CSI KARNATAKA CENTRAL DIOCESE

LENTEN MEDITATIONS - 2019



LENT: A TIME OF REDEMPTION

Contributors

Rt. Rev. Dr. P. K. Samuel
Rev. I. J. W. Ambler
Rev. Asha
Rev. Beena Priyadarshini
Rev. Bethel George Mueller
Rev. J. Christopher Samuel
Rev. M. Christy Rajakumar
Rev. Christy Gnanadason
Rev. Daniel
Rev. Dr. Dexter S. Maben
Rev. Ebi Devasirvadam
Rev. Elisha Devanandam. V
Rev. George Jayaprabhu. E
Rev. Hemalatha John
Rev. E. Immanuel Nehemiah
Rev. J. Jacob
Rev. P. V. G. Kumar
Rev. Margan Sandesh
Rev. Dr. D. Manohar Chandra Prasad
Rev. Mary Shalini
Rev. Mathew Ronald
Rev. Navin K. John
Rev. Paul Dhanasegaran
Rev. Paul Dinakaran
Rev. Princy Samuel
Rev. Rachel Sudarshan
Rev. Rajasingh Gnanaraj
Rev. Rajesh Kumar. J
Rev. Robin Marshall
Rev. I. Robinson
Rev. Rueben Manohar
Rev. Sathyaraju William Jones
Rev. Shalini. G. S.
Rev. Silvan Chandrakumar
Rev. Salome Joshua
Rev. Dr. Sathyanadh
Rev Shailashree Suresh
Rev. Solomon Paul
Rev. Solomon Thomas
Rev. J. Sounder Rajan
Rev. Sudhakar Joshua
Rev. S. Sujeeth Kumar
Rev. Usha Rani
Rev. Victor Prabhakar
Rev. Dr. Vincent Vinod Kumar

Cover Page
Rev. Shalini G. S,

Editor
Rev. J. Christopher Samuel

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1. "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing"
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3. "Woman, here is your son," "here is your mother"
4. "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"
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LENT : A TIME OF REDEMPTION

The season of Lent reminds us of God's redeeming grace expressed in and through the life-event of Jesus Christ. Biblical theology unfurls the understanding of redemption from two different standpoints. Firstly, it affirms that Christ died on the cross for our sins in accordance with the scripture. Secondly, it celebrates God's victory over the powers of evil. At times, the former is considered to be conventional and the latter to be liberal. However, God's redeeming grace surpasses these dichotomies and affirms God's love and justice in a world, which has succumbed to hatred, exploitation, division, discrimination, so on and so forth.

Lenten season, further, reminds us of God's impartial love, selfless love and subversive love, which culminated on the cross by resisting the possessive love that was partial, selfish and exploitative. The early church father Augustine's pertinent question of 'what do I love when I love God?' reminds us that when we love God, we are invited to love God's vision for a new heaven and earth, which is expressed through love in a world of hatred, hope in a situation of despair, and justice in a context of injustice. In the words of N T Wright, "Our task as image-bearing, God-loving, Christ-shaped, Spirit-filled Christians, following Christ and Shaping our World, is to announce redemption to a world that has discovered its fallenness, to announce healing to a world that has discovered its brokenness, to proclaim love and trust to a world that knows only exploitation, fear and suspicion."

I greet and congratulate Rev. Dr. Vincent Vinod Kumar, the convener of the ministerial committee, who has made an attempt to engage pastors from all the four areas in bringing out their academic excellence through this seminal Lenten Meditation book for the year 2019. This book contains meditations on the various perspectives of redemption for all the 40 days, including special occasions such as Palm Sunday, Maundy

Thursday, Good Friday, i.e, the seven words from the cross and Easter Sunday. I encourage our pastors to use these meditations as guidelines, while preparing their sermons.

May the Lenten Season unite us and fill us with God's love to eliminate divisions, and make us worthy to participate with Jesus in establishing the Kingdom of God.

Regards

Rt. Rev. Dr. Prasanna Kumar Samuel
Bishop in KCD

Church of South India
Karnataka Central Diocese

Diocesan Office : # 20, Third Cross
CSI Compound, Bangalore - 560 027
Phone: 22223766 / 22224941 / 22109653
Fax: 22109654

Greetings

I am delighted to hear that the Ministerial Committee has taken the initiative to publish a booklet, containing Sermon outlines for the season of Lent.

Lenten season is a special season for members of the congregations, because they love to listen to preachers from different places. In order to satisfy this quest of the people, the Ministerial Committee has taken the right step in bringing out this booklet.

