Spirit which blows like a violent wind. Only with this power the apostles were able to heal many people. The gifts of the Holy spirit are also given to us not to our selfish or self centered utilization but for the welfare of the people, who are deprived of basic rights and humaness. Let the Church- the people of God, be filled with the diaconal concerns, which would enable and empower life in all its fullness.

Let God the Holy Spirit in the midst of us transform the whole creation to Unity, Sanctity and Liberty.

Amen.

Rev. Paul Francis Ravichandran
CSI Madras Diocese
Wisdom and Knowledge: Gift of God
Students Sunday

Proverbs 2:1-12  Psalm 119: 9-16

Collect: Lord our God, You are the source of wisdom and knowledge: we commit our student community into Your hands. Fill them with faith, virtue, knowledge, patience and godliness, so that they may learn and study that which is good, beautiful, just and that which leads them in the paths of excellence, through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

Introduction:

As we are at a threshold of a new academic year, we are observing as Students’ Sunday. Our prayer is that God would bless our children with the gifts of wisdom and knowledge. Wisdom is a gift from God. Wisdom enables us to make use of the knowledge. By knowing everything one does not become wise. But to know how to use knowledge is to have wisdom. God is the source of all wisdom, therefore we hope and pray that God would bless all those who study with wisdom, knowledge, constant faith, strength and confidence to discover and interpret the new.

1. Seeking God’s Providential Source (GPS) (Proverbs 2:1-12)

God is the source of all wisdom and knowledge. God gives wisdom liberally to all those who ask. Solomon says “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding.” (Proverbs 3:5). Some of us tend to trust in our own internal compass than on the GPS unit. Such people end up in a wrong place because they think they know the shortcut. Instead of trusting in the sure guide they trust in their own direction. So also, all those who seek God’s Providential Source (GPS) for wisdom will surely be able to find it. The word of God encourages us to search for wisdom as one who search for silver and one who searches for hidden treasure. (Proverbs 2:4).

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge. (Proverbs 1:7) The word ‘fear’ does not mean terror or does not mean we should be afraid of God. Fear is what happens when we sense danger. While such fear might be a proper response for all those who trust in their own internal compass and do not trust in GPS, God’s Providential Source. All those who trust and seek after God’s Providential Source will honor the Lord and will find wisdom. We read in James 1:5 “If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given you.” All we need to do is to trust in God’s Providential Source. It is God who bestows us with wisdom, so that we would be able to discern God’s perfect will. J.I. Packer says, “Wisdom is the power to see and the inclination to choose the best and highest goal, together with the surest means of attaining it.” The Old Testament urges us to consider the Lord as our source of wisdom. Therefore, seek after God’s Providential Source (GPS) for wisdom and knowledge.
2. **Googling is not enough; Wisdom continues by following the Lord** (James 3: 13-18)

Google is a search engine, which has lots of information. By the click of a mouse we will be able to access lots of information and gain knowledge about diverse subjects. However, googling is not enough, for wisdom comes from God and continues by following the Lord. Epistle of James reminds us that it is not enough to have knowledge but we need be doers of the word and not mere hearers. Knowing that God is the source of wisdom is part of our responsibility. We also need to trust God and do what God intends us to do. James describes what wisdom is and also tells us that there are two kinds of wisdom. Firstly, there is Earthly wisdom. Earthly wisdom is earthly, unspiritual and demonic. It harbors envy, and selfish ambition. Anyone who uses earthly wisdom, they do it out of selfish ambition. Therefore, in order to succeed in life they run over as many people as possible. Their focus is just on themselves and not on others. They do not consider the needs of others but they want to get all they can and hold on to it by hook or crook. Therefore, pride, domination and selfish ambition are earthly wisdom. This is useless earthly wisdom as it encourages casteism, racism, brutality, and other forms of domination and discrimination. Secondly, there is Heavenly wisdom which comes from God. This kind of wisdom loves peace, is considerate, is full of mercy and is impartial. We need to strive to have such heavenly wisdom which comes from God. When we ask God for wisdom, God certainly blesses us but we need to ask in faith. Therefore, googling is not enough, but wisdom continues by following the Lord.

3. **Jio (Live) like Jesus** (Luke 2: 41-52)

The gospel reading reminds us that Jesus grew in wisdom, stature, in favour of God and all people. So also we need to (Jio) live like Jesus, grow up in a wonderful way. The passage Luke 2: 41-52 tells us that Jesus at the age of twelve was attending the Passover celebration along with his parents. He was about at the age when Jewish boys took on adult responsibilities in the faith community. This was a transition period for Jesus, from boyhood to manhood. (sic)

At this crucial time, Jesus had a clear understanding of his identity. While his mother reproached him saying, “Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” He replied, “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” He did not dispute the authority or responsibility of his earthly parents but he clearly saw and stated his identity based on his relationship to his heavenly Father. We also need to have a secure sense of identity as a child of God and grow up like Jesus.

Jesus was doing his Father’s work and had the yearning desire to learn God’s word and God’s ways. Therefore, Jesus was at the place of learning, listening to the teachers of the Law and asking them questions. (Luke 2:46) All of them who listened to him were astonished at his understanding and wisdom.

In the final words of the passage, we are told “Then he went down to Nazareth with them and was obedient to them.” (Luke 2:51) Jesus left Jerusalem, the Temple and the teachers and went to a place which was mostly known for its backwardness and poor reputation, Nazareth. “Can anything good come from there?” But Jesus left Jerusalem, a very prominent place, the teachers and the temple in humble obedience to his parents. Already at this early age Jesus was showing evidence of understanding beyond his years, and beyond his parents; he did not
rebel but was obedient. He honoured his earthly parents as well as his heavenly Father which led to his growth in wisdom, stature, in favour with God and all people. Therefore, Jio (Live) like Jesus.

**Conclusion**

God is the source of wisdom; therefore seek God’s Providential Source. We may have lot of information through Google but it is not enough as wisdom continues by following the Lord. Jesus, the “wisdom of God” grew in wisdom, stature, in favour of God and all people. Therefore we ought to Jio (live) like Jesus.

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

We Believe in the Triune God

Ezekiel 1: 4-28
2 Corinthians 13: 11-14
Mathew 28:16-20
Psalm 98

Collect: Everlasting and Ever living Triune God, Who spoke and revealed Yourself to our fore parents in manifold ways, Give us faith and confidence to understand and affirm the mystery of the trinity, So that we may be grounded in faith and would launch out to make disciples of all nations, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen

Introduction

Trinity is more than the doctrine of trinity and goes beyond the revealed revelation about God. The Biblical texts make no attempt to construct a mathematical equation (1+1+1 = 1) or any scientific theory. Because trinity does not call us for an intellectual debate. Some assert it is biological unity like a chemical bonding. 1 drop of H2O+another drop of H2O+another drop of H2O make only H2O. This expiation constructs complicated simplicity. For some Trinity stands for definition about Christian God thus for others it remains as an undecipherable enigma.

Trinity is a “family talk”, talk on the family of God- Matthew 11:25-30
How the loving and caring God touches His own creation personally in three ways is the Trinitarian talk. It is not to penetrate in to the Divine but to understand the dependency of humanity on God. Look in to the predicament of humanity then we will know how the Trinitarian formula applies. Trinity is a perceptive picture of how God struggles to revive the sacredness of man and woman. The cross of Christ created the scheme of Trinity. Trinity exposes our absolute dependence on God as we are His own creation. Humanity is the central focus of this talk. Through faith, in love and with spiritual experience we may enjoy this self-revelation and disclosure of God. The God head went through this perplexing alterations, paradoxical images, logical ambiguities against conventional ideologies because Godhead reflects jeopardized humanity. Trinity is the incarnational initiative of God which compelled God to reshape Himself to accommodate humanity in to Himself. Through Jesus Christ our Lord and Saviour we found a berth in His Self.

It did not grow out of speculative theology but inspired through the witness of the disciples in the midst of life threatening dangers and the supernatural power of the Holy. The confusion about Trinity occurs in the human mind because of disobedience, indifferent attitude and severed conscience of humans. Therefore, Trinity is a way of learning and reflecting about us. Do you see a needy world in the eyes of Jesus? Trinity is calling a sinner “come home”

Psalm 98

Trinity is experienced in the context of worship. This Trinitarian structure grew out of the first disciples’ experience in the worship of God, through Jesus Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit. The new song, the joyful noise and praises of the psalmist indicates innumerable and marvelous things the Lord has done. God lives, God comes, God gives victory are all witnessing expressions of God’s concrete interventions in human life. The early church followers were able to stay together, grow together in the midst of persecution, rejection and death because Trinity gave meaningful colour to their suffering.
2 Corinthians 13: 11-13

There is fellowship in God’s family. This fellowship includes the Father, the Son, the Holy Spirit, God’s children and the whole creation. Remember Jesus’ discourse recorded in John 15 on fellowship with Him. The Father is shown as the vine grower and vinedresser. Jesus, His son is the true vine and we are the branches. And we are expected to produce more and much fruits of love and peace. Jesus said all these things, that our joy may be complete. Trinity creates the abiding space for all of us in God. Trinity provides the true essence for Godliness in our life and witness and work. The Trinity labors together on each one of us to be faithful, fruitful and joyful. Trinity is an Invitation to the believer “Abide in Me”

Matthew 28:16-20

Trinity is the power and authority for mission and ministry of the disciple. We are called to witness God. We are called to be salt and light in this world. Trinity is experienced in baptism and Eucharist which are foundation for mission. Mission and ministry is serving God’s family. Trinity is a suffering and serving, burdened and bearing, crying and caring community. There is joy whenever a lost is found. The family keeps moving in the world and also moves the world. Their family is also called Kingdom of Heaven or God. They keep equipping their children and keep sending them into the world. Trinity is commissioning God’s servant “Go in to the world”

Conclusion

Trinity expresses God’s passionate love for you and me and for all, including His marvelous creation. Trinity is God’s character and nature. May God open our eyes and hearts and minds to cherish wondrous compassion and purity of the Divine. Let the beauty of trinity be seen in us.

Rev. Paul Pragasam
CSI Madras Diocese
Collect: Creator God redeemer of the whole creation, we thank you for your redeeming grace that has liberated us and set us free. Grant us your grace to be strengthened by your redeeming power so that we become the stewards of your creation, in Jesus name that groans for liberation, through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forevermore. Amen.

“Groanings which cannot be uttered are often prayers which cannot be refused.”
-Charles Spurgeon

Introduction

Groaning basically is an expression of the urge for deliverance or liberation that emerges from the innermost being of individuals and communities, who undergo excruciating experiences of pain in life. Emotional reasons such as loneliness, harassment, helplessness and depression; or physical reasons such as lack of food, shelter and clothing; as well as external structural reasons like exploitation, injustice, unjust rulers, intolerant neighbors, slavery, foreign invasion, violence, oppression and bondage can be the causes of groaning. It is also to be noted that groaning does not confine to be in the human world, rather groaning reverberates the whole creation. In an apocalyptic language, Apostle Paul, describes the suffering of creation and expresses the cosmic scope of God’s salvation and liberation in Jesus Christ (Romans 8:22). How do we perceive this ‘groaning’ in the life and mission of the church and how could we envision an ecclesia that actively participates in God’s redemptive activity that extends to the whole Creation?

Groaning: Call to Keep Hope Alive

‘Groaning’ has been represented through various expressions in the Bible. The verb, “to groan” is the translated form of the Greek word, στενάζω (stenazo) that means, “of an inward, unexpressed feeling of sorrow.” The same word is translated as “with grief” in Heb. 13:17 (“groaning”); “sighed” in Mark 7:34; “groan,” in Rom. 8:23 and 2 Cor. 5:2, 4. Therefore, “groaning” expresses strong pain or very deep distress in unintelligible terms. We come across so many instances of groaning in the biblical narration. In the Old Testament, those who are mortally wounded in battle do groan (Jer. 51:52). Job endured his great physical and emotional distress by pouring forth his groaning like water (Job 3:24). The physical suffering due to emotional stress is expressed in “groaning all day long” (Ps. 32:3; cf. Ezk. 30:24). Similar to individual groaning, the community may groan under strenuous circumstances. This is evident in a proverb that states: “when the wicked rule, the people groan” (Prov. 29:2). The people of Israel were groaning during their bondage in Egypt, especially, when the Pharaoh intensified the torture in order to keep them under control (Ex. 2:23). Similarly, during the period of the judges, the people groaned because of their affliction whenever a foreign nation oppressed Israel (Judges. 2:18). Similarly, Jerusalem is personified as groaning intensely after it was destructed and the people were taken as captives (Lam. 1:4, 8, 11, 21f, cf. Mic. 4:10). The New Testament presents groaning as occurring in three levels: ‘nature desiring to be restored, “the believer desiring to leave the burdens and
limitations of the present body for the new resurrection body,’ and ‘the Christian earnestly praying in the Spirit to God, troubled beyond words over the sin and corruption of this present world’ (Rom. 8:22f, 26; 2 Cor. 5:2, 4).

Amidst all these expressions of groaning, one interesting fact that calls our attention is the aftermath of these groaning. Groaning always is fittingly accompanied by hope: A hope for a better state of life; liberation or quality of life. In other words, it would be right to say that groaning experience is employed by God to make people and community participate in the Divine drama of salvation. Hence, every experience of groaning is a call to keep this hope of liberation alive in every particular context.

**Groaning: Realization of a Common Destiny**

Romans 8:18-25 presupposes an integral relationship between human and the non-human creation. This relationship is expressed in the ‘groaning,’ shared by the humans along with the rest of creation; as well as the future glory to which the whole creation move forward. Paul, here, brings out an apocalyptic theology, in which the suffering and the glory alike are parts of a great cosmic movement. He links the reality of ‘suffering’/ groaning to the hope of ‘salvation’ to the whole creation. The language used here is poetic, in which the ‘nonhuman reality’ or the ‘whole creation’ is personified. In Paul’s opinion, the creation as well as the humans shares a common fate and destiny. They suffer together in the present context. Therefore, they will be renewed or ‘saved’ and transformed or ‘glorified’ together. All of these are common themes in the Jewish Scriptures and apocalyptic literature.

We would paraphrase Paul’s words in the text; “My suffering is not worth comparing to the glory of God and his creation.” The suffering, mentioned here, includes all kinds of sufferings that we must endure because of our living in this world. These also include natural disasters, disease, frustration, and death. These sufferings are said to belong specifically to the “now time,” which refers not to any one period in earth’s history but to the whole era, from the sin of the first Adam to the return of the second Adam (12:2; Gal 1:4). This calls us to have a different perspective to suffering. Particularly in the context of ecological exploitations resulting in climate changes and severe ecological issues, acknowledging the groaning of the creation would enable us to move forwards a common destiny. Hence, groaning is not simply a cry for liberation; it is a mass self upheaval of the whole creation against the corruption inspired by the evil. This realization would carry humanity towards the cosmic redemption envisioned by God in Christ.

**Groaning: Journey towards Future Glory**

Many Jewish writers, from roughly 200 B.C. to 100 A.D., used apocalypses to express their struggle with the problem of evil and the expectation that God would dramatically intervene to make things right at the end of history. According to Harry Alan Hahne, “They often express an ecological concern for nature by emphasizing that the natural world was created by God and is under God’s control. The sins of humans and fallen angels have defiled the earth and caused some aspects of nature not to operate as God originally intended. God holds humans and fallen angels accountable for their sins against the earth and animals. Nature is a
victim of human and angelic sin and cries out in suffering, and in the coming new age, the natural world will be redeemed and transformed to a state of great glory.”

‘Creation’ is described as a ‘frustrated creation,’ a ‘groaning creation,’ an ‘eagerly waiting creation,’ and a ‘free and liberated creation.’ The focus here is on “the creation.” The creation is waiting in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed (8:19). The creation here refers to the physical or natural world, or all of creation except human beings and angels. The physical universe is earnestly, breathlessly expecting something. This is emphatically stated in quite unusual wording. The text literally is “the eager expectation of the creation is eagerly waiting.” The noun translated “eager expectation” is usually identified as a compound word that means “to stretch out the head, to crane the neck forward” in an attempt to see something. Another translation reads as “Creation is on tiptoe” (Phillips). Though the etymology is different, the word represents an especially strong sense of expectation. This is compounded by the verb, which itself means “to wait eagerly.”

The scripture portrays God as the one who always ‘listens’ to the groaning, actively ‘intervenes’ into their situation and ‘relieve’ their distress (Ex. 2:24; 6:5; Acts 7:34; cf. Ps. 102:20). “I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt” (Ex.3:7-8). Paul, while writing this epistle, deals with the very real problem of suffering and pain experienced by his audience, who belongs to the persecuted Church in Rome(vv. 18–22). They have been undergoing persecution for a long time. The reality of suffering and death has been everywhere; there has been pain everywhere around them. Paul connects this reality to the suffering of the whole creation and uses multiple words to describe the plight of creation: suffering (Rom. 8:18), vanity (Rom. 8:20), bondage (Rom. 8:21), decay (Rom. 8:21), and pain (Rom. 8:22). Against such a background of the devastating situation, Paul compares the groaning of the whole creation to that of a woman in travail. Though there is pain, that pain will end when the child is delivered. Similarly, there will be a day, when the creation will be delivered, that will put an end to the present suffering. Once that happens, the groaning creation will be transformed to be a glorious creation. That is, today’s groaning bondage will be exchanged for tomorrow’s glorious liberty. This is an active hope that God will intervene in history and transform the suffering into glory.

It is to be understood that groaning and glory are complementary. As the famous axiom goes—“No pain no gain,” groaning becomes the prerequisite in order to enter into the glory. Glory could be identified as the Divine presence in which one could experience the fullness of life. Therefore, task of the church is to equip the faith community to endure groaning/suffering and perceive the same as the means to glory, when life attains its fullness.

**Conclusion**

The world today is marked with suffering of common people due to various issues. We live in the midst of technological advancement, population growth, and proliferation of consumeristic culture, human induced disasters and environmental hazards. The rapid growth in technology regularly gives rise to a number of new equipment and gadgets. As more and more advanced equipment make their appearance, most of the products came before them are considered as obsolete and are thrown to the garbage. Therefore, waste production became so rampant in multiple forms. The e-waste, bio-waste, plastic, and other forms of wastes
produced by the humans pollute the earth and threatens it with the impending destruction. Therefore, the sustenance of the creation and the very existence of many species of organisms becomes a question of existence. In addition to that, the population growth gives rise to urbanization and extension of cities by encroaching into the agricultural land, minimizing the water bodies and waste lands. As a result, droughts and floods occur very regularly that trigger unemployment, health hazards as well as migration. In a similar line, there is growing militarization, war, armed violence, terrorism, intolerance, and fascism that promote compartmentalization of the society. The situation is made even worse by the political parties with vested interest and religious fringe groups. All of these realities necessitate liberation and the whole creation is groaning for liberation.

All-powerful God, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest of your creatures. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty. Fill us with peace, that we may live as brothers and sisters, harming no one.

(Missions des Franciscains, World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 2016)

Rev. Anilal Jose
CSI South Kerala Diocese
Worship: Celebration of People's Faith

Isaiah 6: 1-8                                      Psalm 148
Revelation 4: 1-11                               John 4: 16-26

Collect: Holy and Almighty God, seated on the High and Lofty Throne, Illumine our hearts and minds to make truthful confessions, experience Your sanctification and to be guided and led by You in the pilgrimage of life. So that we may worship You in truth and in spirit and celebrate our faith, living each day in the joy of Your presence, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

WORSHIP: Celebration of People’s Faith

The people of God, in response to the persona of God and God’s benevolence celebrate their faith expressing it through various ways of worship to God. The act and expression of worship occupies the central part of any religion. In particular, the Christian worship is exclusive and unique as we offer praise and adoration to our creator, redeemer and sustainer who is the source of our being and the ground of our existence. We worship our living God for (a) Creating us in God’s own image (b) Redeeming us from sin, curse and eternal death, and (c) Sustaining us to lead a life reflecting God in and through our life, witness and ministry.

In addition, worship that is pregnant with faith and adoration of God’s people can be delineated as:

1. The revelation of God’s glory and majesty.
2. The bridge that connects us with God, and
3. The ramification of worship resulting in reconciliation and oikoumene (living together as one family)

1. The revelation of God’s glory and majesty

The scripture in Isaiah 6:1-8 and Rev.4:1-11, gives us a glimpse into the persona of God and the aura of glory surrounding the persona and the atmosphere surrounding the supreme being. As one can easily note the presence of mortal being is absent. Therefore, the inference is the disconnection between the immortal and the mortal world.

2. The bridges that connects us with God

The Psalmist in Psalm 148 beautifully connects the creation with the creator God self. This explains, the ways and means through which one can establish a relationship. The resources that help us in joining the heavenly choir is through the hymns and lyrics we sing with a clean hands and a pure heart, the prayers of adoration we offer and the liturgies we follow and practice, of the physical action and behaviour etc… Most importantly, celebrating our faith through worship and through our life and witness.

3. The ramification of worship resulting in reconciliation and oikoumence (Living together).
The participation in the acts of worship should lead us to recognize the image of God in our neighbour. The biblical text in John 4:16-26 illuminates us the paradigm of worship that Jesus unveils. Jesus encounters with the Samaritan woman is a historic landmark in forging relationships with the marginalized communities in and around our Church and Society. The Jews looked down upon the Samaritans as untouchables. They perceived the latter as polluted. Hence all religious and social contacts amputated. Both the communities lived on the diametrically opposite ends of the country. No Jew would travel into a Samaritan village and communicate with them. But, Jesus, firstly reverses both the Jewish and Samaritans perception of worship by underlying the psalmists’ word, “The earth is the lord’s and the world there of. Secondly, Jesus redefines the worshiping community. Therefore, worship can be offered and practiced anywhere, any time and by any one.

Jesus’ interaction with the Samaritan women is the paradigm of living together as one family in the body of Christ.

So, as people of God we celebrate our faith in and through worship anytime and anywhere, thereby making it a lifestyle connecting ourselves with our creator, redeemer and sustainer.

Mr. John Samadhanam
CSI Synod - SEVA

St. John the Baptist

Malachi 3:1-5                    Revelation 3:14-22

Collect: O God our Lord, You sent John the Baptist to prepare the way for the coming of Your Son. Grant us the wisdom to see Your purpose and openness to hear Your will. Teach us to repent according to his teaching, and follow his example by constantly speaking the truth, boldly rebuking vice and patiently suffering for truth’s sake, and thereby prepare the way for Christ who is coming in power and glory to establish his kingdom of peace and justice, through the same Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

The topic chosen for our meditation is “JOHN THE BAPTIST”, the forerunner of Jesus Christ. He and his mission were fore told by (Isaiah 40:3 and Malachi 3:1). John was priestly tribe by both of his parents his father Zacharias being a priest of the division of Abijah and his Mother Elizabeth being “From the daughter of Aaron” Luke 1:5. At the coming of John the Baptist a new age started. He came as a prophet and to prepare the way for the Messaiah. He did not seek an easy life. He denide himself he was greater than all the old testament prophets. Even though he belong to old covenant he was the last Jewish prophet. Until the coming of Christ their had never been a greater man than John.
1. **A man who called God**

John the Baptist was called by God. God’s call to John was to a different ministry. A ministry that fitted into God’s Plans much more than institutional religion. A man’s first loyalty is to god not to institutional religion. The institutional religionist often fears the loss of Authority, Position and security. Therefore he opposes the outside minister but John understood the call of God and was committed to that fully.

2. **A man who spoke of repentance of social Justice**

When John appeals for repentance he is inviting his hearers to make a radical break with their sinful past and to turn a fresh to god who will come soon in Judgment.

Repentance is more than turning away from sin it is also a turning to a fruitful life. The one who repents should change his life completely needs to respect and love people, be truthful and honest, contented and responsible. John’s Message demanded a changed life.

3. **A man who spoke of repentance to re-union**

John the Baptist emphasize, repent and be Baptized. “Baptism” is an connecting Element with Christ. We can re-union with Christ baptism is an ritual for some its re-union for some. Through baptism we can made new. Mathew 3:7-8- he says “you offspring of vipers, who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth, therefore fruit worthy of repentance”.

Fruit is the ‘out ward expression’ of deep inner conviction without fruit there is no real repentance. Surely repentance is much deeper execution of love towards his presence. Today we are seeing this ‘Holy Baptism’ without holy. We are just making it as an ritual. Without repentance we cannot be holy as the God our Lord is holy one. Without repentance today we are partaking in the Holy communion to re-union with God but this re-union cannot reach us to kingdom of God like an hypocrite we are here but the day will come we should prepare for it. Without repent we cannot be with God. God warns us by warning Lovdecia church. (Revelation 3:14 – Says), “I know your works that you were neither hot nor cold, so because you were luke warm. I am going to vomit you out of my mouth”. Becarefull by dear church. Today our God still giving us one chance.

1. **John was called by God.**
2. **He is humble and meek.**
3. **He reveals God through his character.**

Let us appropriate this message in our lives and bring glory to God. The one who repents should change his life completely needs to respect and love people. Be truthful and honest, contented and responsible John’s message demanded changed life. Do we show Jesus to others when they observe our words and deeds? As we remember and commemorate John the Baptist.
May the triune God help us to be meaningful and fruitful community of sharing and growing together - Amen.

Rev.A.P. Johnson Vijaya Kumar
CSI Nandyal Diocese
Collect: O God, of righteousness and Life, Who hears the heart throb of the poor and the marginalised, Mould us to renounce ungodliness and help us to live upright and godly lives, So that we would in faith wait for the blessed hope in the appearing in glory of the Lord constantly praying “He must increase and I must decrease”, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Discipleship is a very important aspect in Christian Tradition. Through Jesus’ teaching this word received more value. Jesus as Master selected 12 disciples (Mt. 10:1-4), 70 disciples (Lk. 10:1) and later numerous followed him as his disciples (Mt. 4:25). At the end of Jesus’ earthly life Jesus also gave his commission to his disciples ‘to make disciples of all nations’(Mt. 28:19). Hence ‘Discipleship’ is an important Christian characteristic which meditated very often in Christian circles. Witness means in two ways

“Witness” is another loaded word in Christian tradition. In general witness means in two ways, firstly ‘to observe’ and secondly ‘to tell/testify’. In addition to this usage Christian circles use this word as a characteristic feature of Christian life. Witness is a measuring tool of a Christian life. What witness you have among people is a common question heard in faith community. Specially Christians witness (observe) their faith, witness (testify) their faith and maintain their witness (life of Christian faith). Hence ‘witness’ is an expression of Christian life.

As per the theme, this sermon meditates on ‘Discipleship as Witness’. Discipleship as witness demands few qualities in Christian life. The following are three important aspects which extracted from the given scriptures.

I. Discipleship demands Greater Conviction

Conviction has varied means belief, trust and commitment. Greater conviction is very important aspect in discipleship. Commitment towards studies, trusty worthiness to the master and faithfulness to the aim/goal is vital aspects in discipleship.

II Kings 2:1-15 gives an account of conviction of Elisha in his discipleship. Elisha was chosen to be a prophet after Elijah (I Kings 19:16) and was called by Elijah (I Kings 19:19). From then on Elisha followed his master Elijah (I Kings 19:21). No matter where his master goes and stays Elisha followed him. By the time they reached to II Kings 2 Chapter many of the disciples of Elijah knew that their master was going to be taken to heaven so that they stopped following him (II Kings 2:3, 5, 7) because they knew about Elijah that all of sudden he used to disappear and nobody knew where he gone and how he gone (I Kings 18:12). But Elisha followed Elijah, he didn’t want to stop because it was his commitment. He was called to be a prophet after Elijah so he continued his journey with commitment. Even Elijah asked him to stop his journey, Elisha didn’t cease his journey. While in the journey there were many hurdles (like river Jordan II Kings 2:6), though Elisha followed Elijah. There was none like Elisha, whom his master can trust.
When many were leaving Jesus, he asked his 12 disciples that do they also want to leave him (Jn. 6:67). Disciples replied that “Lord to whom can we go? You alone are the one who give life. They were so faithful their master.

Other disciples of Elijah might think that even after knowing that Elijah is going to be taken away there was no point or use in following him. But Elisha was sure that he would be benefitted for this conviction. Other disciples witnessed the benefited aspect of Elisha i.e. ‘The spirit of Elijah rest Elisha’ (II Kings 2:15). Elisha’s Conviction becomes his witness. Having greater conviction is a witness of a disciple.

II. Discipleship demands an appealing pattern of life style

Paul in his epistle to Titus 2:1-15 encouraging Titus his follower and spiritual Son to have an appealing pattern of life style. He asked Titus to show himself in all respects as a model of good works (Titus 2:7-8). Paul encouraged living a life of self controlled, upright and Godly. Need to have zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14). Being good and doing good is expected nature of a disciple. Jesus encouraged his disciples to love one another and do good to one another. Jesus said to his disciples that ‘by this people know that you are my disciples’ (Jn. 13:35). Having good Character and good values are the demand of discipleship.

Elisha in course of his ministry was so good and done wonderful ministry. Helped the poor, solved many problems, cured the sick, fed the hungry and raised the dead. Just as Jesus in the New Testament, Elisha was in Old Testament. Life with its appealing life style is a witness of a disciple.

III. Discipleship demands Certainty

Elders of the Jesus’ time asked him “By what authority you are doing these things” (Mk. 11:28) Who gave permission to do this? Disciples also faced the same question that who gave you power to do these things? Authorization/ permission is necessary to do some things. Certification is necessary for any course of study. Certification is necessary to prove your authenticity. Certificate alone gives proof of evidence that one is completed that course and have enough knowledge in that subject. It was John the Baptist who testified about the ministry of Jesus. He upholds the ministry of Jesus and certifies that it was come from heaven. The ministry revealed that it was from heaven so it became a witness. In fact Jn. 3:22-30 is an account related to Baptism. There was a discussion and difference of opinion on baptism between the disciples of John the Baptist and a Jew. As concluding words of this passage John the Baptist was saying that Jesus must increase and he must decrease. Though both were giving baptism, John the Baptist was accepting the greatness of Jesus and his ministry.

This thought encourages us to do our best to reach to the peaks. Elisha the prophet being the disciple of Elijah strived to achieve double portion of Elijah’s Spirit and received the same spirit of Elijah (II Kings 2:1-15). Since he targeted for the best he received same as his master. This was witnessed by the group of disciples. Jesus too gave same authorization to his disciples to continue the ministry.

In Discipleship the proof of evidence as witness is also important. Disciple need to concentrate to achieve the best so that there is a certainty in knowledge or works.
Discipleship certainly need to be proved by the authenticity that to be shown in expressions or lives just like how Elisha proved himself.

**Conclusion**

In the society that we leave how one can fulfil the great commission of our Lord and saviour Jesus Chris? Many would say we should preach, but how many have preached all through these centuries, what kind of impact has these preaching and so called evangelism has created in the lives of people. We should accept that great that we preached all these centuries but somewhere we were not able to convert out preaching’s, evangelism and service into a witness in our society. It is high time for us to rethink and re-act so that we can be good disciples of Christ displaying a better witness to our redeemer. For this we need greater conviction in our faith journey. We should present ourselves as an appealing pattern of lifestyle and finally we need to be authentic in everything that we do in our Christian life. May the Holy Spirit enable us and help us to have all these qualities in our life so that we may be a witness for Jesus in this society. Amen.

**Rev. T. Johnson Jesudas**
**CSI Dornakal Diocese**
Collect: Ever active God, Who has revealed compassion and fullness of Life through Your son Jesus Christ and called us to be responsible with the resources available, Grant that we may be prudent in the management of resources as people who fear God, trustworthy and who hate dishonest gain, So that in overflowing joy and rich generosity we may be wise stewards of Your manifold gifts, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

We are celebrating the Stewardship Sunday; God has created this beautiful world and human beings in his own image. God admired his own creations and gave responsibility and entrusted the essence of stewardship to the human kind, what is stewardship? Stewardship is a theological belief that humans are responsible for the world, and should take care of it. Stewardship is people who believe in one God who created the universe and all that are within it, also believing that they must take care of creation and look after it. Creation includes animals and the environment. Many religions and denominations have various degrees of support for environmental stewardship. It can have political implications, such as in Christian Democracy.

The bible emphasis stewardship in personal life, Church and society for every Christian. The very first chapter of the bible exposes the Stewardship of human being Genesis 1: 28 “God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the over birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth”. Here the word “subdue and dominion” should not compare with the oppressiveness, but god told them told them to care. In very beginning God gives responsibility to human beings, our bible emphasis the stewardship in many ways. Stewardship in work place, church, contribution, responsibility in secure world. The bible emphasis every Christian to keep the responsibility delegate by God.

Mathew 25: 14 – 30
a) Delegating the Authority
b) Developing the Ability
c) Demonstrating the Accountability

a) Delegating the Authority
In Mathew 25th Chapter verses 14, the master one who appoints his servants for a task, “ he summoned his servant and entrusted his property to them”, delegating the authority is the God’s wonderful act, he deliver the responsibility and expects them be a good stewards. According to their abilities the master gave talents, we cannot ask the master about his sharing of talents; though it was uneven, but it is his will to measure delegation of responsibility. No one was created in this world without any responsibility, everyone have a task in this world. God wants us to be respectable in the given responsibilities, he gave talents
to everyone gives us freewill to use them, though we are not watched closely but we called to give account for the same we received, as individuals and community we do have many responsibilities in family, church and the society.

b) Developing the Ability

God want to develop our abilities in given task. Verses 18-20. The one who received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents, in the same was the one who had two talents made two more talents. The God’s plan is to develop our talents because he is a co-creator, he delegates the responsibilities allow them to develop. Each and every cell in our body is doing its work, every creation in this world accomplishing the duties entrusted by God. Likewise God want us to develop our abilities in various fields. In the life of Jesus Christ he was as hard worker, though he was send by his father to bring kingdom of God in this world, he took the responsibilities of family. Our Bible always denotes our Christian stewardship in our life. Idealism is devilish act; empty mind is a devils workshop. But the one who receive one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid the master’s money. He did not realise the stewardship which assigned to him. God always wants us to develop the abilities and talent.

c) Demonstrating the Accountability

The Master one who entrusted appreciates the succeed, Mathew 25 chapter 21, says “well done, good and trust Worthing servant” denote that he values the hard work and recognize the calibre of a person. The judgement day is for everyone, one who multiples the talent and exercises the stewardship will be for rewarded and will be given or entrusted more responsibility. In this parable the one who receive one talent and went and dug in the soil, he was condemned by the master not for producing more talent, but did not even try with the given talent. The master would have appreciated him if he would have done something with that talent. In verses 24, 25, he accusing the master with harsh words, he did not even plead pardon. The judgement was very sure for the people like him, and they would face the consequences.

Conclusion

Gen 2.15, “lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. The stewardship is entrusted by god to everyone, God expect us to be a good steward in the house, family, relationship, society, church, stewardship in giving, spending our money, place where we work, we cannot be holy unless we are true to our secular works, guarding the god’s creation. May god bless you Amen.

Rev. G. Francis Gnanasundaramani
CSI Madras Diocese
Collect: God of all understanding, Who constantly reveal Yourself in manifold ways and urge us to equip the people of God to comprehend Your precepts, Help us to impress the Scriptures on our children, talk about them when we sit at home and when we walk along the road, when we lie down and when we get up. So that they would hear the word and do them and be like the person who build his house upon the rock, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

The Churches have to equip the entire people of God for ministry. In order to begin this process the local churches need to find out ‘where are our people during the week?’ In other words, we need to develop ways of identifying where the people are and what they are doing during the week. This process gives the people of God a sense that they have been strategically placed by God in their working worlds to make a difference there. The Church is called together to be a distinctive community, a holy people, a sign and sacrament of God’s love in the world. Also, the Church is called to share in the mission of God: we are sent in the power of the Spirit to bear testimony to God’s grace and to share in the work of God’s kingdom.

The starting point for forming and equipping the people of God in mission and ministry is a renewal of our understanding of discipleship. A disciple is someone who follows Jesus, who is committed to learning and growth in their faith, who is prepared for difficulty and sacrifice and who offers their whole life to God in response to God’s grace revealed in Jesus. As disciples we are called to live in the rhythm of coming together to be with Jesus in the Eucharist and being sent out to engage in God’s mission. As a national Church, we are called to grow a culture of discipleship across the Dioceses.

Now let us begin to understand the scripture portions carefully chosen for today.

I. Equipping Family

The family is the basic social unit around which everything in society revolves. As the family goes so goes society. If you destroy the family you will destroy civilization. An equipping (Christian) family is the strength of a society. Dr. Nick Stinnett at the University of Nebraska(USA) studied the characteristics of strong families in different societies around the world. He discovered several common qualities in these families including:

- They are committed to the family social unit.
- They spend quality time together as a family.
- They have good communication skills within the family.
- They consistently express appreciation to each other.
- They apply problem-solving skills in times of crisis.
- They have a commitment to a wholesome spiritual life.
Deuteronomy. Ch. 6 emphasizes many of these same characteristics. In his great sermon to the congregation of Israel at the end of his life Moses declared, "Hear, O Israel! The Lord is our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might." Jesus called this great passage "the first and great commandment." It is a command to love the LORD God. Because they love Him they will have a lifelong fear, or reverence, and obey Him.

Verse 4 speaks of the Shema, which comes from the Hebrew word translated "Hear." It is a reminder of the great commandment that is the major confession of faith in Judaism. "The Lord is our God, the Lord is one!" More literally the Hebrew idea is, "the Lord, our God, the Lord, one." It is "the fundamental truth of Israel’s religion." The Jewish people believed that "the Lord" (Yahweh) is totally unique, one in essence and that He alone is God. A kind of theological education starts at home.

We cannot give our children what we do not possess. We cannot pass along what we do not own. No one else can do it for us. Our children’s programs, Sunday School and public school cannot assume that responsibility. It is our responsibility as parents. We are to love the Lord with all our heart and to share that love with our children. Moses admonished the children of Israel to become role models of this love in their homes. If you love Him, you will obey Him.

"You shall teach them diligently to your sons" (v. 7). The idea of teaching children by repetition is a theme that runs throughout the book. P. C. Craig reminds us, "The commandments were to be the subject of conversation both inside and outside the home, from the beginning of the day to the end of the day." In summary, the commandments were to permeate every sphere of the life of man. Be spiritually prepared and sensitive to witness to your children. Share Christ with them. Don’t be afraid or ashamed to talk about spiritual things with them. Jesus was extremely patient with Mary and Joseph. He submitted to their authority. He lived in harmony with God and His parents. Let us restore these values in our Christian homes so that children may be equipped in the Christian way of life.

II. Equipping Church [Eph. 4: 7-16]

Paul says, nearly breathing deeply with the desperation: "I urge you to walk in a way that honors Christ. I’m begging you to do this!" The present way you live has nothing to do with the way you were saved. Verses 4 through 11 present the distribution of gifts to the body; gifts display diversity within unity. God gifts each believer individually with capacity to serve Him. These gifts help preserve unity in the local church. ([The] grace was given) In the Greek, the word “the” precedes the word “grace.” “The grace” here is unique; it is the grace that enables our gifts to function. “Grace” is what empowers gifts. The essential idea of grace is to give. God, as the God of grace, is oriented to giving to His own. We do nothing to get His grace; we can only receive it.

The purpose of all gifts is to equip the church for ministry (4:12). Having presented gift categories in verse 11, Paul now gave the purpose behind those leadership gifts. The idea of this verse is that God gave gifted men to prepare God’s people for building up His body—namely, the building up of the corporate body of Christ. God’s purpose is to provide gifted men so that individuals in the church can serve. Women, of course, receive multiple gifts as
well. No gifted person can do all that is necessary to execute God’s plan for the church. When a maximum number of people become willing to work in the church, ministry will become dynamic.

Edification is an important concept in Ephesians (4:12, 16, 29). Paul used the word 15 times in his epistles (18 in the NT). He used the verb 9 times as well. Spiritual growth comes first through understanding of Scripture, next through the perception of its principles, then the digestion of those principles, and finally the constant application of those principles to experience.

III. Equipping the people of God for Leadership (Mathew 7: 24-29)

One of the great responsibilities – and privileges – of being a matured Christian is to develop the people around you, to help those that have the potential to become front-runners themselves. There is no success without a successor.

We read that “the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.” There was something distinctive about the authority of Jesus’ teaching. Jesus did not repeat the teaching of others; He spoke from His own authority. The scribes checked with the opinions of previous authorities and never came to a final conclusion. Jesus’ word was final and finished in authority from truth. We need sincere leaders today.

How did Jesus equip people for ministry?

- He modeled – He did it (Mark 1, 2).
- He mentored – He did it and they were with Him (Mark 3:13-15).
- He monitored – They did it and He was with them (Mark 6:7-13).
- He motivated – They did it and He was in the background encouraging them (Mark 16:15-18).
- He multiplied – They did it (Acts 1:6-7; 2 Timothy 2:2).

You are successful as a leader when you leave an area a better place than when you found it. To do that best, you must leave behind people who are well equipped. “The final test of a leader,” says Walter Lippmann,” is that he leaves behind him in other[s] the conviction and the will to carry on.” The Sermon on the Mount concludes with a warning about building on the strong foundation of Jesus’ teachings. Those with weak conviction about Christ’s teaching will have a terrible fall.

Conclusion

From the inception of Christianity education has played a major role in enabling the tradition of the Christian faith to be remembered and celebrated. As Christianity emerged as a new faith within the Judeo-Palestinian tradition and had to survive amidst the Greco-Roman milieu, it embarked on appropriate education to ensure that its faithful were soundly rooted in their faith and prepared to defend it when challenged by adversaries. Early Christianity, being deeply rooted in Judeo-Palestine tradition, thus had an intrinsic commitment to education from the very beginning. As early as the Gospel of St. Luke it is pointed out that Christians

Christianity was a learning and teaching religion, as the sources of Christian faith were not just inner emotional feelings of the individual but a complex tradition transmitted in narratives, in hymns, in liturgy and later in creeds common to a majority of Christians at different places which could be memorized and had to be re-appropriated anew in each generation. It is very significant in biblical tradition that Timothy for instance is exhorted “to continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ”(2 Tim. 3,14-15).

Rev. Dr. Shine John Mathews
CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese
Collect: O sovereign God, Who urged us to be strong and courageous and entrusted us with the ministry of reconciliation. Grant that we would not be afraid or discouraged to be the ambassadors of Christ, So that we could go out and proclaim and people would repent and believe in the Gospel, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

Church likes to identify itself with the titles children of God, called out, chosen race, the elect and People of God, etc… Most of the humans in one or another way like to claim superiority in terms of race, color, caste, creed, gender, class and so on. Most of us like to claim superior status. Everything in life comes with a price tag and nothing is free even the status that which we like to claim. Every Right that we like to enjoy comes with a duty. No Right could be exercised in isolation without the duty. In similar way People of God are the representatives and ambassadors of Christ. Ambassadors are supposed to portray the qualities and character of their own country. The image of their nation will be measured by the deeds and words of the ambassadors.

Ambassadors for Christ: called to live Holy Life

In the book of Joshua Israelites are enjoying the status of being the elect and chosen race. The status of “People of God” is a covenantal relationship. Covenant is a solemn agreement. A promise made with God and the people of Israel. This agreement remains until both the parties remains true to their convictions. The Lord demands holiness in the relationship. Holiness is required to portray the quality of God living among the nations. It is neither ritualistic experience nor an ethnic or racist behavior. It is setting apart from the worldly desires and pleasures that makes unfaithful to the partner.

Ambassadors for Christ: making communities of Reconciliation

The status of being People of God is an open invitation for everyone. All are welcome and Apostle Paul makes this clear to the Corinth church that to have this status. They should have the quality of being ‘In Christ’ v.17. In Christ they will be transformed to become new creation. Then they will be charged with responsibility and a mission to fulfill. Apostle Paul says that he has received the word of reconciliation and the ministry of reconciliation. He is a passionate ambassador who begs the congregation to be reconciled with God. Today we the church is called to be a community that reconciles. Our ministry and the word we preach are to bring reconciliation. Reconciliation among families, communities and countries is the need of the hour.