I take this opportunity to thank all the contributors for their hard work. I hope that this booklet would be helpful to the Presbyters as they plan for the season of lent.

Yours sincerely,

Rev. Paul Dhanasegaran
Diocesan Secretary

Church of South India
Karnataka Central Diocese

Diocesan Office : # 20, Third Cross
CSI Compound, Bangalore - 560 027
Phone: 22223766 / 22224941 / 22109653
Fax: 22109654

Greetings

Greetings to you in the precious name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

I am very happy to know that the Ministerial Committee of our Diocese has brought out a booklet containing Lenten Meditations. I sincerely hope that the Meditations in this booklet would spiritually benefit the congregation of the Diocese.

My sincere appreciation to those who are involved in bringing out this meaningful Lenten Meditaions.

Thanking you,

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Franklyn James
Diocesan Treasurer

Church of South India
Karnataka Central Diocese

Diocesan Office : # 20, Third Cross
CSI Compound, Bangalore - 560 027
Phone: 22223766 / 22224941 / 22109653
Fax: 22109654

Greetings

The Word of God is the most powerful weapon which inspires and transforms people of God throughout the cosmos. Communicating the Word in an impressive as well as meaningful way is the bounden duty of the Pastors. The Karnataka Central Diocesan Pastors are known for new ways of preserving and interpreting the Bible. It is at the initiative and leadership of our Bishop the Rt. Rev. Dr. P. K. Samuel; the Ministerial Committee is bringing out biblical reflections for Lenten Meditations based on the themes and Bible readings suggested in the *CSI Almanac 2019*

It is hoped that this book will enrich the insights of our ministers so that they can prepare and deliver powerful messages during the Lenten Season. I pray that the Word of God may penetrate and permeate into the hearts and minds of people who eagerly wait upon the Lord to speak to them through the Pastors.

I thank my colleagues Rev. J. Christopher Samuel, Rev. Navin K. John, Rev. Christy Gnanadasan. Rev. Hemalatha John and Rev. Immanuel Nehemiah for helping me as editorial team. And I express my gratitude to all my colleagues who have contributed to this Lenten Meditations.

Rev. Dr. Vincent Vinod Kumar
Convener
Ministerial Committee

Lent: A Time of Redemption

March 3, 2019

Isaiah 58:1-14 Psalm 6

Romans 2:1-13 John 5:1-9

Gracious God, our Redeemer, we thank you because you love the world and sent your begotten son to redeem us through his death and resurrection. We thank you for your continuous acts of redemption in history. Grant us grace that we may live as those redeemed by the blood of Christ, always love mercy and walk humbly with you, through Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God world without end. Amen.

Introduction

Redemption is the act of buying something back or paying a price or ransom to return something to your possession. It means deliverance from some evil by payment of a price.

The Lenten season is a time when many Christians observe a period of fasting, repentance, self-denial and spiritual discipline. It is a time to remind ourselves about our broken humanity and experience God's redeeming grace. The purpose is to reflect upon Jesus Christ, his sufferings, sacrifice, life, death, burial and resurrection. The goal is to strengthen the faith of the observer and develop a closer relationship with God.

Biblical redemption centers on God. God is the ultimate Redeemer saving his people from sin, bondage, evil, trouble and death. Redemption is an act of God's grace by which he rescues and restores his people. It is the common thread woven through the scripture.

The central theme of redemption in the Scripture is that God has taken the initiative to act compassionately on behalf of those who are powerless to help themselves. The New Testament makes it very clear that divine redemption includes God's identification with humanity in its plight, and securing liberation of humankind through the obedience, suffering, death and resurrection of the incarnate Son.

Isaiah 58 - Pietism Redefined

In this chapter, God calls the prophet to address the problem of false religious observance. This has to do with two religious disciplines, viz., fasting (Isaiah 58:3-12) and Sabbath observance (Isaiah 58:13-14); but these are only the manifesting problems rather than the root problem.

Isaiah 58 states the type of fasting God is interested in. It is not a mere abstinence from food and drink but a denial which benefits others.

Isaiah 58: 6-7 clearly mentions the kind of fasting acceptable to God:

- To loose the bonds of wickedness.
- To remove heavy burdens from people.
- To let the oppressed go free.
- To break yokes.
- To share our bread with the hungry.
- To shelter the homeless.
- To cover the naked.