Ambassadors for Christ: Living the message of Christ
Ambassadors living in foreign countries enjoy the lavish treatment of having spacious villas, servants, vehicles and having the conversation with the respective country officials and leaders. But ambassadors for Christ are the one’s called to live a simple life which is similar to ascetic life. Here ambassadors are not merely speakers but to live the values of the message. They are called to share and live the message of Christ. The ambassadors for Christ are charged with the mission of spreading the news of repentance, doing the act of healing and liberating people from the evil effects.

Rev. M. Prashanth Babu
CSI Medak Diocese
Collect: O Chief Shepherd, Who constantly call the people of God to tend and feed the little lambs and the sheep. Raise among us Your children who are above reproach, who would be sentinels for Your people, So that in and through them the world would experience the transformation in Christ, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

Transformation is all about change. Be it good or bad, being transformed means to change oneself owing to different characteristics. With reference to Jesus’ act of changing water into wine in Cana, water when turned into wine demonstrated different attributes or qualities. Hence, the process of transformation in Cana was also an act of exemplifying the qualities of the transformed product. This sheds light on the fact that we cannot talk about the process of transformation without acknowledging the inherent qualities which acts as a catalyst for transformation itself. This context will be helpful in analysing our topic: ‘Ordained Ministry: Transformed to Transform’ as the given bible portions point finger towards the inherent qualities that should be embraced by an ordained minister in his or her journey of transformation in order to transform others.

1. An Ordained Minister as a Watchman in the Process of Transformation (Ezek 33:1-9)

Ezekiel 33: 1-9 tries to attach to the leader or prophet the role of a watchman. The passage brings forth the role of a watchman as one who listens to God’s word and the times in directing and warning the people. It is a duty of diligence and perseverance. It is a call to risk one’s life to save the life of many. It involves a responsibility of warning against the sword of the times and blowing the trumpet with courage. It is all about taking up a great responsibility for the cause of others. Yes, it is not about the watchman anymore; it is about others and others lives. It is about not being silent and acting at the right time with the urge to rescue lives.

Ezekiel presents the role of a watchman as a strong image which is significant to the need of our times. Are we able to take up the role of a watchman who is watchful throughout the dark of the night in the context of ordained ministry? Are we ready to rebuke and correct and to ‘blow the trumpet’ to those who need to be made heard the sounds and signs of warning without fear? Can we act out rather than being silent where our voice is necessary? Can we ultimately risk our lives to save souls?

Being a watchman demands courage, diligence, perseverance, dutifulness, risk and a passion to save others. Can we in the process of transformation exhibit the qualities of a good watchman to be transformed and to transform others?

2. An Ordained Minister as an Leader in the Process of Transformation (1 Tim 3:1-13)

We find the image of an ordained minister as a leader in 1 Timothy 3:1-13. A leader is a model and the passage brings out a number of traits that are to be followed by the leader.
Faithful, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable; the list goes on. A close reading of the passage leads us to conclude that the traits of a leader as a model with regard to his family as a family person is given importance here. “If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?” is the question raised here. This refers to the leader as a team builder wherein the members of his team/ his or her family, are inspired to grow together. This involves an attitude of providing a good ambience for work/ life and to equip each other on the journey forward. Most of the traits listed in the passage also refer to the act of ‘keeping one’s tongue in leashes’ as well, which is to maintain the identity of a leader being a model in speech and deed alike.

Are we true leaders who are able to inspire and build others in our ministry? Do we build or destroy others? Do we ever tend to leave space for others to grow as a team leader? Do we demonstrate enough qualities as a leader for others to imbibe? Are we ‘family persons’ who take care of our families? Do we also take care of our tongues and put them to leash whenever necessary?

Being a leader is all about being a great model where others are inspired and take to their hearts traits and qualities which resound from us. Can we in the process of transformation exhibit the qualities of a good leader to be transformed and to transform others?

3. An Ordained Minister as a Pastor in the Process of Transformation (Jn 21:15-19)

The passage in the Gospel of John takes us to the image of a pastor. The terms ‘feed’ and ‘tend’ add more colour to it. Again, the image of a pastor is one in which the significance is on the flock which is to be fed and to be tended and not on the pastor. The role of a pastor demands the act of forgetting about oneself and focusing on the flock. Jesus asks John to feed and to tend his flock. Feeding is about attending to the ‘felt needs’ of the flock. The felt needs of the flock refer to the utmost need which seems to be important in their eyes be it clothes to wear, a shelter to take abode in, or a meal that would take away their hunger. It is important as a pastor to cater to the felt needs of the flock which will help in gaining the trust of the flock. The act of tending or taking care of is followed by the act of feeding. Tending is about attending to the ‘real needs’ of the flock. These real needs might be ignorant in the eyes of the flock but that is where the real challenge arises before a pastor. Real needs include acts like spiritual edification which might seem unimportant to the flock. But the pastor ought to take care and tend the flock as Jesus commanded.

How do we manage our role as a pastor in our ministry? Do we take time to ‘feed’ and to ‘tend’ our flock? Are we aware of the ‘felt needs’ of our flock? How do we respond to the ‘real needs’ of our flock? Do we really stand by our flock to feed and to take care of them?

Being a pastor is all about feeding and tending. Can we in the process of transformation exhibit the qualities of a good pastor to be transformed and to transform others?

Conclusion

We need to display qualities that are soothing and significant to our ministry in the process of transformation, which is to be transformed and to transform others. Three images should be our stronghold in our journey of being transformed and transforming. The image of the watchman and the leader and the pastor should rekindle the ministerial fire within us where
others are influenced and challenged. May we as diligent watchmen, able leaders and zealous pastors be transformed for the cause of Christ wherein we invite in others to be transformed and stand for the same cause as watchmen, leaders and pastors.

Rev. Dr. P. K. Kuruvilla
CSI Madhya Kerala Diocese
Marriage: Celebration of Covenant/ Sacrament

Genesis 2:18-25                         Psalm 127
Hebrews 13: 1- 6                        Mathew 19: 3-  6

Collect: O God of the Families, Who instituted the covenant of marriage, Strengthen the bond of fellowship within the families and help everyone to hold marriage in honour So that mutual love may continue, generations would grow in an atmosphere of love and care, society may stand upon firm foundations and God’s name would be glorified, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

The relationship between the male and the female is the earthly expression of the relationship between God and humankind. This expression is called the Holy Matrimony. Today, the thought of marriage often gives a negative stroke and is seen as a threat for the present generation. But the Word of God gives a different picture on this unique relationship. Scripture describes several relationships yet there is only two covenant relationship that God has established. The first is our covenantal relationship with God and the second is the marriage between a man and a woman. Today we are called to celebrate this covenant. But instead of a thrilling experience, marriage has become a threat filled experience because of the misinterpretation of the purpose and significance of this remarkable relationship. Let us go through three important steps to change this covenant from a chaos into a celebration. The first step is to

1. Turn worse into better: Psychological arena

God created everything and saw that it was good. But in Genesis 2:18 we read that, “It is not good…” as He found man alone and so He made a helper suitable for him. So marriage is not to make our life worse but better. Yet the main reason for the reverse result in majority of the couples is because of what happens in their psychological arena. In Genesis 1:27, we read that “…male and female He created them”: male from the dust and female with his rib. Bible teaches that the role of women in marriage is to compliment and complete men. Men has to love his wife and sacrifice himself for her just as Christ did for the church. Today marriage is pathetic because of our failure to understand and accept our differences. Both men and women vary in how they see the world, in how they handle their stress, in their understanding on sexuality, in their choices etc. Our spouse see life, approach life and handle life differently than we do. The only thing in common is that we are being made in the image of God.

The issue of ‘who is Great’ has become devil’s successful agenda to lead our marriage to divorce. When the sons of Zebedee were striving for positions, Jesus in Matthew 20:26-27 said that whoever wants to be great must be a servant. In short, Christ was not talking about the position, but the responsibility of both the partners. Our differences are our strengths for that’s the way God has created us and so we should let God work in our psychological arena to change our attitude toward the purpose and significance of this relationship that can possibly turn our marriage from worst into better.

The second step to change this covenant from chaos into celebration is that we need to
2. Turn poor into richer – practical arena

Each one’s psychological condition directly affects their life in practical arena. A man influenced by his abusive parents would tend to abuse his wife and children. What goes in comes out. Paul in Titus 2:4-8 says that women must love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husband. Similarly, men to be self-controlled and to be an example in everything by doing what is good. In the practical arena, we need to strengthen our covenant with God, which in turn will reflect in our covenant with our partners. Here we deal with our mutual love and trust, our faithfulness to our spouse as well as with God, our life of devotion and prayer and our testimonial life in family and society. We need to constantly check our character code to make it richer and purer in the sight of the world pleasing to God.

Devil brings many attractive offers to destroy and break the covenant made by us. He is very clever in making us believe all his lies, against our spouse and our God. He tries to weaken the relationship by sowing doubt in our heart. But our responsibility is to submit to God and resist the devil. It is possible only when we have a rich relationship with God and with our spouse. So to turn our poor relationship into a richer one, so that our marriages and families can be whole and functional, Christ must be given the centre part in our life and family. If we succeed in building this rich and strong relationship in our practical arena, we can no doubt change the covenant of marriage from chaos into celebration.

Third step toward the celebration of covenant is to

3. Turn sickness into health – physical arena

This is the most forgotten part in marriage by both the spouses. As we get ready to marry, many concentrate on their physical fitness but after few years our stress keeps us far from concentrating on our health. Staying fit both in body and mind is very important to run our family in a healthy way. Scripture says, our body is the temple of God. We are accountable and responsible for the way we deal with it and so we need to really check what goes inside as it defiles our body. A healthy body also keeps our mind alert. Healthy mind filled with God’s grace keeps us away from unhealthy thoughts, words and actions.

To make our marriage healthy, it is necessary to give our body, mind and heart to the Lord completely. Any little or big physical sickness should be taken seriously and be committed in God’s hand. Our unhealthy mind can cause several physical problems, sleeplessness, depression, ulcer and serious sicknesses. To cope such diseases we need to deal with our unhealthy mind. Sinful practices, drug addictions, alcoholism and smoking also causes serious damage to numerous parts of the body. Romans 12:2 says, “Do not be conformed to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind”. Often conformed to the pattern of this world brings destruction to the family life. Peer pressure, adultery, lust for money and like devil’s schemes destroys our mind, body and the covenant both with God and our partner. Today majority of married men and women lead an unhealthy life either physically or mentally through ailment or sinful practices. We are responsible to keep ourselves fit for the goodness of our family and for our spouse to whom it belongs, to make our covenant healthy.

Conclusion
Marriage is a holy relationship instituted by God for His perfect design for the perfect purpose of His crown of creation. Unlike contract, it is a covenant of commitment with promises to be fulfilled by one partner irrespective of the failure of the other. So it is important to look into our psychological arena, practical arena and physical arena to make our marriage a celebration of covenant. Let us turn worse into better, poor into richer, sickness to health and thereby make this remarkable relationship better, richer and healthier.

Rev. Rajesh Charles
CSI Kollam Kottarakara Diocese
Mission Sunday

Mission: Good News to All

Isaiah 55: 1-6
Acts 10: 34 - 43
Psalm 146
Matthew 4: 17-25

Collect: God of the Good News, Who made the heavens and the earth to communicate the Good News to the whole creation, Help us to incline our hearts to Your enlivening Word that ensure justice to the poor, food to the hungry, freedom to the bound, vision to the blind, protection to the stranger and dignity to the widow, So that we may imbibe the spirit of the good news, preach peace in Christ and live the gospel, In the name of God who chose us as witnesses, Christ who commanded us to preach and the Holy Spirit who enable us to testify.

Amen.

Introduction

“As fire exists in its flame, the church exists in its mission,” says Emil Bruner. Mission is missio dei. It started from the very moment of the creation of the heaven and earth and will be consummated with the accomplishment of the new heaven and the new earth. Church becomes stagnant without mission, which is integral to the spread of the gospel. The ultimate aim of Christian mission is disciplining people so that they, irrespective of all distinctions and prejudices know the God in Christ. Let’s reflect on how does mission become good news to all based on today’s lectionary.

1. Mission, a free gift which satisfies all (Is. 55: 1-6)

Isaiah 55 is an invitation to abundant life, where the prophet promises the Israelites that God is going to deliver them from Babylonian captivity free of cost. Being aware of the Abrahamic covenant of the possession of Canaan (Gen. 12: 2-3; 15: 18-21; 17: 3-8, 19) and the Mosaic covenant of the liberation from the Egyptian exile, Isaiah reminds them of the everlasting covenant which God has made with David too. Though David’s dynasty ended and the kingdom bifurcated into Judah in the South and Israel in the North, God’s mission continued through Cyrus, the Persian King. God made David three things; (i) a witness to show all the nations of God’s love and power, (ii) a leader of nations to receive God’s blessings and fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham (Ps. 18: 43; 72: 17) and (iii) a commander to teach all the nations to obey God (Is. 45: 14; 53: 11). Similarly Cyrus is God’s anointed person to liberate the people of God from Babylonian exile. This liberation is a part of God’s covenant. Every covenant is ensured with a meal, a symbol of the heart’s intense quest for truth, which is considered as a token of grace and blessing, eg, the covenant between Laban and Jacob (Gen. 31: 44, 54). That’s why there are the references to milk, wine and bread. This meal is a free gift which does satisfy all. In this context the prophet quizzes the people why are they spending money for that which are not bread and labour which do not satisfy all. This very same context reminds us to reflect upon our own situation. Mission is the one which does convey the good news of liberation and salvation, but we, by ignoring it, are running behind food and work which seldom give us any satisfaction. Satisfaction is the end of mission. In this consumerist world, food and labour are becoming part of a disposable or a throw-away culture. Hence we must be mindful of the true source of satisfaction which comes free of cost, the mission of good news to all.
2. Mission, a good news transcends all boundaries (Acts 10: 34-43)

The mission which Jesus taught and the early apostles practiced, was a cross border mission (Mt. 28: 19-20). Acts 10: 34-43 shows how Peter become a missionary to the Gentiles, crossing the borders of Jewish conservatism. Cornelius, the centurion of the Italian regiment in Caesarea, receives Peter’s mission, accepts the good news and gets baptized along with his family and fellow people. Like the other centurions in the NT, he was also pictured favourably (Mt. 8: 5-10; 27: 54; Mk. 15: 44-45; Acts 22: 25-26; 23: 17-18, 27: 6-43). Peter’s mission as well as proclamation to the Gentiles was the most revolutionary one. It swept away the prejudices and indoctrination of the generation of Judaism. The very opening words of Peter prove that, i.e. God shows no partiality, in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him (Acts 10: 34). This message provides us a good lesson to the present day Christians and Church as well. We are trying to limit or confine God within the boundaries of our own church and religion itself, but it is the unlimited mission which should be our chief priority.

3. Mission, makes disciples for Christ (Mt. 4: 17-25)

Jesus begins his mission echoing the words of repentance as John, the Baptist (3: 2; 4:17). For us the centre of mission would probably be among the affluent, whereas for Jesus the centre was the margins of Galilee, a place away from the powerful centre and in the same place the socio- economically deprived people dwelt. From there the good news spread to Syria, a Gentile place, Decapolis, Jerusalem, Judea and from beyond Jordan. Jesus’ mission was a doing mission, for that he first selected the pairs of brothers, Andrew and Peter, and the sons of Zeb-e-dee, James and John. He commanded them to follow him and made them catchers of men instead of fish. The NRSV seems right when it says fish for people, where as in the other versions it is catchers or fishers of men (NIV), i.e., a hunting or an aggressive mission, but true mission is indeed making the disciples fish for people, i.e., mission which will make the disciples victims for Christ. We might remember what Dietrich Bonheoffer said, “come and be crucified” for Christ. All the true disciples become fish for people. Jesus’ first disciples were from fishing community. They were the most despised people in the society. In Cicero’s ranking of occupation, owners of cultivated land ranked first and fishermen last. Athanasius says fishermen and fishmongers were despised as equal as money lenders and thieves. To such a vulnerable community did Jesus concentrate his mission. Through this Jesus wanted to build an alternative society.

4. Mission, builds an alternative community (Mt. 4: 23-25)

Jesus focused his mission to create an alternative community challenging the imperial structures. For these disciples, fishing was their livelihood. The Sea of Galilee was controlled by the Roman imperialist forces. Fishermen had to get license for fishing which added revenue to the imperial treasury. Leaving behind the boat itself was a challenge to the imperial powers at the cost of their lives. In this way they also became fish for people. The disciples left their father and boat. Note the order; ‘boat’ and then the ‘father’. It meant that material things were prioritized than family relations as we are doing right now. Their family obligations were subordinated to a greater obligation to God. Their fathers gave them the
freedom to serve the Lord. Unlike us they were the role models who did not regard their sons as insurance policies to take care of them in their old age. Their identity as fishermen with their involvement in the imperial economic and political monopoly was replaced by a new identity and relationship in Christ as disciples. After this Jesus healed the demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics. These diseases were related with Jesus’ resistance to an imperial culture. Demon possession was a kind of people’s unwillingness to admit the change in the war torn context which had brought sudden change in the socio-economic-religious-personal lives. Together with that labelling people as demoniac was a hidden method to oppress that person. Even Jesus himself was labelled as being demon possessed. Casting out demon was also marked as Jesus countering imperialism. It was believed that epilepsy was caused by the harmful effects of the Moon. The traditional Greek magicians used to invoke the Moon or the goddess Selene to harm people. The Moon was also considered as the symbol of Roman success. By healing the epileptic, Jesus challenged the notion of material boon and bane. And paralysis was a psychosomatic disorder in which the person refused to give in to the Roman imperialism. Paralysis and muteness reflected the trauma and violence of war and occupation. Jesus freed them from the silencing impact of the imperial control to a new identity in the kingdom (relationship) of God. It was indeed the responsibility of the government to provide proper healthcare system to its citizens. Hence Jesus’ healing activity is to be understood in the background of the administration’s flaw in the health care system, which was later interpreted as the Lord challenging the Roman sovereignty. That was why people even from far and wide were following Jesus. Jesus did all these to create an alternative society as part of mission.

Conclusion

Mission, independent of God is not successful. Mission satisfies all through its free gift of salvation in the process of liberation. It is, not be limited, but has to cross all boundaries to reach out even to the least, the last and the lost as well. Mission requires disciplining the disciples for they shall be transformed as sacrificial fish for people. It is also done to create an alternative community to counter the regime of the unjust imperial structures. May God help us to carry out the mission by strongly adhering to these values. Amen.

Rev. R. Shibu Mayam
CSI South Kerala Diocese
Sacrament of Baptism

Exodus 14:15-31                         Psalm 32
Titus 3:3-8                                           John 3:1-8

Collect: Gracious God, Who in Your goodness and loving kindness saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, enable us to understand the essence of being born of water and the spirit, So that we would experience the fullness of life in the Kingdom of God, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Baptism is a Holy Sacrament by which we are born again by being immersed in water three times in the name of the Holy Trinity; the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

The Sacrament of Baptism is often called "The door of the Church," because it is the first of the seven sacraments not only in time but in priority, since the reception of the other sacraments depends on it. It is the first of the three Sacraments of Initiation, the other two being the Sacrament of Confirmation and the Sacrament of Holy Communion.

Baptism is the sacrament of Christian initiation. Through baptism believers and their children are embodied in the covenant of grace and become a part of the fellowship of the church. Baptism is God’s gift to the church. It is a sign – a tangible evidence – that God does those things symbolized by the act. The church baptizes with water, but God alone gives the seal of his Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13).

Baptism by any mode recalls images of washing or cleansing.

Sprinkling recalls Old Testament images of the priest sprinkling the people with the blood of the sacrifice offered to make atonement (at-one-ment) between a holy God and a sinful nation.

Pouring reminds us of God’s promise to pour out God’s Spirit upon all flesh (Joel 2:28; Acts 2:17).

Immersion reminds us that we are joined to Christ in his death and resurrection (Romans 6:11). It conveys the idea of dying to sin and of being raised to new life.

1. **Baptism is a sign for repentence**

Baptism is a sacrament of faith which has the risen Christ as its source, and it is the offer of salvation for all people. Christ Himself ordered His disciples to preach the Gospel to all nations and to baptize those who accept the message of the Gospel. In His encounter with Nicodemus (John 3:1-21), Christ made it clear that baptism was necessary for salvation: "Amen, amen I say to thee, unless a man be born again of water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God."

2. **Baptism is a foundation for the new life**

Christian Baptism carries a responsibility. The Sacrament of Baptism incorporates a person into the Church founded by Christ. Baptism is a symbolization of Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection.
It also signifies new birth, cleansing from sin, individual's response to God's grace, and acceptance into the faith community. The Holy Spirit is responsible for the building up of the invisible Body of Christ that is made visible though the One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church. The Sacrament of

Baptism is the doorway into the Body of Christ. No one can belong to the Body of Christ as a true child of God [1 Jn. 3:1], nor enter the Kingdom of God [Jn. 3:5], unless he/she is baptized. Through Baptism, God enables us to participate in his life in Jesus Christ and makes us his children. It is through this sacrament that we receive the Holy Spirit and become members of the people of God, of the Body of Christ, which is the Church. Baptism becomes our commitment to grow in this new life and to strive to acquire spiritual maturity. By baptism, God purifies us from sin.

3. Baptism is a commitment of life

Baptism is the sacrament of initiation and it is a commitment for a lifetime. The actual ritual is over in a matter of minutes, but the blessings and responsibilities of the act last a lifetime. Every baptism is a call for the whole company of those who have been baptized to be “dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus” (Romans 6:11).

Conclusion:

Let the sacrament of Baptism, initiate within ourselves to rooted in Christ and commit ourselves to continue to lead a victorious Christian life.

Rev. J. Samson
CSI Madras Diocese
Sacrament of Holy Eucharist

Genesis 14: 17- 24                              Psalm 104: 14- 30
1 Cori 10: 15- 17                Mark 14:12-26

Collect: God Most High Possessor of Heaven and Earth, Who gave Your Son to be poured
out as a ransom for many help us to realize that we cannot partake of the table of the Lord
and also the table of the evil one, The cup of blessing would indeed be a participation in the
blood of Christ. Through Jesus Christ and the broken bread a participation in the body of
Christ who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more.
Amen.

The subject given for our meditation today is, “Sacrament of Holy Eucharist.” Celebration of
Holy Eucharist is one of the most important things that Christian communities have done
over the centuries. As Bernard J. Lee says, “In so doing they have understood better whence
they come, who they are, and what they are called to become.” Michael Perham rightly says,
“In this sacrament we also have a constant reinforcement of the divine initiative in our lives.”

Since our Lord Himself instituted and took part in the Holy Eucharist, it is the most important
sacrament of the church. In fact it is not an invention of Jesus Christ. There were similar
celebrations of religious meals like that of Passover, Kiddush, Chabura, and so on with
blessing prayers like Berakah in the Jewish community in His time. The Holy Eucharist is
more related to the Passover Meal mentioned in Ex. 12. However it is not a mere imitation of
the Passover Meal, but a celebration with definite and deliberate change introduced by its
celebrant, Jesus. At the time of Jesus the original ideas of the Passover was lost and it became
a mere ritual. Even just before the Passover meal, the leaders of the Jewish community were
ready to shed an innocent blood that of Jesus, just to safeguard their vested interests. They
forgot the original purpose of Passover, commemoration of their miraculous deliverance from
the bondage of Egypt.

Jesus brought back the Passover to its original vision of deliverance from all bondages. He
told His disciples that the wine He gave was His blood of the covenant, which is poured out
for many for the forgiveness of sins. He enhanced the greatness of Eucharist by incorporating
in it, God’s call (of Israel) to become a blessing to others (Gen. 12.2b; 22.18). Jesus offered
Himself to be an unblemished lamb for others and shared the bread and wine as His body and
blood. The priest became the unblemished lamb. So, the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews
called Him as “a great High Priest” (4.14).

Usually at the end of the Passover meal an attendant brings water and a napkin for the
participants of the meal to wash and wipe their hands. But at the last supper Jesus Himself
washed and wiped the legs of the participants, and put forward a new model.

As we saw, Jesus did not celebrate the usual Jewish Passover as such, but He enriched it with
a new vision of life. He renewed, reformed and transformed it. Moreover, as we see in the
Gospel, Lk. 22.19, He ordered to “Do this in remembrance of me”. Here his order is not for
remembering an idea, but doing an action. As John H. Westerhoff asks and answers, “But to
do what? Do what is necessary for you to become what I have begun to make you by this
action, namely members of my body to be my presence in the world”. Jesus demands His
people to lead a life that He led. In John’s Gospel, we see that, after the Last Supper, He asked His disciples to abide in Him to bear much fruit (Jn. 15.4,5). It is a union with Christ, thereby leading a life that of Him: thinking, speaking and doing like Him. In short, a person who takes part in the Holy Eucharist will be transformed to be a new person in thoughts, words and deeds.

Today’s four scripture portions remind us four aspects of the Holy Eucharist.

**It is a meal that empowers us for our mission:** In the OT portion (Gen. 14. 17-24), we come across the reception given to Abram, by Melchiz’dek, king of Salem, who was priest of God Most High. Abram was returning after successfully fighting a war of justice. A team of kings took away Lot, son of Abram’s brother, who was dwelling in Sodom. They also looted his people and treasures before departing. When Abram heard this, he organized three hundred and eighteen trained people who were born in his house, and followed the enemies up to Dan, defeated them, and brought back the people and their goods. Melchiz’dek came to receive Abram who was returning from the battle. He brought out bread and wine to strengthen Abram who was weary and tired, after the fierce fight for justice, and deliverance of a group of bonded people.

**It is a meal that assures God’s providence:** In Psalms 104: 14, we see that, it is God who provides food and wine for people. All creatures, even lion, seek their food from God. Even the trees are satisfied by what was given by God. When ever we take the bread and wine, during the Holy Eucharist, we are assured that God provides us our daily needs. Though we work, it is God who makes our works successful and fruitful. Human predicament is only up to his work. Beyond that God works. In Psalms 127:2, Solomon says that, “It is in vain that you rise up early and go late to rest, eating the bread of anxious toil; for he gives to his beloved sleep.”

**It is a meal that challenges us to lead a life of self sacrifice.** As we see in today’s Gospel portion, during the last supper, “he (Jesus) took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, take; this is my body. And he took a cup … And he said to them, this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured for many” (Mk. 14.22-23). Jesus celebrated the Last Supper as a symbol of His submission as a sacrifice, for the welfare of society. Killing another life for one’s own benefit as sacrifices was the usual practice. Instead of that Jesus submitted Himself to be a sacrifice for the benefit of others. And He called His people to continue this example. The message of cross without the Last Supper would not be complete.

**It is a meal that calls us for unity.** In today’s Epistle portion, Paul explicitly made it clear that, as partakers of the same bread, the whole congregation of the Church becomes one body (1 Cor. 10.17). There is no room for any division or disparity in the Church. In the Indian situation, where there are different sections of people in one Church, it is really a challenge. Every time when we take part in the Holy Eucharist, and share the bread, we proclaim that we become one body. Unless we feel that oneness in the Church, there is no meaning in participating in the Holy Eucharist.

As we have already seen, Jesus did not introduce something totally new and unfamiliar to the people, but took and renewed a familiar custom prevailed in the society. If we put it in the Communion prayer style, He took the Passover Meal, blessed it and transformed it into the
Eucharist, and gave it to His people to celebrate for His presence to be experienced in the world always. So it is the prime duty of all Christians to safeguard its sanctity and hand it over to generations with purity in its original vision.

In Luke 22 we see that Jesus was very particular and eager to celebrate His last Passover with His disciples. Luke quotes Jesus’ words, “I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer” (Lk. 22.15). While we celebrate the Holy Communion, we experience the presence of our Lord, who earnestly desires to eat the Passover with us. Let us all partake in the Holy Eucharist with that experience. God Almighty help us for that.

Rev. Jyothi Isaac
CSI South Kerala Diocese
Christian Presence in Multi Faith Society

Daniel 1: 1-21
Acts 10: 9-16
Psalm 67
Matthew 13: 31-33

Collect: God the sower and sustainer, Who intended us to be the leaven in the world, Help us to seek Your will that does not overlook anyone who seeks You, that helps us to be present with the people of multiple faiths and that keeps us undefiled as the transforming leaven so that many may find shelter and solace in Your branches and shadows bringing joyous songs to all nations, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction
India is a pluralistic country. It has diverse cultures, religions, languages, and ethnic groups. At times the co-existence of such diverse groups results in conflicts. The presence of Christians in such a context requires faithfulness to the Gospel message and sensitivity in our mission to neighbours. In this sermon a humble attempt is made with the help of the scripture to explore the possibilities of Christian presence in the multi faith society.

1. Seek the welfare of others (2Kgs 5. 1-14)
Israelites and the Arameans (Syria) were bitter enemies. Naaman was a great commander in the Syrian army and mighty man of courage. But he was a leper. It’s described in the passage as leprosy, but it’s good to remember that in those days, just about any persistent rash was called leprosy. There is no mention of losing fingers or toes or noses, one of the things that have happened to people with Hansen’s disease. But whether its leprosy or a heat rash, Naaman was suffering despite all the local Aramite doctors’ efforts. Lepers were the outcasts of their society; they had lost hope, and their self-respect. In order not to infect other people, they had to live outside, far away from civilized society. And therefore, they could also never access the House of God. But there’s hope. Young Hebrew girl, Naaman’s armies took when they raided Israel, went to Naaman’s wife and told her about Prophet Elisha. Naaman took permission and gifts from king and went to Samaria to meet Elisha. Obeying the words of Elisha, Naaman dipped himself in the river Jordan seven times. His flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he became clean. The young girl stayed faithful to God and was able with courage to help the master of the foreign land. She held no grudge against those who held her captive. She sought the welfare of her master. Christian presence can be understood by our concerns and welfare for all irrespective of the differences.

2. Stand faithful (Daniel 1: 1-21)
Book of Daniel provides a hopeful picture of how God’s people can survive and even thrive in a hostile environment by remaining faithful to God. In 722 B.C.E. ten tribes of Israel were taken into captivity in Assyria. By 605 B.C.E. the Assyrian empire fell and the Babylonian empire arose. In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and began the first of three deportations to Babylon. After a victory, the Babylonians usually took whom they considered the most important people. Daniel was one of those taken captive in the first deportation. The king instructed Ashpenaz, the master of his eunuchs, to bring the young men of Israel who are good-looking, gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand, who had ability to serve in the king’s palace, and whom they might teach the language and literature of the Chaldeans.
Among them were Daniel and his friends. They were given new names—Daniel (Belteshazzar), Hananiah (Shadrach), Mishael (Meshach), and Azariah (Abednego). Daniel and his friends were challenged by new home, new knowledge, new diet, and new culture. The provision of the king’s food was intended to be generous and indicated favor of the king. The food offered by the king was good yet was against the Jewish dietary laws. It was offered to idols and probably included forbidden items. Daniel and friends decided to abstain from it, and thus the cultural challenge. Daniel finds a way to be obedient to God without being disobedient to civil authority. The creative alternative produced an amazing result—the four Hebrews appeared healthier and better nourished than any of the others. It specifically states in v. 17 that ‘To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning.’ It is worth to remember the words of Geri Scazzero, ‘we are meant to be a ship, saving people from drowning in values that don’t belong to the reign of God.’

3. Avoid partiality (Acts 10: 9-16)
Impartiality is a Christian virtue. Our impartial actions will be remembered more than our words. In the beginning the gospel had been somewhat limited in its outreach. The gospel spread first throughout Judea, Galilee and Samaria. Other than Samaritans it had gone only to the Jews. With the Conversion of Cornelius mission to the Gentiles started. Cornelius, a centurion, was a devout man and feared God with his whole family (Acts 10. 1,2). He gave alms generously and prayed to God always. He had a vision in which the angel announced that his prayers and alms have been noticed by God (Acts 10. 3-8). As he was instructed by the angel he send two soldiers to invite Peter. The next day, while praying, hungry, Peter had a vision (Act 10. 9-15). In his vision a sheet containing all sorts of creatures descended from heaven. The voice told to kill and eat for which Peter replied, ‘he has never eaten anything common or unclean.’ The reply from God was ‘what God has cleansed you must not call common.’ The barrier for salvation has been broken. It is the blood of Christ that saves and through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, both Gentiles and Jews are saved.

4. Acknowledge the presence of others (Acts 17: 16-31)
While waiting in Athens for Timothy and Silas Paul encountered Jews and Athenians. Paul was disturbed by the presence of idols everywhere. Don Richardson says, Athens was the ‘god capital of the world.’ Athens was the native city of Socrates and Plato, and the adopted city of Aristotle, Epicurus, and Zeno. There were two main schools of philosophy in Athens at that time, namely, Epicureans—who did not believe in life after death, resurrection, judgment, heaven or hell, and Stoics—who believed that life in this world was determined by fate and there is nothing you can do that can change anything or make any difference in the world. Paul talked with Jews in the synagogue and with Gentiles in the marketplace. He found their ‘altar to the unknown God’ and used it to introduce the true and living God. He preached about the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the need for repentance. Athenians were intrigued by his doctrine and request him to speak at Mars’ Hill (Acts 17: 19-31). Areopagus (hill north-west of Acropolis) is the Latin for the Greek Hill of Mars. Paul preached that God is the Creator of the Universe (Acts 17:24); God is the Sustainer of Life (Acts 17:25); God is the Ruler of the Nations (Acts 17:26-28a); God is the Father of Humanity (Acts 17:28b-29); God is the Judge of all the World (Acts 17:30-31a); and God is the Saviour of the World (Acts 17: 31b). Paul’s method was mutual respect and acknowledgement. He quoted from two Greek poets Epimenides and Aritus—‘in Him we live
and move and exist,’ and ‘for we are also His offspring,’ which was a perfect example for contextualization.

Conclusion

Christian presence in the multi faith context demands us to be faithful to our commitment at the same time sensitive to the context. We need to consider our fellow believers as our mission sojourners. The welfare of others must be the centrality of the mission. God does not show partiality therefore let us not become partial in our mission. Christian presence is not a privilege but a responsibility to share the love of God manifested through Jesus Christ. May God bless you all.

Rev. Dr. M. Justin Moses  
Serampore College
Collect: O all Knowing God, Who taught us wisdom is better than jewels and knowledge and understanding better than choice gold, grant that we would have teachers who guide seekers into Truth and Understanding of the Way with a heart of compassion and care. So that they would be agents of liberation grounded in the Word which sweeter than the honey in the honeycomb Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Verse for meditation: How can I, he said “Unless someone explains it to me? So he invited Philip to come up and sit with him” (Acts 8:31).

Christian education is an important activity of the Christian Church. Teachers and students are very much conspicuous in all fields of activities in the church. The Christian Church is a fellowship of those who study each other and teach each other. Here we study from many opportunities and many people for this purpose. Thus, God helps the Church to grow in the knowledge and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 12:4, 5). Christian education is very much important for the spiritual growth of the church as well as for the fellowship (Eph. 4:11-16). Saint Paul asks us to grow upto the head of Jesus, in everything.

Teachers: Ministers of Liberation for Wisdom and Knowledge (Pro. 8:1-12)
The Wisdom Literature challenges us repeatedly to acquire Godly knowledge and grow in wisdom. The word of God says: “You who are simple, gain prudence; you who are foolish, gain understanding” (Pro. 8:5). Apostle Paul prays for the Church that the eyes of the heart may be opened to see the wisdom and revelation (Eph. 1:17,18). St. Paul again records of the charismata of the word of knowledge and the word of wisdom (1 Cor. 12:4,5). The prophetic words of Hosea, “My people are destroyed from lack of knowledge” (Hos. 4:6) should be remembered at this juncture.

Teachers: Ministers of Holistic Development (Ps. 119:97-104)
Through Christian education the church grows in its spiritual, material and social dimensions because from the precepts of God, human being gains understanding (Ps. 119:104). Therefore, humanity recognizes the wrong paths and hates them (Ps. 119:104). The psalmist aims that the study of the word of God will help a person to recognize evils around him or her and evade them (Ps. 119:11). The holistic growth of Jesus is being recorded by Luke as follows: “And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Lk. 2:52). That is to say that Jesus was growing physically, intellectually – in knowledge, in the grace of people – growing socially, in God’s grace – spiritually. This holistic growth is attained through the Christian education. Jesus taught with authority. St. Mark says “The people were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, not as the teachers of the law” (Mk. 1:22). The people discerned about the teachings of Jesus as “… A new
teaching – and with authority! He even gives orders to evil spirits and they obey him” (Mk. 1:27). The teachings of Jesus expelled demonic forces. The Christian education casts out the spirits of all evil, darkness and powers of dissensions. The Christian Church is helped to attain a holistic growth.

**Teachers: Ministers of the Gospel (Acts 8:26 - 38)**

The conversation of the Egyptian eunuch is an important incident in the New Testament Church. The teaching of Philip has brought not only the transformation of a person but also above all, the transformation of a country. Philip’s teachings from the Scriptures have brought a total transformation to the Egyptian. The Egyptian’s question was as follows: ‘How can I understand unless someone interprets it to me?’ (Acts 8:31). This exposition has paved the way for a missionary movement, Here, mission is the most important task of the Church which has been exposed. Mission is the important end result of the Christian education of the Church.

**Prayer:** O all Knowing God, Who taught us wisdom is better than jewels and knowledge and understanding better than choice gold, grant that we would have teachers who guide seekers into Truth and understanding of the Way with a heart of compassion and care, So that they would be agents of liberation grounded in the Word which sweeter than the honey in the honeycomb Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Rev. Dr. D.J. Ajith Kumar  
South Kerala Diocese
Women's Sunday
Women as Change Makers

Numbers 27:1-11  Psalm 119: 57-64

Collect: O Unchanging God, the God of all changes, Who called the community of men and women to be participants in the kingdom experience, Grant that the world would be humble enough to recognize the rights and dignity of women, the contribution of women in the making of history and the role of the women in the creation of the future, So that women would indeed be the agents of change and transformation, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Why there is a need for a change? And why women are expected to be the changers?

In fact, if women are in need of changing the social structure or order, it means that the society demands a change from the women’s understanding of social life and order. However, this was the story even in the ancient times and in the time of earthly Jesus and Early Church. Though women were not given identity and space in the social life in real manner, they had been engaged by their roles as change makers both in Israel society and in the time of earthly Jesus, especially in the time of early church. The Scripture evidences with the stories of women, who dedicated their life in bring change in their family, society, religion and in the ecclesia. Though everyone in the scripture has their unique role in bringing a change in their respective societies, three women among them have created their story in distinctive way in the God’s redemption history with historical effect.

1. Daughters of Zelophehad – Redefining the God’s/Mosaic Law (Num 27:1 – 11)

The Mosaic Law, in other terms, was a face of God through which God had been revealed his presence to his chosen community, Israel. The whole understanding of being faithful to God was resolute in respecting and following the law. Moreover, the whole Israel history can be/has to be read from the view of Law, as it revolves around the covenant relationship of Yahweh and his people. For, the Mosaic Law was intertwined with covenant of Yahweh, through which Yahweh was related with them. In this context, can anyone question the law and demand for redefining it? Is it not questioning the very understanding of God and his nature, who gave the commandments to Moses?

On one hand, according to the Mosaic Law, daughters are not given any property rights as what the sons get from the father as a birth right (Deut 21:15-17; 25:5-10). And this view can also be seen as being insisted in Gen 38 and in the book of Ruth. But, on the other hand, the basic Old Testament theological foundation in which, the land is Yahweh’s and the system of divine distribution of that land made sure that daughters also has the right to inherit the possessions. In this line, the claim of the daughters of Zelophehad made it legally possible for women to get the inheritance, especially for the rest of the following women community in the Israel history. Moreover, theologically this section (27:1-11) stresses the rights of women in a recognized legal position within the sphere of property law, which in turn was redefining the property decree in the Mosaic Law. However, this also points out today’s situation of an
unregulated appropriation, on basis of gender and cast, of landed property which is in fact harmful to the wellbeing of the community.

2. **Lydia – disturbing/Liberating Faith** (Acts 16:11 – 15)
Faith cannot be passive in its nature. If someone is liberated by receiving the experience of salvation through having faith on Jesus, then that experience of being liberated has to naturally help others, to get liberation, who is journeying along with that person. Being a part of the vulnerable community, when Lydia received the liberation/salvation, she was able to help the slave – girl, who was divinized, to be liberated, by her own way of support and efforts (vv 15, 18).

Can faith be a disturbing threat to the society? Of course, it has to be, says Lydia. Her liberated experience disturbed the neighbors who were also craving for redemption and, the Jewish and the Roman authorities too (16:19-23). Lydia’s salvation could disturb the society which was dominating and misusing the poor and women and paved the way for them to be liberated.

**Mary – Changing the Social Order/Changing the Perspective of Social Order** (Lk 1:46 – 55)
Mary’s Song is basically a lullaby which a mother sings out of her overwhelming joy towards her baby. However, her song is a song of joy, praising God for being what God is; the God who takes side with the poor, weak, vulnerable and marginalized. And she glorifies his name for fulfilling his will through them. Here in her song she acknowledges, at the same time, proposes the new social order and the new perspective on the social structures, which is against to the existing order that is unequal in all of its natures (vv 51 – 53). So it’s not merely a joy for the mother to bear a son who is told as the son of God, but it’s a joy because through him the new world order is going to be proposed and acknowledged.

Thus, these women can reaffirm once again about the nature of God who is working through the vulnerable community to bring changes in the social dimensions of life. Also, they reaffirm by calling us to be prepared to take active part in the God’s redemptive history by being bold and crossing the social boundaries which has been made for centuries based on gender and sexuality.

Ms. Vedha Kani
United Theological College, Bangalore
Peace and Conflict Resolution

Genesis 13: 2-12
Acts 6: 1- 6
Psalm 16
Matthew 20: 1-16

Collect: God of Shalom, Who is gracious to make the last first and just to make the last first, Grant us wisdom to be peacemakers, prudence to avoid conflicts and humility and grace to resolve conflicts, So that the world may experience the tranquility and the fullness of joy in the presence of the Lord, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Everywhere, there will be a need for Peace and Conflict resolution as there will be a life always with a need of fellowship. There is no other being than the human in the creation of God that struggles to fit in fellowships, gets into tension from conflicts and tries several means of reconciliations and resolutions to live in peace. As a social or a fellowship being, it is always hard and sometimes a human being could never understand that human endeavour for peace is only a temporary concord for a life but never a permanent resolution of a real peace.

The scripture portions allotted under this topic, “Peace and Conflict resolution” for our meditation today, shows certain concords by the human world and tries to give us a way for a permanent solution found only in the wish of the Master, who creates and dictates life. In the lesson from the Hebrew Scriptures, we find father Abraham, trying for a peace and conflict resolution through resource sharing and separation; in the epistle lesson, we find our apostles, who were trying for a solution by representing the authority to seven persons and finally in the gospel lesson, we find the solution for peace and conflict resolution only in the master’s wish and not as human’s wish.

Resource Sharing and Separation

The insufficiencies in the life are inevitable for any life in fellowship. When tolerance and adjustment are absent in the insufficient life, conflicts make the peace absent in fellowships. Such were the conflicts that one could see between Abraham and Lot in the first bible lesson.

Abraham and Lot’s processions were so great that they could not dwell together (Gen.13:6). Abraham comes to a solution to separate and share the processions so that there will be no strife (Gen. 13:8, 9). Therefore, Abraham to the land of Canaan and Lot to the Jordan valley shared and distributed their processions to live separately with the resources they had together (Gen.13:11, 12).