Prophet Isaiah, vehemently, condemns false religion and pietism. Instead of a mere religious observance of a fast, God wants us to be just and merciful to our fellow human beings and live in humble obedience to him. A heart that is pure towards God cannot be indifferent towards others.

Jesus proclaims the same message (Matthew 22: 36-40). Jesus also teaches the right way of fasting (Matthew 6: 16-18). Religious activity is no substitute for an obedient heart. The true reason for fasting is not ritualistic but for spiritual strength that brings liberation to God's people. True fasting will change the heart and make it compassionate.

In the last two verses (Isaiah 58: 13-14), prophet Isaiah reminds the readers about the importance of the Sabbath, not in legalistic terms but in loving terms. The observation of the Sabbath takes a new dimension after the resurrection and it moves from the last to the first day of the week. We are not expected to use the day of rest merely for our

pleasure; rather we should use it for God's purpose in us which includes rest and worship. This makes the redemption we got in Jesus Christ meaningful and pure.

Moralism Reimagined

The Epistle portion for this day, Romans 2:1-13, gives a picture of God's righteous judgment not only to the church at Rome but also to all. The jews had the habit of judging other people. Jews had always considered themselves in a specially privileged position. They said 'God loves Israel alone out of all the nations of the earth.' God will judge the Gentiles with one measure and Jews with another. This notion led them to judge other people, especially the Gentiles. They were proud of their history and the law given to them. But they were not loyal to God, who chose them as special people. They regarded themselves as righteous. But God's judgment is impartial. He judges according to the truth, deeds and morality that the person has. Hence there arises no discrimination between Jews and Gentiles. His judgment is inescapable and righteous. We tend to judge others for the very sins we are committing ourselves. Paul warns sternly that God's patience is not a tolerance of sin, but a period of truce that gives us chances to repent. Morality is common to all and many scrupulous people are blind to their own wrong doings. The truth is that all of us are sinners and no one is perfect. God judges those who would judge others. Hence we human beings, who are the redeemed sinners, are liable to look only at our own sins and leave the judgment to God, who alone is perfect and righteous.

Legalism Reformed

The Gospel portion for today is John 5:1-9. Jesus saw a man, who had been ill for 38 years, lying on his mat near the pool of water at Bethesda. Near the pool lay a multitude of people who were sick, blind, lame, and withered. Jesus approached the man deliberately and offered him his help. The healing is an act of God's redeeming grace. That man was powerless, helpless and hopeless. Jesus Christ offers help for the hopeless and hope for the helpless. The man was completely transformed by the redemptive act of Jesus.

The religious leaders questioned Jesus because he did it on the Sabbath Day. Moreover, the healed man was walking with his bed (carrying a burden) in opposition to the law. So the authorities levelled their accusation against Jesus. In John 5:19, Jesus says 'Very truly I tell you, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does.' This implies that even on Sabbath day, God's love, mercy and compassion is extended to all.

The church, as a redeemed community, needs to empower the needy by extending love and compassion. The so called legalism should not hinder the church in its ongoing mission.

Conclusion

The redemption wrought for us, leads to the liberation we have achieved in Christ our liberator. The liberated one is called to liberate others who are in bondage. The local church is endowed with leadership which is not a reward or a privilege but a task and a responsibility. This task of leadership does not consist in exploiting this role and being served by others. Because the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and to give himself as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Let the season of Lent redeem us from being ritualistic victims of pietism, moralism and legalism.

Rev J Jacob

Introduction

The word redemption means deliverance by payment of a price or ransom; hence, metaphysically, at a great cost or sacrifice. In the Old Testament, especially in Deuteronomy, Psalms and Isaiah, the word 'redemption' is often used to mean deliverance from oppression, violence, sickness, captivity and death. Here redemption means power of the redeemer. The biggest history of God's redemption comes from Israel's exodus from the Egyptian bondage. Two words are used to express their deliverance, the concept of redemption;

1. 'gaal' from which 'goel' is derived, which means tithes and it was a favourite and accepted term in Psalms, Deuteronomy and Isaiah.
2. 'Paahah' also appears in Deuteronomy and early Psalms.

The word 'goel' refers to the kinsman who has the right to redeem. The term is also used to refer avenger of blood (Numbers 35:12, Job 19:25, Psalms 19:14). But in Deuteronomy and Isaiah, it refers to and denotes Jehovah as the vindicator, deliverer and avenger of his people (Isaiah 40:14, 43:14).