This is one of the human solutions that we always try to implement in every family accumulated with some wealth. We think sharing properties and separating as micro-families from a macro-family is the solution for peace and conflict resolutions in the families. After sharing and separation again grumbling starts by questioning about the sharing that they are not equal or just so on. Therefore, the peace that takes place by the resource sharing and separation is not a real peace, it is only temporary and untrue. Not only in the families but also in the communities, state governments, administrations of the church and in any organised bodies, we see that resource sharing and separation is not at all a permanent solution for the right and true peace.
**Representation of Authority**

The human life in a fellowship that increases in numbers cannot demand uniformity of life for all as its unity and equality. When the shortcomings become complaints, the conflicts present to spoil the peace of life in fellowships. This kind of complaints from Hellenist widows against the Hebrew widows in the fellowship formed by the apostles were found in the distribution of goods and services for food in the second bible lesson.

There were conflicts between Hellenist and Hebrew widows in the fellowship formed by the apostles that a weaker group is neglected by the dominant group in serving the food (Acts. 6:1). To resolve the conflict in the service of distributing food, Apostles came with the solution to pick out seven persons among the fellowship to provide necessary goods and services to the widows in the fellowship to live daily(Acts.6:3). The seven persons were the persons, who were pleased by the whole gathering for the representation of authority (Acts. 6:5).

Our history journeyed with conflict resolutions starting from the old stone-aged pre-modern societies to the present post modern society by defining several representing authorities like monarchy, anarchy, dictatorship and democracy as forms of government for peace. Every form of authority and their representations proved a failure because we still find conflicts for resolutions in our forms of governments both in the church and society. Therefore, an authority direct or indirect through representation could not be a permanent solution for the provision of true peace. That is why, we go with five year plans, bienniums and trienniums to change or continue leaderships to represent authority for peace and conflict resolutions.

**Only In the Master’s Wish**

When a particular servant accepts to be a servant and works for an agreed wage under a master, then the authority over that servant’s life to receive that agreed wage will be in the wish of that chosen master. The decision for peace with wages to pay the agreed or more than the agreed wage will also be in the master’s wish only. And it can never be in the servant’s wish to demand more than the agreement because master is the one who gives and servant is the one only to receive. Likewise, unless the human beings consider themselves as servants submitted to their creator, who is the Master of their life, they can never achieve a right and a real peace that surpasses all the understandings in the world of human beings.

The Master of the vineyard agrees to pay a denarius for certain labourers those were chosen to work for a day and to get that agreed wage is peace with the Master (Mat. 20:2). Now the peace between the servants and the Master to get the agreed wage or to receive more than the agreed wage shall be in the Master’s wish and not in the servant’s wish (Mat. 20:13, 14). Therefore peace belongs to God the creator who gives and it doesn’t belong to human creatures who receive (Mat. 20:15).

Today as human beings we do not realise that our life in the world belongs to God and we are here as labourers for the wages of peace with God. We cannot demand peace from God as our wish because even the agreed denarius in the parable is also the wish of the owner that sends or allows the servants into the owner’s vineyard. Therefore peace and conflict resolution is not only accepting God’s generosity for us but also for all those who do not even deserve to
have. We also lose our peace and could not resolve our conflicts if we do not equally accept those who do not deserve as we accept ourselves.

**Conclusion**

God’s wish is to give us peace that surpasses all understanding of the world guarding us through Jesus Christ (Phil. 4:7). While leaving from this life on earth Jesus gave clues to his disciples to define peace in the way He gives. “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give you.” (John 14:27). Let us underline, “not as the world gives”.

The peace as the world gives is sharing resources and separating as micro bodies to live under several kinds of accepted authorities and representations to escape conflicts. The peace given by God is not as the world of human beings brings to us but it is the life coming to us with Jesus Christ, who will not leave us as orphans (John.14:18). And before Jesus Christ could dwell with us to give us peace, “the spirit of truth” was promised to us all as a deposit (2 Cor.5:5).

Therefore, the spirit of truth deposited in us could not provide us peace until the world of human beings rule us by dwelling in our hearts and minds. It is because the world in us cannot receive, neither sees nor know the deposit of the spirit of God (John.14:17). As our human nature, we accept the world and despise the people of the world. This makes the spirit of truth inactive to give us peace.

Let us accept all the people in the world on whom the generosity of God dwells and despise their entire world, which even makes the deposited spirit of truth to become blind in us to provide PEACE.

Rev. Kummithi Devanand Subuddy
CSI Rayalaseema Diocese
Senior Citizen's Sunday

Fruitfulness of the Elderly

Genesis 17: 1-8          Psalm 92
Philemon 8-22            Matthew 7: 13-20

Collect: God of covenant, Who declare Your steadfast love in the morning and Your faithfulness by night, Plant us in the house of the Lord, refresh our heart in Christ, empower us to be righteous, enable us to take the narrow road that leads to life, enlighten us with joyful songs of praise, So that we may flourish like palm tree, to be useful brothers, sisters and neighbours, and give fruits even in our old age, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Revolution for development in every country is the norm of today’s context. We have been experiencing the fruit of development in every sphere of human lives. Almost all the people of the earth are enjoying the comforts as well as living standards. For this tremendous development, we do all accept there was a beginning and initiation. If we look back into history we can testify all the hardships of our elders who were cause for this fruits of the development. This sermon remembers and regards the efforts of the elders and their fruitfulness in their life journey.

I. Righteousness of the elders become ‘Just Fruit’

When judgement pronounced on Sodam, Abraham asked God that “Will God indeed sweep away the righteous with wicked? If suppose there are fifty righteous within the city”. “If find fifty righteous at city, God replied that he will spare the city for sake of righteous (Gen. 18:23-26). Abraham asked the same question again and again by reducing 5 or 10 members each time, till he reached to the figure 10. God replied the same that, if he found the said number of just people, certainly he spares the life of others for sake of the righteous. In fact this was the covenant that God made with Abraham in Gen. 17:1-8. God said to Abraham that, walk before me, and be blameless, and I will make my covenant between me and you, and will make you exceedingly numerous and you will be the ancestor of multitude of nations (Gen. 17:2-3). It is the Covenant of the God that, whoever righteous before him, certainly their offspring and also future generations receives fruit of blessing (Gen. 17:7). This blessing can be called as ‘Just fruit’. Abraham’s righteousness became a blessing to his offspring and to the future generations. In Gen. 18:23-26, even the covenantal saving act was extended to the other people of the city where the righteous are living. The values, culture and dignity of life is the ‘Just fruit’ that our elders gave to us through their righteous life. Hence we are the ‘Just fruit’ of our elder’s righteousness.

They are fruitful in keeping their offspring in just line. Mt. 7 :18 Says you know the people by their fruit. If they are bad they can’t bear good fruit. If they are good they can’t bear bad fruit. Since we are their fruit, as they are Just we are also Just. If not at least expected to be just. It is our responsibility to safeguard the same values in order to hand over to our next generation just as our elders done to us.
II. **Faith of the elders become the ‘Spiritual Fruit’**

As it is in Gen. 17:7 Abraham became the cause for the covenant of the God with him and to his offspring. His faith and faithfulness was the cause for establishing a long lasting covenant with generation after generation. We can say Abraham bear his offspring as spiritual fruit. Paul in his epistle to Philemon saying he became spiritual father of Onesimus in his imprisonment (Philem. 10). Likewise our elders are the cause for our spiritual life. The Church today is the fruit of our elder’s faith and commitment to God. What they believed they handed over to the next generation. The faith community has its base from elders. We are part of faith community because of their dedication to God. They stood as pillars of the Church. Commitment, devotion and sacrifice of elders yielded us as the spiritual fruit. They sacrificed their life they maintained a covenantal relationship with God.

III. **Industrious Production becomes the Prosperous Fruit**

Many a time people think that there is no use of taking care of aged because they can’t yield fruit anymore. They are useless. Many think that spending on the ‘Old’ is waste of time and resources. As a result Old-Age homes are emerging and increasing. Many are trying to leave and escape from the responsibility of taking care of the aged. Life given elders are kept in ‘Old age homes’ (prisons) and some were left in the streets.

What is the reason for this abundance? They gave their life. They sacrificed everything for sake of their offspring. Still if we need more from them, Bible says in their Old age too they produce fruit (Ps. 92:14), because the very nature of elders is to produce for their offspring. They have been industrious in producing fruit which become the prosperity for our generation.

In the epistle of Philemon Paul explaining how he became the father of Onesimus in prison (Philem. 10). Paul had been working and working for God, and produced many fruit. He quoted in Philem. 19 that Philemon owing to Paul. In his Missionary Journeys Paul produced many fruits for God and lived as a blessing to many. But his later stage, then government might think that Paul can’t yield any more fruit since he was in prison (like Old age home). But in his imprisonment Paul produced fruit. Elders of the family too produce the fruit. It is the God providence for them. Psalms says they are always green and full sap(Ps. 92:14 ). Elders are the cause of growth in the family. With white hair they give green advises to make a fruitful house. They can’t sit idle, but always try to be productive with their deeds and thoughts. The very thought of our elders certainly could be that their offspring will be prosperous. That we call it as ‘Prosperous fruit’. Today, what we are is the result of our elder’s industrious production.

**Conclusion**

It is always right and meek to respect and take care of our elders. “You shall stand up before the gray head and honour the face of an old man” (Lev. 19:32). Bible also promises a blessed life to those who take care of their elders: “Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, that your days may be long, and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you (Deut. 5:16). In fact, we are their fruit and they are fruitful for our sake.
Rev. B.D.P. Ravindra
CSI Dornakal Diocese
Collect: Almighty God, whose blessed Son prayed that all who believe in Him might be one; grant that we who celebrate the union of Churches in South India, may with one heart and soul present ourselves for Your service and bear witness to Your love; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen

The Church of South India is a miracle and it is the plan of God in the Indian Church history. The largest and perceptible symbol of unity, the Church of South India is called to be a witnessing community, not just in words but through our works. The awakening of missionary zeal resulted in the formation of several mission societies in the European countries. These mission societies not just grew in the word of God but also grown strong according to their own tradition and culture. Thus there were four major church traditions namely Anglicans, Congregationalists, Methodists and Presbyterians.

The missionaries who arrived in India not just came and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ but also their own traditional values and perceptions. These traditions are different from the other and in many cases one traditions claims superiority over the other. Indeed there were relentless problems because of the traditional differences and history would reveal that these traditional values are so strong that even relationships and communications between people with different traditions were not possible. One tradition was not able to accept the other. However, several attempts were made to bring-in the missionaries, the congregation of different traditions in spite of several differences. One such primary attempt to unite the Christians in India was in the year 1868, the Bengal Christian Association for the Promotion of Christian Truth and Godliness and Protection of the Rights of Indian Christians in Calcutta. Followed by this, the Western Indian Native Christian Alliance was formed in Bombay during the year 1871. The Congregationalist and Presbyterians came together on a common platform to make common consensus and formed the South India United Church in the year 1908. Concurrently the awakening of unity among the church traditions was emphasised in the International Community in the Edinburgh Conference with a great vision to unite the Church. This conference had drawn 1600 delegates and 160 missionary representatives from all over the world.

Thus Church of South India is not just a United Church, but it began as a movement. Any movement needs to be progressive and not static. Therefore, on the completion of the 70th year of our faith journey of this movement called CSI, let us examine ourselves on the light of the three readings that has been prescribed for us with a theme United in Witness.

Unity in Diversity (Ezekiel 37: 15-23)

The first lesson read to us from the prophetical book of Ezekiel about the vision of God for His people. This symbolism of uniting both the sticks of Judah and Ephraim i.e. the Northern and Southern kingdom respectively reveals the mind of God. This act of God was a call to give up the hostility between the people, traditional values and customs of the people belonging to both the kingdoms. This passage reveals the heart and thought of God and his
intentions towards the people of Israel, the called-out community. The fruit of unification is towards one nation and one God. Similarly, the Church of South India which incorporated the different traditions and values of the congregation had given enough room for each other’s tradition. We, the members of CSI are called to be witness through the life and work of the church by being united as it is the vision of God.

Unity is Not Uniformity (Ephesians 4:1-6)

The second reading from the epistle of Paul to the Ephesians throws light on the situation of church in the time of Paul. As we are aware, this letter was not written to any particular church or individual, so it has to be understood it is a general letter with the element of exhortation to all the churches. The 3rd verse emphasis and encourages the church and its members to make every possible effort to maintain unity. Many of us misunderstand that unity means uniformity. Because of varieties life becomes more interesting and one has to recognize and learn to appreciate the traditional values of the other and there should be mutual respect for each others differences. Every one of us thinks I am right and others are wrong. Therefore, V.2, guides the church how to maintain the Spirit of Unity. It is by humility, gentleness and patience that we are called to bear one another irrespective of our differences. We need to learn to appreciate the values of the other. This very formula was seen in the life and work of the missionaries who went to an extent of sacrificing their own lives in order to reveal Christ in their lives and acquired lands, schools and properties for the Indian Church. The first LMS missionary who served in Coimbatore region, by name Rev. William Bawn Addis was spat on his face by an upper caste teacher as the missionary started a school for Dalits and girl children as early as 1841. The missionary humbly accepted the insult and gently moved from the place, saying Father forgive him. The same street where the missionary was insulted is now known as the Addis street, situated in the heart of the Coimbatore city. Several instances could be cited, however, the Pauline letter emphasis that each of us was given grace according to the measure of Christ’s gift, different disciplines of ministry in the vineyard of the Lord. And we need to be uniform and called to be united in midst of diversity.

Unity is Unique Quality (St.John 17:20-26)

The four major traditions of the church and its congregation had several difficulties in coming together as one church. There was a fear within everyone in loosing their identity against the other. In order to overcome the fear and the paradigm for the visible symbol of being one church could be drawn from the prayer of Jesus Christ. The united church is a growing church and it is called to be witness by following the footsteps of Jesus Christ. The gospel reading divulges the mind of Jesus and His expectation about the relationship among the believers. In fact the dictum of the Church of South India is “That they all may be one”, St. John 17:21.

How? The model is drawn from the prayer of Jesus Christ, the relationship between the Father and Christ. The very purpose of the call to be united is to care for each other. For instance while we drive our cars on the street, suppose we met with an accident, how do we deal if the person who caused the accident is well known to us and how do we deal if it is an unknown person? The unity within and among the churches is expected to emulate the virtues of the relationship between Father and Christ. The root and trunk of a tree cannot be
separated or detached, both are same and both complement the other. In order to meaningfully sustain and contribute to the welfare of the people leaving around the tree, the birds and several other tiny micro-creatures the bonding between the trunk and root is foreseeable.

Therefore, let us show the world that the Church in South India recognizes the diversity of the other, and appreciates the values and concerns of the other and this church is continuing its mission by caring for the other. As the emblem of CSI projects that Church in India is called to live like the lotus in the muddy water. Let us uphold the Cross of Jesus Christ, let this thought of being united engulf as a fire within our hearts to be a witnessing community not just in our words but through our works and deeds. Amen.

Rev. Charles N. Samraj
CSI Coimbatore Diocese
Laity Sunday

Witness of the People of God

Daniel 3: 12-30         Psalm 15

Collect: O God of the Harvest, Who send us into the world as lambs among wolves, Enable us to boldly affirm that the God we serve is able to save us from furnaces, rescue us from any adversity and co-sojourn with us in the fire, So that we would in fervent Spirit witness accurately the things concerning Jesus, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen

Bible is the book of witness and it contains the witness of people about God, God’s goodness. It also contains the witnesses of God’s relationship with His people. Witnessing is the primary responsibility of the believer. Church as the people of God has entrusted the responsibility proclaiming the goodness and wonderful acts of the one who has called his people from darkness to light as chosen and royal priesthood. Thus we note that, witnessing is the primary task of the believers because we are called and given responsibility to do it. The Great Commission emphasizes that we are commissioned to proclaim and witness the love of God unto the ends of the nations. People of Israel are chosen as people of God to be the witnesses of God’s mighty acts. Thus, witnessing is not just somebody’s task or responsibility but it is the responsibility of all God’s children. Christian witness has to bring transformation in the world, in the life of the people and the society in which we live. With this understanding, let us ponder on the theme.

Witness - not to comply but to be different for the Glory to God (Daniel 3: 12-30)

The Old Testament reading talks about the witness of Daniel. Shadrack and his friends who refused to worship the idol that was erected by the King of Babylon. We notice that Shadrach and his friends did not hesitate whether they should comply or not. Life or deaths were not to be considered. They witnessed through their life and by daring to say no to worship gods other than Yahweh. They did not yield to the temptation or allurements. This passage clearly shows that the true devotion calms the spirit, quiets and softens it but devotion to false gods inflames misery, hatred and destruction.

Through this passage, we understand that, witnessing means, to be different and to have complete trust in God. It is the determination and courage to say no to evil. Stand not to pause about it but to say as Christ did, get thee behind me, Satan. Daniel and his friends did not contrive an evasive answer when a direct answer was expected. The same manner the faithful servants need not to be fearful or anxious concerning the event or situation. The faithful find God beside them who can control and overrule all the powers armed against them. It is the strong faith and courage to refuse the dictates of the power or authority that tries to control and govern the lives and destiny of the people. The witnessing life of Daniel and his friends invites us to refuse all worldly powers and evils that have control over us and say no to worship anything other than the living God who is God of life and justice. Ultimately the glory and honor belongs to God. Daniel and his friends witness to the living God in and through their life and persistent faith proves that the witnessing life of the people of God brings glory to God. We as the people of God are called to be the witnesses of God and God’s goodness to the world and the witness of the people of God brings glory to God not the individuals. In this passage we clearly read that, through the witnessing life of the Daniel and his friends, King and his entire Kingdom came to know the power and greatness of God almighty. The King orders that, Daniel’s God is the God of all nations from now on.
We see it as the change of perception of God and faith in God a complete turn over from the old to new understanding of God and God’s power.

2. Witnessing means Edification in Faith (Acts. 18: 24-28)

In this passage, we notice that, Paul begins his third Missionary Journey with a tour to Galatia and Phrygia to strengthen the disciples who were there. Strengthen their faith and edify them in the Word of God and enable them to be faithful to Christ in their life through witnessing.

There was a man called Apollo. Apollo came from Alexandria, where there were many Jews and Alexandria being the city of scholars, their strength in number was so great. They believed in the allegorical interpretation of the Old Testament because of this Apollo was exceedingly useful in convincing Jews. He was able to find references to Christ all over the Old Testament and was able to prove that the Old Testament always looked forward to Christ’s coming. This clearly indicates that, there was something lacking in his training, that is, Apollo knew only the baptism of John. It is an indication that he realized the need for repentance and has recognized Jesus as the Messiah, but as yet he did not know the good news of Jesus Christ as the savior of all people and of the coming of the Holy Spirit in power.

Further, Apollo knew the greatest task that God has given to the believers is to witness and to proclaim the good news and that is why Apollo was moving from place to place proclaiming what he knew of God and Jesus Christ. One thing we notice that, he did not yet fully know the Holy Spirit and its power in the witnessing life. The result was, Apollo, who already knew Jesus as a figure in history came to know him as a living presence and with the instructions and teachings. His power as preacher must have been increased drastically by the preaching and teachings received from Aquila and Pricilla.

Aquila and Priscilla encouraged his ministry by attendance upon it. They did not despise or undervalued Apollo but considered the disadvantages he had labored under. Having themselves got knowledge in the truth of the Gospel by their long interaction with Paul they told to him what they knew and enabled to perfect his faith in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus Aquila and Pricilla carried the ministry of the edification in faith. Edification is one of the important aspects of the ministry. Mutually edifying each other in order to grow in faith and following Christ is the need of the other. As believers we called to witness through edification of one another in faith and truth of the Gospel so that we continue to work for the growth of the Church and for the betterment of the congregation.

3. Witness of the People of God is accepting the invitation to risk life (Luke. 10:1-20)

Gospel reading speaks about Christ sending out the seventy disciples two by two to proclaim and witness the Kingdom of God so that they might strengthen and encourage another. Jesus gave the instructions to be followed in the process of witnessing. They were instructed not to take purse, net, or any belongings and not to depend upon the people, worldly powers. He sent them by instructing them to depend upon Him and His providential grace for everything and day to day. The reward will be given by the Master who has sent them on the task. They were also given power and authority to cast out demons and to heal and to bring wholeness to individuals whom they meet. This is the transformation which the Gospel can bring in the individuals.

As people of God, we are called to lead a witnessing life. We are to be conscious of people with different needs. They were also instructed not to entangle with the worldly concerns and leave the judgment to God. He will judge according to His measures. All glory belongs to God and not to the individual preachers or the witnessing person. This is the criteria to be followed in the proclamation of the Gospel and the witnessing life of the believers. Here the
disciples were invited to risk their lives for the sake of the proclamation of the Gospel and for the glory of God. Accepting the invitation and being faithful to the call will always fills the heart with happiness and joy. At the end of the day the disciple were astonished to realize how they were used for the glory of God as witnesses.

In conclusion, as the children of God and believers of Jesus Christ our primary task is to witness the goodness of God. Witnessing is always for the glory of God not for the individual benefit or name. Witnessing means to be different from others and it is an invitation to risk life for the sake of the Gospel. May the good Lord enable us to lead a life that gives witness to God’s goodness in and through our life, action and words and our faith.

Rev. P. Victor Paul  
CSI Karimnagar Diocese
Collect: God of Life, Who loves justice and graciously sanctify each life. Shower Your grace on all who are weak, tormented, persecuted, insulted, paralysed and are mentally and physically challenged and teach us to be gracious, So that all those who suffer in palliation, and in physical and mental challenges may live their life in dignity and sanctity. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Disability in human beings is a gift from God as Person(s) with Disability (PwD) are created by the hands of God. The creation of God is diverse in nature. It is a variety. The beauty in the creation of God is universality of the essence of life, dignity and honour contained in it.

The principles of the creation of God do not operate on the uniformity in the physical formal structure but on the diversity that is exhibited. What brings the whole creation of God which primordially was void and formless, is the essence of life, that is pure, valuable and which dreams for honour the creation of God, though is concerned about the well-being of own creation, yet has a very special love, plan under purpose for the person with disability.

The calling of Moses in Exodus 4: 10 – 17 exhibits the aforementioned truth. Even though there might be several other non-PwD. In the Hebrew community in Egypt, the heart of God has a special place for Moses who was a PwD.

The calling of Moses for leadership upon people of Israel, is concentrating not upon his disability but to Liberate the people of Israel from the Egypt, Integrate with Gods vision, enhance interpersonal Fellowship within their own community and Empower his people as the people of God specially among all the other nations.

The healing od the paralysed man by the pool of the Bethesda in John 5: 1-9 is not just a physical healing but holistic healing. The man who experienced 38 years of disability receives holistic healing in return of emotions, social and religion.

The Jewish society which operated on the principles of purity and pollution, perfection and imperfection always considered people with disabilities as a result of sin. Therefore, they are ostracized and denied of living and life in the society. The experienced exclusion from the temple, family and a larger community as a result they lost their dignity of life and the sanctity and honours it carried.

However Jesus in healing presents to us, a new paradigm of mainstreaming a person with disability into complete wholeness

The life of a person Paul though was used by God to spread the gospel far and wide,

Yet is presented in 2 Corinthians 12: 1-10 as a man with disability in his body. The disability in his body was affecting his ministerial functions and performance and restricting his
abilities. Inspite of cry for God’s healing, he receives a response of assurance and encouragement marked in words, “My grace is sufficient for you and my strength is made perfect in your weakness”.

These words reverberate in the ears of PwD who continue to live a life of limitation, challenges, vulnerability and struggles. It is purely by the grace and strength of God that PwD are sustained in their life.

The stories of Moses, the unnamed man by the pool of Bethesda and St. Paul underscores the vision and the mission of God in the lives of PwD and the ministry that they can execute in the life, witness and ministry of the church.

The church today is challenged to tap the leadership of PwD in our church and mainstream their lives into the life ministry and witness of the church.

The church is called to become a channel of God’s unfailing and sustaining grace to empower them to lead a life in its fullness.

Mr. John Samadhanam
CSI Synod SEVA
Youth Sunday

Spirituality of the Youth in the Contemporary World

Collect: Gracious and Merciful God, Who has caused His wondrous works to be remembered, Equip us to be people in whom the Spirit of God dwell, who would count anything as insignificant in order to gain Christ and be found in Him, That we may know Christ and the power of His resurrection sharing in his suffering and becoming like Him in his death, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

The contemporary world is an ever-changing mix of social and political changes. With religious, political, and ethnic conflicts globally and locally, challenges of the 21st century include emerging technologies, health care, overpopulation, climate change, poverty, illiteracy, disease, Contrasts between developed and developing nations and migration.

On the other hand, the today's youth in general represent a generation for whom the biggest visible change has been in lifestyles. The old socialist mantra of "rice in every bowl" has now been replaced with "a cell phone in every hand". It is in this kind of a converging context, the meaning of ‘Spirituality’ has to be unlocked or redefined.

The word ‘Spirituality’ is very much in fashion among Christians of our times. It was originally a French Catholic terminology, but today it is a very common terminology for all faith traditions which has taken different shades of its understanding. For some, prayer and worship are spirituality. For others, going to church regularly is spirituality. If, for a few giving alms and helping the needy is spirituality for some contemplating and encountering a divine experience is spirituality. Nevertheless one need to understand that there is much deeper meaning to how Spirituality can be perceived.

Spirituality is a broad concept with room for many perspectives. In general, it typically involves a search for meaning in life and seeking purpose for one’s existence. As such, it is a universal human experience— our view of life, our manner of life, our attitude to other people and so on. It concerns our whole articulation of our faith, influencing our being and our becoming. As Micah 6:8 says, doing Justice, Showing Kindness and walking humbly with God is Spirituality.

The passages assigned for our meditations portrays different shades of spirituality, let’s look at them.

**Genesis 41:37-43: Spirituality which reviews Reality**

Joseph, who once was a slave, is elevated to the highest position in the kingdom of Egypt. His wisdom in interpreting dreams and his plans for the future in accumulating the stock of grains and being prepared for the time of famine fortifies the power and the authority of Pharaoh. Joseph the dreamer is glorified for his acumen and management skills, Nonetheless,
he as an official in a repressive society, became part of its power structure, and he personally imposed slavery on uncounted numbers of people. He built the monopoly of Pharaoh making him the ultimate power of displaying authority not just in Egypt but also on the neighbouring countries.

In Genesis 41:34, Joseph takes one fifth of the produce of the land from the people when the land produced abundant crops, but when famine struck the land for the next seven years, we see in Ch 41: 56-57 & 47:14, how he sells the stock of grains taken from the people and makes money out of it and accumulates wealth in the hands of pharaoh. When the famine became worse, he demands the livestock from the people for exchange of food grains, (47:16). When the situation became more worse, he demanded the lands of people in exchange of food grains and ultimately made the people of Egypt slaves to pharaoh in exchange of food grains when they did not have anything else to offer (47:20-21). Joseph, who was once a slave, now enslaves people and their lives at the cost of fortifying and building the empire of Pharaoh. Joseph here, instead of seeking the welfare of the people, sought only the goodwill of his master by accumulating all the wealth and pushed people into the bondage of slavery. This preference of Joseph turned very evil for the innocent people at large.

As youngsters our spirituality should reflect the choices that we make in our life styles, the preferences that we opt convey the commitment that we have towards life and its reality. Today, many youngsters are lured by the so called development paradigms which are not life-affirming but life-negating. Many of us want more dams to be constructed not realizing the fact that hundreds of tribes will be displaced and lose their homes, many people want more roads connecting every part of our country not knowing that many poor farmers and helpless people will lose their lands which is their only source of hope, many want steel bridges and flyovers which makes their commuting easy not knowing that thousands of trees have to be cut for the sake of access for a few who are rich and powerful. We have become more aspirational than being sacrificial. Can we be like Joseph, who sided with the Empire which sought to seek its own security and manipulated the famine situation of people? Can we be like Joseph whose management tactic accumulated wealth and power only in the hands of the king and pushed people into slavery? We have to review the choices we make, because, our choices and our convictions reflect our spirituality.

Mathew 19: 16-22: Spirituality which reiterates Mutuality:

Mathew 19:16-22, speaks about the rich young man who came to Jesus asking about the good deeds he should do to have eternal life. Jesus not just mentions what is good but also goes further in saying what is also perfect (19:21). The rich young man, goes away disappointed after listening to the expectation from Jesus to sell the possessions, give it to the poor and then to follow him. The young man was sad when he heard that he had to give up his most loved wealth. He thought that, he can still earn eternal life in spite of not being able to give up on something he loved more than Jesus. But the young man failed to realize that both what is good and perfect has nothing to do with individual piety or private soul saving agenda through good deeds, rather it’s all about mutuality, i.e. in relation to the ‘other’.

The commandments mentioned by Jesus from the Decalogue to the young man can be put to practice only in relation to the ‘other’. It involves the other, and in relation to the other we are
obliged to keep up that commandment. Jesus here reiterates the need of mutual and just relationships within the community and therefore the experience of spirituality is not always individualistic soul saving exercise but it’s a corporal experience of God’s grace and forgiveness within the context of a community where human relationships are cherished and shared.

This indicates to us that true spirituality demands complete adherence to Jesus which has to be lived out within the context of a community. It’s not just an act of charity or an event of good deeds; rather it’s a new orientation to Christ and our relationships.

**Philippians 3:1-16: Spirituality which rejoices in Scarcity:**

The ‘prosperity’ spirituality always speaks about the God of abundance. It romanticises this aspect of God, ignoring the reality of poverty, suffering and pain and accusing them as a result of sin or curse from God. Apparently, the world order today too propagates abundance or maximum satisfaction and looks down upon what is scarce and empty to be unsuccessful and futile. The psyche of our young people today is inclined to this concept of having the maximum satisfaction or experiencing the abundance in every aspect of their lives. They want to earn big and make more wealth, evade suffering and enjoy all comforts and luxuries hence, falling into the trap of running after success at the cost of even compromising the values taught by faith.

Throughout Philippians, Paul emphasizes the theme of joy to the extent of saying that one can choose to celebrate Christ in the midst of the most difficult circumstances in life even while experiencing scarcity. Knowing Christ and willing to share in his sufferings, while considering all that was gained as loss is the crux of Paul’s spirituality in this passage. Paul’s spirituality in this passage challenges us to embrace suffering and scarcity. It challenges the youth to relinquish the race to become ambitious and accept loss at the priceless cost of knowing Christ and hence considering all that is gained in the form of titles, positions, honours, wealth and so on as futile and temporary.

**Director, Department of Youth**  
**CSI Synod**
Collect: Gracious God, our Creator, who created us in Your image and protects us from all dangers of life, help us to recognize your will in our lives in the midst of trials and tribulations for the sake of truth and justice which are the foundation to your reign. Grant us grace to fix our eyes on your Son Jesus Christ who did not count the sufferings in order to glorify your name. Strengthen us to take risks for the reign of god through Jesus Christ Your son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God world without end. Amen

Verse for meditation: “And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38).

Christian life is leading a life rooted in the basic principles of the Kingdom of God such as truth and justice in the midst of challenges, temptations and persecutions. Jesus has taught, “In this world you will have troubles” (Jn. 16:33). The apostles taught the disciples, ‘Stand firm in their faith and to enter into the kingdom of God through many sufferings’ (Acts 14:22). In our ‘faith – life’ we receive not only blessings always but because of faith there are many forefathers who experienced defeat also in their lives to receive a better resurrection (Heb. 11:35). “Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated – the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, in caves and holes in the ground” (Heb. 11:36 -38). Thus, there are many who are models to us those who have received heroic – challenges in their lives. But we believe that though there is no end for our sufferings, they are not the reasons for the end of our lives rather they are the stepping stones for the entry to a ‘new world’.

Esther who accepted risks (Esther 8:1 -72)
The disastrous end of Haman who tried to eradicate the Jewish race is noted here. The book of Esther says that though the Jews had threat, finally they attained a great success. The timely interference of Esther and the prayers brought divine intervention and deliverance to a people, who would have suffered extinction. This incident reminds us for the need of timely wisdom, prayers, response and action that are needed rather than perplexity when the storms of oppositions strike against us.

Paul who accepted risks (Phil. 2:25 -30)
Paul wrote about Epaphroditus when he became sick and was about to die: God had mercy on him and healed him “…he was ill …because he almost died for the cause of Christ…” (Phil. 2:27, 30). Paul interprets that we have been given the charisma not only to believe in Jesus but he says that ‘we are called to suffer’ also (1 Pet. 2:21). “Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance” (Rom. 5:3). “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (2 Tim. 3:12)
is the teaching of Paul. Again Paul says, “Now if we are children, then we are heirs – heirs of God and Co-heirs with Christ, if needed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory” (Rom. 8:17). But suffering is not the end in itself. Because after the temporary sufferings, the merciful God will restore us and make us strong, firm and steadfast (1 Pet. 5:9,10).

The call to accept risks (Matt. 10:37 – 42)
Jesus invited his disciples to take up their own cross and follow him. The position of Jesus is very clear when he says, “And anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me” (Matt. 10:38,39; Mk. 8:34,35; Lk. 14:26,27). We should not forget the resurrection and ascension which are beyond the message of the cross, persecutions and sufferings. Beyond every cross there is a resurrection. This thought will inspire us to accept all challenges and risks for the sake of the kingdom of God.

Prayer: Gracious God, our Creator, who created us in Your image and protects us from all dangers of life, help us to recognize your will in our lives in the midst of trials and tribulations for the sake of truth and justice which are the foundation to your reign. Grant us grace to fix our eyes on your Son Jesus Christ who did not count the sufferings in order to glorify your name. Strengthen us to take risks for the reign of god through Jesus Christ Your son, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God world without end. Amen.

Rev. Dr. D.J. Ajith Kumar
South Kerala Diocese
Reformation Sunday
Rediscovering and Reliving the Faith

2 Chronicles 34:8-21
Revelation 2: 1-7
Psalm 46
John 2:12-22

Collect: God our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble, Enable us to rediscover the precepts of the kingdom values, constantly inquiring of the Lord concerning the living out of the faith with a zeal for Your House and passion for justice and truth, So that we may regain the first love that we seem to have lost somewhere in the journey, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Year 2017 marks 500th year of Reformation. The Reformation movement was a milestone in the history of Christian faith and religious practice as it showed us the way to re-read scriptures, rediscover our faith and relive our Christian commitment.

Rediscovering and Embodying the Scripture: 2 Chronicles 34:8-21,

Rediscovering and continually reinterpreting scriptures were key factors of Reformation. Martin Luther spoke about being rooted in the scripture and at the same time reorganising the Church.

A young ruler Josiah ruled in the ways of Yahweh and in the ways of David. He took the best out of the tradition from a fractured history of the land. The situation was volatile. But he was surrounded by those who put God, torah and temple-spirituality first. He got the temple renovated. He identified the best workers who worked faithfully. He delegated the responsibilities by trusting his leadership team.

This child-ruler takes his people back to innocent stages of their spirituality. We usually wonder what good could come out of childhood or youth. We also tend to think that the best comes only out of adult leadership because we equate the physical maturity of the adults with rational and emotional maturity. But this passage strongly endorses that younger generation could bring about a great change without looking at youth and childhood as insignificant stages of life. Also, the good values sown during the childhood will bear more fruit in the future.

As much as Josiah focused on infra-structure, he focused on the instructions and practice of the laws too. This struck a good balance between their faith and religiosity.

In this passage, the act of communal repentance as well as the act of purging whatever was idolatrous shows a wholistic nature of spirituality. Repentance facilitates retrospection and also envisions a spirituality that forms a strong fabric of our society. They did not get carried away or boasted by the huge infrastructural accomplishment, but also tried to, rediscover lifestyles pleasing to the Lord. It began with repentance which is seeing one's own inabilities and frailties.
Reviving and Reliving the First Love: Revelation 2: 1-7

The church in Ephesus is an important city with one of the first christian communities. Paul had ministered there. Aquilla, Priscilla and other apostles had served there. Timothy too worked there. The faith of Ephesus was strongly grounded in the doctrine of love.

Vs: 2-3: The church may have set great standards in practicing tolerance, perseverance and endurance. Everything looked great from outside. But all these good works were ineffective unless they were grounded in love (vs.4). This calls the church today to develop a discernment to prioritize the doctrine of love as the ground of all activity and identity.

John makes a tough call to the churches to express their first love especially in the context of persecution of the minorities under Roman empire. Threats to faith and religious activities of a community from outside is no excuse for internal chaos and muddle. Therefore communities are called to challenge both external and internal challenges.

Secondly, the church in Ephesus is called to unfollow the Nicolaitans. Sadly, the Nicolaitans, did not condemn corrupt practices, adultery and various forms of idolatory including lavish lifestyle. They compromised their spirituality and indirectly proposed a hierarchical view of life and church. This was against the doctrine of love that challenges hierarchy and subjugation.

Transforming Unjust Structures: John 2:12-22

This passage talks about the temple-cleansing act of Jesus. This act of Jesus is presented in John's gospel as a prelude to his ministry. This is unlike the synoptics (Matthew and Mark) which present the cleansing as one of the activities towards the close of Jesus' earthly ministry. The temple-cleansing act is a presentation of Jesus' praxis, a praxis based on his thorough assessment of the religious activities of his time. He was able to see how the economic activities surrounding the temple and rituals were eroding the life-giving vision of the temple. His pilgrimage to Jerusalem for Passover is combined with his vision to reform the temple activities. Jesus' cleansing act should not be seen as a one-off act of reformation or as an operation of superficial cleansing of the structure. He is not a mere ritualistic pilgrim.

What did Jesus overturn? While John tells us that Jesus overturned the furniture (greek) of the traders, Mark and Luke see Jesus overturning the rock-hard administrative structures of the temple. The gospel writers generally address corruption which is built into the temple system. Matthew (ch 21) and Mark (ch 11) complement John when they say that Jesus overturned not just the simple furniture but kathedras (greek). It is well documented that the children of high priests set the value for doves and animals for sacrifice. In a sense, they ran the stock market by their whims and fancies. The overturning was catastrophic (greek) to those involved in temple business. Jesus bursts into the scene as a dynamic thinker with a clear purpose of disrupting the core of the business motives of the religious authorities. He doubles up his pilgrimage into an act of transforming the system from within especially at an
unexpected time as the Passover. Jesus' views do not passover a corrupt situation without transforming it.

To conclude, today's lessons give us directions for a wholistic transformation of the church. They call us to be scriptures ourselves (embodying scriptures). Embodying the scriptures help us to critically see the suppressing religious and societal structures and transform them from within.

Very importantly, the lessons call us to hold our churches together not through fear or overriding-power but on the gospel of love.

Dr. Rohan P. Gideon
CSI Karnataka Northern Diocese
World Sunday School Day
Nurturing in Faith

Proverbs 23:15-26
Ephesians 6: 10- 18

Collect: God the Great Guru, Who builds and guards the people of God in Your wisdom, Make us obedient listeners of Your Word, mould us to be strong in You, enrobe us with the armour of God, enable us to stand firm in boldness to the mystery of the Gospel, so that we may humble ourselves to Your wisdom and turn to become like little children to be nurtured in Your word, to overcome the evils of this world, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Key Verse: “…unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Matthew 18:3

Observing ‘World Sunday-School Sunday’ in our churches certainly reminds us the call and commitment of Church towards the children in our church and society. Children are one among the weaker and vulnerable sections in our societies who are often ill-treated, abused, exploited, subdued, and neglected. Nelson Mandela has stated that there could be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children. Having focused on Mandela’s statement, we would be ended up with an understanding that our societies reveal sickness of their souls while maltreating their children. The United Nations expounds in a definition on violence against children that all forms of physical or mental violence, injury and abuse, neglect or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation, including sexual abuse is categorized as violence against children.

In the light of above discussions, we identify the importance of securing the children and their dignity. In the given biblical passages we see the magnitude of God’s perpetual compassion on the children. The wisdom sayings speak of the inbound relationship between the children of God and creator God by mentioning “my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right.”(Proverbs 23:16). God’s will is to win everyone’s heart of God’s creation. In the narration of biblical character Samuel’s birth it is written that God has remembered Hannah and Elkanah hence the boy Samuel was born. This example implies that the invisible hand of God is at work behind the birth of every child of God. Rabindranath Tagore says, “Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of man.” What we can draw from these discourses is that every child is a messenger from God who brings a message that God has remembered the relationship of the child’s parents and the child is precious in the sight of the Lord.

Jesus in his ministry has challenged the status quo which equips the hierarchical structure in the Jewish society by not only bringing up the children in the centre of discussion but also by placing them as examples to follow and imitate their attitude in our faith journey. When the disciples of Jesus had a query on “who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus answered in a parabolic way which opposes the stream of structure in the society designed in terms of power, position, wealth, or glamour. His act of bringing a child and making the child to stand in the middle gives a radical answer that overturned the hierarchical nature of the
Jewish structure and reversed the human value scales. A child in the Jewish society is usually treated as an insignificant and is often overlooked. An insignificant and overlooked vulnerable has become an instrument in the hands of Jesus to teach a lesson for the elders. Jesus’ act and words of elevating a child have set every child as a model for the elderly believers to follow. Jesus further said, “...unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” What needs to be derived from the act of Jesus in this context is that the child whom Jesus used here is representing all the children in the world particularly the children who are neglected, orphans, undocumented, migrants, bonded labour children, slaves, dalit-tribal children, homeless children, etc. All the children for that matter are precious tools from whom the grown up are advised to receive the characteristics of children which are humble, innocent, receptive and trustful. It’s a common tendency among the elders that their main task is to control, educate, dominate, mold, and dictate the children. But on the contrary to the world view Jesus taught that the elders should be transformed like children. It implies that everyone has to humble his/herself to the status of a child in order to be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. Apostle Peter while comparing with the newborn infants advises the elders to long for salvation as the infants long for the pure milk from mother (1 Peter 2:2). Every infant is set as an example before the elders to learn how to be humble, obedient and purity seekers.

Children to be nurtured in faith is said to be a prime call of a church. Being nurtured in faith is to develop one’s own identity in Christ and to ignite conscience according to the scripture. In order to nurture a child in faith one has to be like a child. Unless one learns to be humble and pure, s/he cannot teach/train children to be in Christian faith. May we all learn to value the state of childhood and together grow in faith.

Rev. K. John Vikram,
CSI Krishna Godavari
Sunday for the Girl Child

Assuring Future for the Girl Child

2 Kings 5:1-5
Acts 12: 11-17
Psalm 8
Mark 5: 21-24,35-43

Collect: Gracious God, who through Your Son made the weak and the rejected strong and whole, we praise You. Look mercifully on all the girl children who are rejected and marginalized, and give them courage and new hope. Help us to receive the girl child as a full member of the community and restore all the honour and respect they deserve. May the talents and potentials You have endowed them with, flower forth to become essential resources in the community. Help us Lord that we may together be liberated and equipped to use our mutual strengths and weaknesses, gifts and talents, opportunities and limitations, to contribute to the welfare of the whole world; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Verse for meditation: “He took her by the hand and said to her, “Talitha Koum!” (Which means, “Little girl, I say to you, get up!”)”. (Mk.5:41).

The word of God explains that God through His son Jesus has empowered the weak and the rejected persons. God has revealed His indiscriminate love through Jesus. There is no discrimination as male or female (Gal 3:28). Through today’s meditation, an attitude to accept and respect the girl child need to be usefully developed in the society. Their talents would be useful to families and the society at large. But the girl children face many challenges and they continue even today. They are challenged from womb to tomb from the stage of a foetus in the womb of their mother till their death at the tomb. They are at the risks of foeticide, infanticide, women trafficking, rape, dowry, domestic violence and the like. The social scientist named Ram Ahuja has segregated them under three major headings.