Content

The word redemption signifies being set free, bought out back; God has smitten the first born (paska) of the Egyptians and saved all the first born of Israel and received the Levites in place of all the first born of Israel, and the livestock of the Levites in place of their livestock. Their lives are to be mine, I am the Lord; to redeem the 273 first born Israelites who exceeded the number of Levites "Collect five Shekels for each one", according to the sanctuary shekel, which weighs twenty gerahs. Give the money for the redemption of the additional Israelites to Aaron and his sons (Numbers 3:44.48). They were thus set free. Likewise the land or the one who sold himself, could be redeemed (Leviticus 25:23, 24, 47, 54) and from them the subject rises to the redemption of soul or life forfeited because of sin.

Man cannot give ransom to God for his brother; for the redemption of the soul is precious or priceless and it is redeemed with great worth. Redemption under God's mighty power was particularly in the historical consciousness of the people of Israel. Terms like

redemption, redeem and redeemer occur frequently in Old Testament. From the basic meaning of buying back by paying a ransom, the term was also extended to cover major deliverances of any kind (whether or not a payment was involved). Above all, redemption was regarded as the appropriate word to describe the grand liberation of the Hebrew tribes from the bondage of their Egyptian oppressor.

The word, redemption, gives new meaning to the person who involves in the mighty deliverance of God. He will be called redeemer. Redeemer, in broad sense, takes physical, political, religious and social leadership in delivering people and he will bring people who are oppressed to a stage or phase of freedom and allow them to reach a state of freedom. In the Old Testament history, Moses became the perfect redeeming leader under the guidance of the mighty God, Jehovah. Redeemer and redemption in Genesis 48: 16 refer to the redeeming activity, Exodus 6:6, 15:13 refers to God's redemption from burden. In Deuteronomy 21: 8, 24:18, Moses prays to God to be the merciful Redeemer.

References in Bible for Redeem, Redeemer, Redeemed, Redemption

II Sam.7:23 redeemer of Israel, Nehemiah 1:10 redeemer God, Psalms 26:11 redeem me, Psalms 34:22 - Lord redeemeth, Psalms 44:26, Psalms 69:18 - redeem us, Psalms 7:23 - rejoice and sing for redeemed, Psalms 74:2 - remember the redeemer, Psalms 77:15 - redeemed thy people, Psalms 103:3 - who redeemeth, Psalms 107:2 - He redeemed me from my enemies, Psalms 111:9 - sent redemption, Psalms 130: 7,8 hope redemption. Isaiah 1:27 - Zion shall be redeemed, Isaiah 29:27, who redeemed Abraham, Isaiah 43:1 I have redeemed, Isaiah 48:20, Isaiah 44:22, blot out transgression redeem, Isaiah 52:9 redeem Jerusalem Micah 4:10 Redeemed from Egypt, Job 19:25 I know that My redeemer lives

CONCLUSION

In Hellenistic world, redemption and ransom refers to commodities, animal and slave trade. New Testament writers used these terms for the release of slave as an apt symbolic form to represent what Jesus Christ has done for humankind.

Rev. Dr. Manohar Chandra Prasad

Understanding of Redemption in the NT

March 5, 2019
Tuesday

Introduction

Redemption is a universal idea that transcends all faiths and cultures. Each scriptural and non-scriptural religious tradition interprets the idea of Redemption in diverse ways. Christian faith has always emphasized the need for redemption as the possibility to overcome sin, death and evil. While the Christian doctrine of sin attempts to explain the brokenness and vulnerability of relationships, the doctrine of Salvation deals with reconciliation with the created order. Early Christian thought has expressed redemption in terms of Christ the great high priest and victim, who offers himself as a sacrifice that once and for all expiated sins (Hebrews 2:17-18). While contemporary writers tend to speak of redemption as a metaphor to illustrate the totality of the saving act, the New Testament (NT) writers tend to employ it in the context of religious laws, social customs, political systems, Imperial powers and cultural values that were real for the early believers who were willing to take a courageous step of putting their faith and celebrating their identity in Christ. The story of redemption in the NT is in many ways the story of Jesus Christ, which offers deliverance from evil, cleansing from sin and reconciling in and through love, demonstrated in the passion, death and resurrection of Christ.

Redemption: Language and usage

The Hebrew words used in the Old Testament and Septuagint (LXX: The Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible) their usage and translations played a significant role in shaping the Christian understanding of Redemption in the NT. Two Hebrew words *padhah* (to ransom or to free slaves by payment) and *ga'al* (to play the role of a relative or vindicator; to fulfill a promise or pledge) are the key words that are the foundation for NT usage.