Criminal violence
Domestic Violence
Social violence

Every year these crimes are increasing at an alarming rate. During the study on this subject in the past five years 1,64,765 cases of 2006 have gone up to 2,13,585 in 2010. Out of this 6870 cases were on rape. We have reached a stage where the girl child has lost her safety and security at their work places and at homes, where they work. The rapid growth of the mass media, the mobile phones, internet and the social media has become a challenge to the ethical and safe movement of girls and women. In this scenario, we have a spiritual and ethical responsibility to reflect and act on the basis of the Scripture.

The concern of God (2 King 5:1-5)
The Holy Bible speaks of a God who is concerned about and strengthen the weak and feeble ones. God does not show favoritism. He is the God of All, both man and woman (Gal. 3:28; Acts 10:34). God has named ‘Adam’ not for man alone, but include woman (Gen. 5:2). The body is different, but the soul comes from God. In the Old Testament, we find that God has
empowered women like Deborah and Hannah and used them as prophetesses (Lk. 2:36; Jud.4). The Old Testament includes biblical books in the names of Ruth and Esther. During the earthly life of Jesus many women were with him to minister (Lk.8:1-3). St.Paul reminds the church at Rome about the incredible contributions given by women to the body of Christ (Rom. 16). Here, we find a list of women, who gave leadership in the church. Women are created in the image of God. And He cares for them. 2King.5.1-5 gives a reading on how God used a maidservant, a small girl for the supernatural healing of Naaman, the commander of the army of the king of Aaram.

The concern for the girl children should begin from families (Mk.5:21-24; 35-43)
Both the Gospels and the Acts record how the parents came to Jesus with the concern of their weak or sick as dying girls (Mk. 5:21-24; 35-43; Acts 9:36-43). At first we should confirm the safety of our girl children at our homes itself. Parents have a major role towards care of their girl children. Parents should scrutinize and have an eye on their education, friendships and the needs of girls. St. Paul tells us “… do not exasperate your children instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). In our Indian culture, after marriage the girl is sent to another family. But at their own homes they are always haunted even from childhood with the thought that they are strangers in their own homes and at some stage they will be sent to another house in which they are strangers there too. When they reach the new house of the in-laws, they are considered as outsiders and as “one who has come from outside”. Here girls need a ‘space’ for them. Such ‘space’ should start at their homes itself. She is also a legal heir for the love of God that has been expressed through Jesus Christ. Just as Jesus has held the hand of the hapless girl and asked others to give her food. He is holding the hands of girls with his love who are weak due to many reasons and give them new life even today (Num.27:1-11). Moreover, the Lord reminds us to make sure the safety of the girls giving us that responsibility.

Girls in the Ministry of the Kingdom of God (2 Kings 5:1-5, Acts 12:11-17)
As we have seen in the Old Testament and the New Testament, God uses girls in the ministry. As mentioned above, when the young servant girl at the house of Naaman, the commander of the Army of the king of Aram introduced the ‘Living’ God to them, not only Naaman was healed, but also the difference between Aram and Israel have been healed. Peter was released from the jail by the angel of the Lord and he went to the house of Mary, the aunt of John Mark. They were all praying together. As Peter was knocking, a girl named Rhoda identified his voice and informed those praying about the arrival of Peter. Here the first step of faith had been set by a girl. But those who were praying did not believe her (Acts 12:12-15). But Rhoda could believe it and see the mighty act of God. The girl children have a great message in building up the church, society and the country through sharing the love of God. Let us encourage them to utilize their talents to the optimum level for building the Kingdom of God.

Prayer: Gracious God, who through Your Son made the weak and the rejected strong and whole, we praise you. Look mercifully on all the girl children who are rejected and marginalized, and give them courage and new hope. Help us to receive the girl child as a full member of the community and restore all the honour and respect they deserve. May the talents and potentials you have endowed them with, flower forth to become essential resources in the community. Help us Lord that we may together be liberated and equipped to
use our mutual strengths and weaknesses, gifts and talents, opportunities and limitations, to contribute to the welfare of the whole world; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Rev. Dr. D.J. Ajith Kumar
South Kerala Diocese
Preparing for the Coming of Lord

Hoseiah 10:12-15
Colossians 4:1-6
Psalm 37:1-24
Luke 12:35-40

Collect: Almighty God, who restores all things in your beloved Son, Jesus our Lord, Sanctify our hearts and minds so that we may be prepared for the coming of the Lord. Help us to be like the wise virgins, ever vigilant and ready to meet your Son, the head of the Church. Let the whole creation be renewed and rejuvenated through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God world without end. Amen

The Christian community is people which waits patiently for the Lord’s Coming. But this waiting is not any laziness, but this waiting is filled with an active love that Hosea talks about. In the Old Testament passage, Hosea makes an interesting reference to agricultural activity. He says that until the coming of the Lord, we need to “sow righteousness and reap the fruit of unfailing love and break up the unplowed ground.” The unplowed ground refers to the enormous potential that God has given us – the potential to love, to sacrifice, to serve, to keep God’s eternal commandments – unlimited potential. “But”, laments Hosea that Israel has “planted wickedness and reaped evil.” The result is disastrous. It is interesting to see what our church has sowed during the wait for God. The church too has sowed selfishness and petty politics, compromising the commandments of God. And the result is disastrous. We are reaping the bitter fruits of hate and violence. Perhaps it would be good to remember what the Lord wants us to sow and reap while we wait for the coming of the Lord.

In Colossians 4, Paul adds a clause to being watchful. He says, “be watchful and thankful.” The emphasis is on being prepared for the coming of the Lord with a sense of gratitude. Who else could know better the meaning of being watchful than Paul who was in prison while he wrote these words? But what makes Paul even more special is the fact that he could still keep his faith intact even in the face of calamity. He was not only faithful, but was also filled with gratitude for the Good news he had received and which he was now preaching even from the prison cell. This is where Paul reminds us that as Christians, we need to be preparing for the coming of the Lord with a sense of gratitude. This preparation is enthused with joyfulness even in calamities and struggles, mainly because this preparation is for the cause of transcending human suffering through patience and love. Above all, this preparation is for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ into this world and into our lives.

Luke is the most profound in telling us the beauty of watchfulness. He says, “wait on the Lord… and when He comes, He will make you recline at his table and He shall wait on you.” The words used here is exclusively the language of service. In others words, Luke seems to be suggesting that as the Lord will wait upon us with the sense of serving us, we need to show our willingness to wait upon our Lord by serving our fellow humans.

All three passages seem to suggest at one thing primarily – patience. This is a very lacking in our fast paced, competent, dog eats dog world. And as we contemplate the meaning of the preparation for the Lord’s coming, one thing seems to become very important, that is slowing down our pace, developing a sense of watching and waiting, to give up competitive mindsets. But to learn to wait with love for God and our fellow-humans is the meaning of preparation. May we learn to wait upon the Lord, for He wishes to wait upon us.
Collect: God of all places and all times, In whose Son we find joy, hope, peace and salvation, Help us to pray and long for the fullness of salvation and grant us the grace to live the gladness of Your salvation all through our lives In order that You would find us blameless and holy in Your presence when our Lord Jesus comes with all His holy ones, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

Today we are celebrating the first Sunday in Advent in this year. ‘Advent’ or the ‘coming of Christ’ is a special occasion for all of us because, Jesus Christ is entering our homes and in our hearts. During Advent, we generally say a prayer – “O Lord Jesus Christ, come and fill our homes and our hearts with your grace and love.” It is indeed an expectation of our dreams that He is fulfilling. Today we see Christians hanging a star in their homes, Churches or Institutions because it depicts a sign of Christ’s coming, the sign of the Advent.

During Christmas season, we engage ourselves in cleaning our homes and making various plans for the celebration, singing beautiful hymns, saying wonderful prayers, in fact we are busy with our rituals and customs. Similarly, in the season of Advent too, we do celebration. Advent holds a special place in our Christian almanac, and our almanac begins from Advent Sunday onwards. Today’s passage taken from Luke Ch. 1: 39 to 45 speaks about this Advent and the expectation of the coming of Christ. When we speak of ‘expectation’, we can draw a parallel with the ‘expectation’ mentioned in this passage with that of academic students right from KG (Kindergarten) to PG (post-graduate) who are always filled with expectations regarding their results, anxious of how they fared in their performance – and each time they are expecting good news from their results. It is very natural that we look for good news or eagerly expect some good news.

Coming back to this passage, let us reflect on the conversation between two women Elizabeth and Mary who are cousins mentioned in this passage, when they meet in a common visit to share their experiences as they were the primary recipients of God’s Good News and their expectation of Christ’s coming. This conversation though it seems to be a just casual and simple, is to be understood very seriously. Luke, who is the author of this passage, is a doctor and he diagnosed each and every thing in relation to this passage.

Dear beloved in Christ, please note that this is not a common passage as we are soon going to see, but it is a good news not just for the two families or a small community, but the Good News is for the entire world. Luke has specially recorded this passage here. So now, let us look upon this passage from three different perspectives.

The first one is –Experience: In this passage both the women Elizabeth and Mary are having their own bundle of experiences to share.
On one hand, we see the experience of Elizabeth is totally different when she comes to know she is six months pregnant at her advanced age. Elizabeth is filled with tremendous anxiety and she wants to share all this experience with Mary.

On the other hand, Mary is a spinster, and is only engaged to Joseph. When the angel of the Lord reveals to her she has found favour with God, and that she is to become a mother to the Son of God, she is also filled with tremendous anxiety. It’s great she got the good news, but she is caught in a very complex situation. How will the society accept her – she, a spinster, about to become a mother? It’s a new experience for her. So, she goes to the hill country of Judea filled with this new experience to share it with her cousin Elizabeth.

Now, what happens when these two women who meet? It is recorded in God’s holy scriptures in Luke Ch.1:41 that when Elizabeth greeted Mary, the baby leaped in her womb and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. See the amazing way that God chose to pass on the good news from Heaven to Earth. God sent his angel to Mary to declare that she is the chosen vessel to bear God’s son, from Mary to Elizabeth, and from Elizabeth to the child she was carrying in her womb. It has been proved by medical science that a child in the womb after six months in pregnancy, can indeed experience outside conversation. And this has been proved by the Bible itself. Elizabeth’s child also received the good news and leaped in her womb and shared in the joyful expectation of Christ’s coming.

Dearly beloved in Christ, we share lot of experiences in our lives of how God saved us, protected us and shielded us; how God has encouraged, strengthened and uplifted us in our troubles. We sometimes tend to keep our experience concealed in a box and will practically never share a single line with others. Advent is not only just a season of celebration but it is a time of sharing our experience with God in our lives. In one way, this passage teaches us to share our experience with others as to what God did for us and who Jesus is in our lives.

The second perspective is Execution – i.e. executing faith in deeds.

It is said “words are easy to say but hard to put in practice” especially when we say that we believe in God. To put faith into practice is not an easy task, but despite the odds, we must practice faith every moment in our daily lives. Mary and Elizabeth being pregnant, now find themselves in such a situation. A very different situation in which one is much older in age, and the other is just a spinster. The moment the angel of the Lord revealed to them God’s plan of executing His purpose through the lives of these women, both wholeheartedly surrendered their lives to God, thereby enabling God to carry out his divine plan. By surrendering their lives, both these women performed a marvellous demonstration of putting their faith into action. Thus, their lives became a practical instrumental for execution of God’s plan. This is a classic example where we see both have devoted their lives to God’s service. Both have experienced God’s presence in their lives and once they surrendered to Him, God moulds them according to his will.

Dearly beloved in Christ we are Christians. Sometimes we look like Christians but we do not live like Christians. To live and have a faith like Elizabeth and Mary, we have to experience God’s presence in our lives and then only we will have the strength to put faith into action. We must learn from the life of Elizabeth and Mary that we must totally surrender to God’s
will and allow him to carry out his plan. In this season of Advent let us surrender ourselves and open our hearts to God and allow Him to carry out his plan.

**The third perspective is - Expectation:**

What is this word ‘expectation’ of which we are talking about here? It is the expectation that “the Messiah will come who is our Redeemer, Protector and Saviour, the One who will release us from the bondage of sin and death.” This is the expectation that has been spoken of by the prophets of long ago and this expectation is now revealed and fulfilled in this passage. As we have seen earlier, this expectation is not pertaining to Mary and Elizabeth alone, but this expectation is for the whole world.

In verse 42 of this same chapter, when Elizabeth sees Mary, she is filled with a joyful expectation of the Messiah to be born and being seized with the Holy Spirit she exclaims in a loud voice “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear!” Yes. Elizabeth’s expectations are joyful. There is absolutely no hindrance or barriers. Nothing just pure immaculate joy that emanates from the depths of her heart, which she expresses whole heartedly. Even before the Saviour was born, Elizabeth acknowledges “Jesus as the Lord”, which we see in verse 43 of this same chapter, when she refers to Mary as “mother of my Lord”. The words “mother of my Lord” spoken by Elizabeth are perhaps the most beautiful words uttered by her. It can be likened to a small creed or a beautiful prayer that got translated into words by her joyful expectation. Elizabeth placed her full trust in God and thus her expectation is fulfilled. For Elizabeth, it’s a time of the Lord’s plan being put into action.

There are many instances of ‘expectations’ we see in the Bible. We see expressions of joyful expectations in Jeremiah Ch.33:10-16 in which we see that God will release them from captivity and ensure their freedom. In verse 11, they received more than what they had expected. In other words, what they have and what they will get is totally different – a new promise and a new expectation. Similarly, in 1Thessalonians Ch. 3:6 -13 is written a new experience. We must be holy, we have a lot of expectations in our life presently, in future and beyond death also.

Dearly beloved in Christ, whether our expectations are like Mary or Elizabeth; have we ever undergone that kind of similar experience in our lives? How Elizabeth has acknowledged and exclaimed, can we ever hope to do that? Let us examine ourselves. I exhort you to be devoted to God, commit everything into God’s hands. He will surely mould you according to His will. In this season of advent, we must experience this kind of conversation in our lives like Mary and Elizabeth. Let us come with our anxiety, troubles or burdens, and bring everything into God’s presence, and the Almighty God will make all impossible things become possible. Always remember that Jesus Christ is the same Lord and Saviour of yesterday, today and tomorrow. Let us pray that God’s Holy Spirit may lead us every moment of our lives.

Have a blessed Advent and I convey my season’s greetings to all of you. Amen.

Rev. Ebenezer Jathanna
CSI Karnataka Southern Diocese
Bible Sunday

Word of God: Light to our Path

(Birth of John the Baptist)

Isaiah 55: 6-13                                     Psalm  119: 105-112
Galatians 1: 11- 17              Luke 1: 67-80

Collect: God, the Eternal Word, Who continues to speak to us, Your Church, we pray that You enable us to listen to Your word, calling us to return to You from our evil ways, walk our ways with Your Word as a lamp to our feet and light to our path. And then, Your Word that You have sent would not return to You empty, rather, would accomplish what Your purpose, guiding our feet into the path of peace, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

As we march forward to experience the birth of Messiah, we need to reshape our commitment and live according to the teachings of Jesus Christ which are very much evident in the Word of God. But many a times we are confused and caught up in the dichotomy between our spirituality and worldly materialistic behavior. The best possible answer to overcome this confusion is to believe, act and live according to the Word of God, which is the Light to our Path. In Old Testament, the concept of the Word of God (Dabar) is a major theme, it points out the absolute uniqueness of Yahweh as the transcendent, sovereign and creator God (In Genesis 1, God created all things by His spoken words. God’s word is supremely powerful, able to create ex nihilo-out of nothing). In New Testament, the Word of God (Logos) points out the incarnation of Jesus Christ, “And the Word became flesh and lived among us” (Jn 1:14-NRSV).

1. The Word of God is the Light to our Life

The Rhetoric image of Light in the Bible elucidates the importance of life in its fullness. In general understanding, physical Light will helps us to see the world around us and to avoid running into obstacles, Biblical understanding about Light is much more beyond this expression; it enlightens our mind and guides us in a right path. Ps 119:105, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path,” strengthens the view that the Light is very essential in our lives. When the darkness settles upon and around us, the Word of God reveals the way to come out of it. In Gen 1:1, God created Light on the first day, and that Light is incarnated in the form of Jesus Christ (Jn 8:12 - “I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life”). The Signs which are portrayed in the Bible during the birth of messiah also makes us understand that Jesus is the Light of this world (for ex: The imagery of Stars and Angels are seen as the agents of Light and these agents are used as signs during the Birth of Messiah; Star in Mt 2:2; Angel in Lk 1:26-to Mary, Mt 1:20-to Joseph, Lk 2:9-to Shepherds). The Word of God instruct us to walk in the Light (Isa 2:5, I Jn 1:6, 7) therefore walking with Jesus is walking in the Light and this Light expels the spiritual darkness in our lives (Jn 1:4-5, “in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.”)
2. The Word of God will not Return Empty

Isaiah 55 is the final exilic hymn by Deutero-Isaiah which invites the Jews who are in the Babylonian exile to their ancestral land where they experienced Joy, Peace and Justice. Isa 55:6-13 portrays the power of God’s Word over everything. These prophetic verses in Isa 55:6,7 expresses the hourly need for a response by the people - seeking the Lord, calling on Him while He is near, forsaking the wicked way or unrighteous thoughts, and returning to the Lord. The Lord’s reply is mercy and abundant pardon. The images of heaven, rain, snow and bread in verses 8, 9 & 10 shows God’s sovereignty and care towards His creation. V.11 is a prominent verse which says, “so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and succeed in the thing for which I sent it.” Thus, there is a clear indication that the Word of God will not return empty but it will accomplish the purpose of God’s Word. The purpose of the Word of God is mentioned as Joy, Peace and Justice in verses 12 &13. Jews during exilic time were promised with the prophetic assurance of Joy, Peace and Justice and even the whole world experienced these prophetic assurances of Joy, Peace and Justice with the incarnation of Jesus Christ (Jn 16:20- assurance of Joy, Isa 9:6-imagery of Prince of Peace, Jn 14:27-assurance of Peace, Lk 4:18, 19-assurance of Justice in Nazareth’s Manifesto and so on). Therefore the Word of God will not return empty without establishing Joy, Peace and Justice on this earth.

3. The Word of God is Living and Active

The evidence of John the Baptist can be primarily traced back to three sources, viz., (1) Lk 1:13, 67-80 (2) Acts 10:37, 11:16 and so on (3) Writings of the Jewish Historian Josephus. Lk 1:67-80 is called as ‘Song of Zechariah,’ which acknowledges the birth of Messiah and the birth of John the Baptist. According to Josephus, John the Baptist was a Jewish preacher in the time of Pontius Pilate (A.D 26-36). He called the people to repent and renew their covenant relation with God. Later he was imprisoned and eventually put to death by Herod Antipas (son of Herod the Great, who was king when Jesus was born) for denouncing Herod’s marriage to Herodias, the wife of his living brother Philip. John the Baptist, in his ministry always testified the Word of God is living and active. John the Baptist during his ministry near river Jordan and in the wilderness of Judea affirmed the repentance of the sins, baptism and preparation for the coming of the Kingship of God (Mt 3:1-17). The Birth of John the Baptist is one of the examples that Word of God is Living and Active. In Gal 1:11-17, St. Paul also acknowledges that the Gospel is not of human origin but it is the revelation of Jesus Christ. Likewise even our lives should testify that the Word of God is Living and Active by our repentance, confession, spiritual thoughts and actions.

Conclusion

Word of God discloses God’s plan for His creation. Word of God which is also called as the Holy Scripture helps us to understand the aspects of creation, sustenance and redemption. Word of God is a manifestation of the mind and will of God. This Word of God is personified in Jesus Christ. Word of God is the light to our lives, Word of God will not return empty without accomplishing its purpose and the Word of God is living and active. Now at this time let us commit ourselves to the Word of God and also remember the people who had struggled and who are struggling to proclaim the Word of God. May the Triune God bless us and use us mightily in His service.
Rev.Ch. John Nischal Kumar
CSI Rayalaseema Diocese
Hope of Salvation

Collect: Almighty God, our Saviour, And our Hope of Salvation, Grant us the wisdom to live in anticipation of a new heaven and new earth, a holy and godly life, trusting in You as our Saviour and walking with You as our Immanuel In order that our hearts may be enlightened to know the hope to which You have called us, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

People of God live in hope. It is a virtue for many of us. We, in our day to day struggles to meet both the ends, experience happiness when we hopefully look at God’s promises for His people. We believe in a God who is faithful and just. Hope strengthens us to take control over the most adverse experiences we face. We hear testimonies every day, how God helped many of our co-pilgrims to reach their destinations in spite of all difficulties. There are contra scenes also. Stories of suicides and destructions are common in our social premises. Many end their lives in depression and addiction denying the existence of this virtue, the Hope. It is in a context where hopelessness vs. hope, our meditation ‘the hope of salvation’ finds relevance. For generations past, their anticipation for newness motivated the people of God continue their life in great happiness. They believed that the present is temporary and soon will there be a change for everything they go through. They found strength in thinking that, their struggles and longing for deliverance will turn to the joy of restoration.

“Restoration” – an experience of God’s blessing, ‘Hope celebrated’:
In this context, we see Zephaniah, the prophet of God, talks about Israel’s joy and restoration. Prophet calls his people to rejoice. He presents a threefold call to sing for joy (14-15), because of the presence of God. In Him there is no more reason to fear. The day of Yahweh in positive aspect, is not day for sobering (16-17), but for rejoicing and celebration. For the prophet, the presence of a God is powerful enough to save them. God acts and we see power and gentleness combined in Him. God, here, is a warrior-parent, who feels delighted in the return of a lost child; who removes all fears; and the cry of battle turns to gentle crooning of a mother for her infant (18-20). God’s blessings for them mean rescue and gathering; honour instead of shame. For, God’s ultimate desire is not to inflict punishment but to restore.

“Prayer” – an experience of God’s Presence, ‘Hope expressed’:
Psalmist’s prayer, ‘send out your light and your truth’ points to the expected future. He continues his prayer for rescue and restoration. The reality is that, living in God’s light and cherish his truth is the true way through life’s difficulties to a blessed outcome. In it, we see a homecoming in progress: mountain, place, altar and God. Here, too psalmist believes that the presence of God gives man a hope to continue with life; for, the presence itself spreads the divine light that helps us experience a true God, who is genuine and gentle. The prayer turns to be the thing that brings hope by invoking the presence of God in all our struggles for light and truth. For, we live in a time the power of darkness domain.

“Delay” – an experience of God’s Love, ‘Hope unending’:
Peter’s writing here on the ‘day of the Lord’ addresses the reason for its felt delay. For him, God’s delay for the next promised intervention into our history is to give us more time for
repentance. God’s love for us is steadfast. We see a God who loves His people even before the foundations of the world (1 Peter 1:18-20). He says, the redemption of the creation through the blood of Christ was foreknown and is manifested in the fullness of time. Since God’s love is eternal, hope never ends and the delay is just a feeling for us, the people live in the limitation of time and space.

“Naming” – an experience of God’s acceptance, Hope realised’

God asked Joseph to name Him ‘Jesus’; means, God saves. It was a challenge for Joseph who thought of rejecting his girl and the child took birth in her womb. Naming ceremony allows you to own and accept a certain person, thing or experience. It is an occasion of joy and celebration because the acceptance is mutual. Can we accept this saviour in our lives by calling Him ‘Lord’ and enjoy His acceptance as His people? For, in Him all our hope is fulfilled and realised.

Dearly beloved in Christ Jesus, during this season of Christmas, let us rededicate our lives before a God: who loved us before the foundation of the world and send His only begotten Son to save us his people. Believe! The Day of the Lord is not a day of sobering; it is the day of accepting His presence in our lives and rejoicing in it. Let’s do not worry about those things delayed in our lives, rather continue to enjoy God’s love everlasting. It is high time for us to stop all kinds of our laments over the earthly things. We are not called to end our life in distress and hopelessness. Our God is faithful and just; he keeps his promises. We are a people in God’s thoughts and in His mind. He is a warrior-parent for us. Let our prayers be of that great confidence; walk with the God of light and truth - the Immanuel, rejoicing in His presence, the hope of salvation.

Rev. Binu C. John
CSI Karnataka Southern Diocese
Rejoice, the Lord is Near

Zechariah 2: 6- 13
1Thessaloninas. 5:12-24
Psalm 50: 1-15
John 16: 16-24

Collect: Almighty God, Who deems us as the apple of Your eye as we joyfully wait to receive Your Son as our redeemer, sanctify our spirit, soul and body to be kept blameless at the coming of Your Son, So that when He shall come after a little while to be our judge with righteousness and faithfulness, we would behold Him with sure confidence, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Being joyful has become a rare experience in our lives. We are placed in a very precarious living situation where our life is at threat at all times. The Un-Gods such as Fundamentalism, Fanaticism, capitalism, Terrorism, Globalization, Saffronization, etc have taken away the real joy from us. The people are groaning with pain. In this context being joyful will be very ironical in the real sense. The clarion call to rejoice, as the Lord is near is a pointer to the first advent of Jesus and also the final Parousia or advent of Jesus. Inspite of all difficulties God in Jesus, has given us the assurance to Rejoice.

Rejoice for Jesus will transform your Grief into Joy:

The discourse between Jesus the Guru and his disciples in John 16:16-24, instills hope in the lives of the disciples. Jesus ‘ instruction to His disciples pertaining to the immediate future, where their sorrow, pain, agony and their spiritual failure would disappear because however joy, prayer and peace will be their part of their rejoicing. This hope of joy is given for all of us in Jesus Christ. This final dialogue, before Jesus faced the Cross had given the disciples different perceptions of Jesus resurrection and ascension after the cross and his assurance of coming back again. Jesus clearly puts confidence in them saying Suffering, lamenting, grieving, crying are all temporal as eternal joy is founded only on Jesus and eternal life at His coming as a judge. In whatever situations we are placed, let us draw strength from the cross of Christ which gives us the hope. The coming of the Lord is very near, so let us rejoice and be glad in His coming, so that all our grief would turn into Joy.

Rejoice for Jesus will transform your worldly living into Hoy living:

The members of the Church at Thessalonica had been warned to live a life of being different from others. Saint Paul advises about their personal living from I Thess 5: 16-18, corporate living from verses 19-22 and Divine enablement from verses 23-24. He admonishes them to get rid of their lethargicness, idleness and get stirred into action at all times. The values, like encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient always, do not pay evil for evil, seek to do good to one another and to everyone, rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances, do not quench the spirit etc are given as pointers of preparation to be Joyful and to rejoice in the coming of the Lord. In today’s context we are to follow and inculcate these spiritual values for our Holy Living. Finally St.Paul closes this chapter by saying that every member must undergo the experience of sanctification and walk blamelessly at the Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Finally it is a reminder for all of us that...
‘the one who has called us is Holy’. Only in Christ we all can become anew. Only if we travel from being to becoming in Jesus Christ we could Rejoice at His coming.

**Rejoice for Jesus will transform your captivity into Liberation:**

The Psalmist in 50th psalms emphatically sings the magnitude and power of God in Jesus. He assures the coming in Verse 3. The psalmist says the God in Jesus will not keep quite because He comes as a judge to Judge. Jesus coming will liberate the righteousness from the captivity of the wicked, as they are the covenant people who always honour God and fear God. Their pain and their cries are temporal but if they look upon the lord at the time of trouble He liberates them and gives them joy and peace.

Jesus the son of God at his first advent liberated people from both physical captivity and from spiritual bondage. The coming of the lord is near and all people who were with Him in the covenantal relationship of sacrificing their lives for the lives of others would undergo the experience of Liberation. The very coming of the Lord will transform us from bondage to Liberation, hence Rejoice.

May the Coming of the Lord bestow upon all of us His Joy and liberation in all walks of our life. Amen

Rev. Indira Paul  
CSI Madras Diocese
Collect: Eternal God, Who has sent His only Son to the smallest of the towns in Judah, to bring peace to the whole world, Grant us the grace to recognize Him, receive Him and believe in Him, as the Word, incarnated and lived among us full of grace and truth, So that we would become Your children, always living with You. Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction: When we tell and retell the most important stories of our life, we often find that every time we tell it, there are a few details that we can’t leave out of the story. The story of the nativity, the birth of Christ, is no different. The Gospel tells us about a baby, born to an unmarried couple, under extraordinary circumstances. And they tell us where it happened. And where it didn’t. It wasn’t enough for the Gospels to just say “he was born” or even “he was born in Bethlehem”. They tell us he was born in a manger, because there was no room in the inn. A manger isn’t much. It was a sort of container for the hay that the animals ate. It wasn’t a crib, or a bed, or anything like that. It was perhaps the most unexpected resting place for a newly born Messiah. There is a Christian tradition about the spot where Jesus was born. There is a church in Bethlehem that was built over the very spot where Jesus was said to have laid in a manger. It is considered so holy that three different Christian traditions, Catholic and Orthodox, have laid claim to it for centuries and now they all have monks that live there and there is sort of an uneasy truce. The monks still to this day sometimes even have fist fights over the space. Christmas Eve is not about the place where the prince of peace was born but it’s about what God did, and what God still does. And it’s about what we do next.

God who surprises: God coming to us is the greatest miracle that was ever experienced by the humans. God’s preferential option too quite surprises the humans especially who love to maintain the status quo. God chose Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah. It was insignificant in size and population that it was not enumerated among the cities of Judah (Joshua 15:21). God chooses the little things of the world to eclipse in glory its greatest things (Judges 6:15, John 1:46, 1 Corinthians 1:27 1 Corinthians 1:28). The low state of David's line when Messiah was born is also implied here. Mary’s song also point out that God elevates the poor and scatters the proud in the thoughts of their hearts (Lk 1: 51,52). In the whole of biblical narratives, it is evident that God has a preferential option for the poor, the down trodden and the marginalized. This does not disprove God’s love for the ‘others’. But love of God that gives hope to the hopeless and life to the life less always surprises both the victim and the victimizer. While God uplifts the victim, he gives space for correction to the victimizer. That surprising love of God is called to mind on this Eve.

God who surpasses: Micah presents the Messiah as the Shepherd who will tend the flock in the strength of the Lord. The sheep will find safety and security with this shepherd as he is not a hireling but God who embodied himself, the word became flesh (John 1:1-14) to redeem the world. The incarnation is a unique event that reflects the surpassing grace of God.
As St. Paul says, as the sin abounds, God’s grace abounds even more. God entering human realm is beyond our understanding for God is always perceived as a transcendent being. Through incarnation, the transcendent God became a tangible God, a God who can be touched! The touch of God has a beautiful connotation in the Bible. God’s touch not only turns marah into something sweet and useable but also grants liberation. The so-called social, political, economic and spiritual barriers do discriminate people and most often negate life of communities on the margins. The holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God (Rev 21:2) has no boundaries. The loud voice proclaimed saying, behold, the dwelling place of God is with humans. He will dwell with them and they will be his people and God himself will be with them as their God He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (V. 3-4). This is the ultimate desire of God that he should dwell among his people. This was enacted in the incarnation but only few could comprehend it.

**Conclusion:** The event of incarnation was necessitated by the repeated rejection of God’s love that experienced as a mystery. But God coming to us in Jesus Christ was the hallmark of divine love that surprises all and surpasses everything in order to embrace the neglected. Christmas demands us to become incarnational in our own contexts to give hope to hopeless. We must enable the Christ experience in all. May the Immanuel God challenge our notion about the neighbour and disturb our comfort zones so that we move forward to exhibit the love God by loving justice and walking humbly with the saviour.

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

Christmas: Finding Space for the Prince of Peace

Isaiah 9: 2-7
Ephesians 1: 3-14
Psalm 85: 8-13
Luke 2: 1- 14

Collect: God, the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer, Who became a human being, to be born of a virgin and laid in a manger, to live as ‘Immanuel’, to be obedient even unto the death upon a Cross, Make our hearts humble enough to offer space for the Prince of Peace so that we may experience and share the Good News of Your salvation for all, Through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen

“Prince of peace” is a title given to Jesus because he came into this world as a peacemaker between the creation and the creator. We need to provide space for him to bring the bliss of peace. Let us see three aspects of this process in three lessons given for this Christmas.

1. Isaiah 9: 3 and 6 verses: PEACE DISCOVERED
Isaiah 9:6 says “for to us a child is born who is the prince of peace…” The kind of peace that Jesus brought in, is contrary to the Jewish expectations of that time such as victory over the war, acculturation of nations, killing enemy including their children and livestock, destroying the architectures and even burning them to ashes, and the joy of plunder being distributed. What an angry God they desired to establish kingdom of peace! Contrary to their expectations, the God of wrath and anger sends the prince of peace to reconcile the conflicting world unto God!

Change of life perspective that brings newness of life in attitude, aptitude, outlook, thought process, the very value system and purity of relationships are embedded in peace that Jesus brought by being the wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting Father, and prince of peace. Thus the Christmas is a cultural outbreak, a discovery of a web of life connecting people of all nations, every tribe and caste. This peace is found in Christ alone.

2. Ephesians 1:014 PEACES DEFINED
St. Paul is addresses a learned community of those days in Ephesus where a famous library existed. Straight away St. Paul started the discourse about the mission of God and status of humanity. God created the world of humanity with complete perfection and goodness and He found it Good (Gen 1:31). In order that we continue to be good and perfect in glorious relation with God, he had distained to us even before the foundations of the world. Humanity got caught in sin and digressed the (predestined) expected line of holiness and beauty of God’s own children. In order to restore the predestined peace with God, Jesus had to shed his blood, and define the space for the prince of peace to be always with us. The Holy Spirit is given to us as a guarantee of such space and defined us as a restored community to continue the mission of perpetuating the peace in this world. Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of everything we need for our existence. When God assures peace, he assures food clothing, shelter, health, safe environment and co-existence with all creatures.

For today’s theme there are very important and pertinent questions hidden in this popular passage: Why Mary should go with Joseph to his native place in such condition knowing
that women were not counted in senses? How many days they had to travel? Is that because Mary had no place in Nazareth after the episode of Gabriel’s message?

Christmas is a real celebration of singing the good news of salvation. Angels were the first to proclaim this good news. The crux of the angelic carol is the message for today.

“Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased”

For the prince of peace, the space is in the highest yet he chooses to dwell among us. However, the space among those with whom he is pleased is a challenge to us. Unless there is peace among people, God in heaven cannot be glorified. It is not the war and victory but the peace that passes all understanding is the hallmark of God’s presence.

We who are celebrating Christmas must be mindful of the fact that the peace declared at the first Christmas ought to become a reality in our lives. God calls us to be peacemakers in this conflicting world. Most often than not, the vulnerables become victims of greed and hatred. We must risk ourselves, allow our peace to be disturbed till we find a space for the prince of peace amidst the vulnerables and the marginalized that God may reign and people live in harmony.

Rt. Rev. Boyineni Deva Prasada Rao
Bishop in Rayalaseema
Collect: God, the author of all families, from whom every family in heaven and on earth receives its true name, Grant us and our families the wisdom to decide, to serve You alone, So that we would remain as members of the household of Your Son Jesus Christ, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction

In this world, God’s gift to human beings is a family. Pope John Paul II says that “the future of humanity passes by way of the family” A family is a community of people living together in an environment which is a centre of loving, healing, caring, sharing, needing and giving. In a God-given Christian family Children grow best in an atmosphere of security and affection. It is a nurturing place where people discover their abilities. Grandparents, Parents and Children live together with true love. Like Christ’s love the love should be true love as well as sacrificial love. Now a days every where in the families we can hear of violence and murders. I wish to highlight three points.

God’s family must be worship the Lord.

Joshua affirms his faith in God. Now fear the lord and serve him with all faithfulness. (Joshua 24:14). The Almighty God brought Israelites from Egypt by his mighty hands. Joshua called the Israelites to serve and worship the lord Almighty whole –heartedly; because the lord protected them for the entire journey. In our day to day life God protects as from all evils. Therefore we have to worship the lord with our family. Joshua witnessed to the lord in front of the Israelites. Christian families have the duty to witness to Christ. God wants our families to hold to moral and religious values.

God’s family must be a Christ-centered family

A God-centered family is the best family to educate children about Christian values and Christ’s teachings. We should educate our children to love the lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength. We have to Educate our Children to grow with God (Deuteronomy 6:4-8). The Bible says “fear of the lord is the beginning of wisdom” proverbs (1:7a). In this world our children need knowledge and wisdom. They can receive wisdom only from our God. Parents duty is to pray for our Children their salvation and for their future as children of God when Jesus went to Zacchaeus the Tax collector’s house, his life was changed and Jesus said to him “Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham” (luke 19:9). The home of a God-centered family is the first and best school wherein education is looked upon as a co-operative task shared by both parents and brother and sisters in the pre school years and aided and developed by the professional teacher in school years.

God’s family must live with God’s love
In this world husband and wife’s love is different, parents and children’s love is different. God’s love is completely different, “for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believers in him shall not but have eternal life”. John 3:16. We need Christ’s love in our Churches, society and our families. Jesus Christ not only loved his mother and brother, but loves each and every one of us, as brothers and sisters. In there day’s the love we need in our family is what have described in 1 Corinthians 13: 4-8. The foundation stone for a good family is Love.

Conclusion
If we practice Christ’s love in our houses, The home will be a heaven in earth. If we have Christ centered life our family will be a blessed one. May the Almighty God Bless us all and out families.

Rev. Mrs. Charlet Soundara Rajan
CSI Kanyakumari Diocese
Collect: Everlasting God, the Creator and sustainer of the whole creation, our times are in Your hands; as You have brought us to the end of a year in ways mysterious to us, enable us to put our trust in You fully so that we may truly experience Your blessings each day of our lives and also inherit life eternal; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, One God, now and forever more. Amen.

Introduction: We live in a world of temptation (1Jn 2:16), one of the best ways to protect ourselves against temptation is to have a grateful heart. Remembrance, gratitude, thanksgiving must be basic principle in one’s secular and spiritual life as well. Moses exhorted Israelites, before inheriting the promise land, to remember God for what they received from Him (Dt 6:10-25). An attitude of gratitude is a wonderful weapon against unbelief, disobedience, a hard heart and a bitter spirit. St. Paul suggests that “In everything give thanks…” (1Thes. 5:16-18). Let our attitude of gratitude be an evidence of our faith in Him. Where there is gratitude, there is joy and peace. Year ending is a wonderful time to give thanks. No matter what happens around us, we can always find something to be thankful to God for. Ps 100, a psalm of thanksgiving, says enter His gates with thanksgiving… So let us come to the Lord with Thanksgiving on these precious moments.

The Attitude of Gratitude (2 Sam 6:1-15): The Ark of the Covenant symbolized the glorious throne of God which was captured by Philistines during Eli’s period (1 Sam 4). God enabled David to defeat Philistines, by which Israel regained the territory and the cities that were lost by Saul in his battle. David got an opportunity to bring back the Ark of God, which is called by the name of the Lord of hosts who is enthroned on the Cherubim (Ps.80:1b, 99:1). These two victories of David added greater glory to God. As God revealed that “for those who honour me I’ll honour…” (1Sam 2:30b), “I’ll rescue and honour them who know my name” (Ps. 91:14, 15), hence God honored His servant by enabling His people to recognize David as a brave and skilful warrior. Having been conscious of God’s guidance, David with thankful heart, wanted to honor the Lord and give Him His rightful place as a king of the nation. He kept his kingship aside and danced before the Lord with thankful heart (Ps. 103:1, 2) and with all his might while the Ark was being brought to Jerusalem. By his gesture, David inculcated the attitude of thankfulness in his people. All the house of Israel accompanied the Ark of God with shouting and with the sound of the trumpet. Our attitude of gratitude and thankfulness must inspire others to remember all the blessings they received and facilitate them to come to the Lord with thanksgiving.

Gratitude from the Margins (St. Luke 17:11-19): While Jesus on His way to Jerusalem, ten lepers approached Him keeping their distance, called out “Master, have mercy on us!” their voice was not so clear because of their sickness. There was much difference between the approach of these ten lepers and a leper who approached Him earlier for only physical healing (5:12), the ten lepers sought His mercy, which means they approached Jesus not only for physical healing but also healing for their mind and soul. As Jesus was surrounded by the people and couldn’t reach them He said “Go and show yourself to the priests”, which itself
was an act of faith, for they had not yet been cured. When they turned to obey, they were completely healed, for their obedience was evidence of their faith in Jesus. The ten men supposed to run to Jesus with grateful and thankful hearts for what they received according to their prayer and the healing they experienced and also a new start in life, but only one did so, and he was not even a Jew. How grateful all the men ought to be for His providence and power of healing that caused them to experience healing but in vain. The Samaritan who returned shouted “Glory to God!” and fell at Jesus’ feet to praise Him and give thanks. His voice was not so clear when approached Him earlier (13v), now he is able to shout, an overwhelming joy of healing and gratitude from the bottom of his heart enabled him to praise God very clearly with loud voice (15b). It would have been logical for him to follow the other to the temple, but he first came to Jesus with thankful heart and sacrifice of praise (Heb 13:15). This pleased the Lord more than all the sacrifices the other men offered, even though they were obeying the Law (Ps.51:15-17). Instead of going to the priest, the Samaritan became priest, and built his altar at the feet of Jesus. By coming to Jesus, he received something greater than physical healing: saved from his sin. The other was declared clean by the priest, but he was declared and saved by the Saviour. It was a great miracle to experience eternal salvation than to experience physical healing. Everyone should cultivate the grace of gratitude. It not only opens the heart to further blessings but glorifies and pleases the Lord. An unthankful heart is fertile soil for all kinds of sins (Rom. 1:21ff). Let us appraise our own ‘Gratitude Quotient’ how often do we take our blessings for granted and fail to thank God? Too often we are content to enjoy the gift forgetting the giver. We are quick to pray but slow to praise.

Gratitude the Epitome of Worship (Col. 3:12-17): In Paul’s days, Pagan religions revealed nothing about personal morality and thanksgiving. A worshiper could bow before an idol, put his offering on the altar, and go back to live the same old life of sin. No relation between belief and behaviour. Paul exhorts to the Christians to live a holy life. He says put off grave clothes of sin and the old life and put on the grace clothes of holiness and the new life in Christ because we are chosen by God, set apart for God, loved by God, and forgiven by God. Therefore, we have to be thankful to God and whatever we do in the name of Christ ought to be joined with thanksgiving. If we cannot give thanks, then we had better not do it or say it. He also emphasizes that our prayers must be faithful, purposeful, watchful and thankful. Thanksgiving is an important ingredient in successful praying (Phi 4:6). All we do is ask, and never thank God for His gifts, are we not selfish? Sincere gratitude to God is one of the best ways to put fervor into our praying.

Conclusion: Though we live in a world of temptation, injustice, inequality, corruption, and greediness, let us find something to be thankful to God for. At a mission conference, the director challenged the participants to consider fulltime missionary work-calling for those who were willing to die for Jesus to stand up and to receive prayer. No one did. Discouraged, he complained to the senior pastor. The pastor said, “Don’t fret if no one is willing to die for Jesus. Worry if no one is willing to live for Jesus!” In Romans 12, Paul makes a call for radical commitment. He was not telling us to die for Jesus but to do the reverse- to live for Him. Jesus offered Himself as an atoning sacrifice (2 Cor. 5:21) His physical body was broken for us (Rom 8:3,4). In response, we often exhorted to give our hearts to Jesus. But Paul asking us to offer our bodies as dedicatory sacrifices-as thanksgiving offerings to God. The demand of discipleship isn’t to die for Jesus but to die for sin and self (Rom 6:2, 10, 11).
Therefore, having been conscious about the importance of thanksgiving let us come to the Lord with thanksgiving with grateful and thankful hearts. All we must do is we need to remember all His blessings in our lives (Ps 103:1,2) which leads to have an attitude of gratitude and ultimately our hearts filled with thanksgiving. Though unworthy, unfaithful, unholy and corrupt we are God has been enabling us to experience all the blessings so far. So let us welcome the New Year with thankful hearts and set our eyes upon the One who is so faithful, unchangeable and everlasting.

Have a Blessed and Prosperous New Year.

Rev. P. Raja Sekhar
CSI Krishna Godavari Diocese