Agorazô is the common word for “to buy” (see Matt 13:44); “to buy” or “to redeem” may also denote the act of redemption (1 Cor 6:20).

LXX Septuagint

The other word group, popular in the LXX, is represented by lytroô ("to redeem," Titus 2:14; always in the middle or passive in the NT). Its cognates are *lytron* ("ransom," only in Mark 10:45 = Matt 20:28), *antilytron* ("ransom," only in 1 Tim 2:6), lytrôsis ("redemption," Heb 9:12), and the popular NT word apolytrôsis ("redemption").

A basic survey of the usage in the OT and NT, point to the two defining events that shape the writings of the Old Testament and its theology – the Exodus and Exile. While the title 'Redeemer,' is not ascribed to Christ by early Christian communities, the NT calls him our redemption (*apolutrosis*; 1 Cor 1:30) and names him 'Saviour' (e.g. Luke 2:11) sixteen times. Therefore the proclamation of Christ by early Christians as 'redeeming,' 'buying,' 'ransoming,' 'freeing,' or 'liberating,' is located in the social, political and economic context(s) of early Christianity.

Redemption in the New Testament

The foundational idea of Redemption among others is derived from God's saving act from bondage and slavery symbolized by Egypt where Religion, Politics and Culture celebrated suffering and oppression. In the Song of Sea, the people become the People of God (Exodus 15:13). Since today we come to accept many of the writings of the OT (Hebrew Bible) to be post-exilic, the idea of Redemption shaped the life of people in the midst of laws, norms, customs and rules that were practiced by the 'Other.' The Exodus and Exile define and redefine the idea of sin and evil, which the NT writers illustrated with the grounding of the idea of Salvation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Particularly the usage by Paul indicates the intervention of God in the act of liberating the people of Israel from bondage. The biblical narrative of Redemption reverses the paradigms of the world that celebrate success, power and position. God's story of redemption is an act of intervention and restoring the lives of individuals and communities, who are otherwise shamed by the society. Moses was a murderer, Jacob and Esau were conniving, Peter denied even knowing Jesus, while Paul viewed himself as the "Chief among sinners" because he persecuted the believers before he was converted. The biblical narrative of redemption as an act of

reversal is significant, because it provides us with hope and inspiration when sin, failure, defeat and hopelessness are sometimes overwhelming. Redemption is an act of transformation that helps us move beyond our own self and values and structures that enslave us. Therefore when Paul employs images of Salvation, the prominent four are Adoption, Justification, Salvation and Redemption, each of them located in the background of the Old Testament and in the life of the communities that he is ministering or engaging with.

The person and work of Jesus Christ explains redemption as an active act that can make a difference in our lives. In Mark, redemption is a call to repentance, proclamation of the good news and a call to celebrate the values of the Kingdom of God **(Mark 1:14-15).** It is also a fulfilment of the longstanding hope and aspirations of people who are waiting in expectation to experience redemption. It is a choice to celebrate the ways of God which are not necessarily the ways of the world. It is an indicator of God's rule or God's reign, where the redeemed community celebrates the values of justice and peace. The language and promise of the Kingdom is not an earthly one but an invitation to experience the divine one, the redeemed universe, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt 25:34).

A similar thought is echoed by Paul in **2 Corinthians 5:16-21.** In the earlier verses (14 and 15), Paul indicates that the act of redemption is made available to all, irrespective of ethnic identity, class, gender or status. The idea of redemption is illustrated through one of the most significant themes in Paul's theology, “New creation.” The community is to demonstrate redemption by living for others, made possible by the power of the Spirit (2 Cor 3:3, 6, 18) and the death of Christ (2 Cor 5:14-15). The new creation is the possibility to overcome sin, evil and death, and offers to understand redemption as a new act of God's intervention. One of the prominent ideas of Redemption in the NT through the Pauline lens is a call to live for others and experience reconciliation in and through Christ; it expects us to be involved in a 'Ministry of Reconciliation.'

Conclusion

The human understanding of redemption is met with God's understanding of Redemption at the Cross. Ethnic identity, class, caste, gender, birth, money, position - all these standards disappear in the light of Calvary. None of the values of the world will define our relationship with God or with each other, but redemption will make a 'difference,' for a community and within a community of faith. That is and will be a challenge for us as individuals and as communities of faith. Can our understanding of redemption make a difference for us and others?

Rev. Dr. Dexter S. Maben

Cross: A Call to Vicarious Suffering

1 Kings 17: 12-24 Psalm 102
Phillippians 2: 1-11 Mark 8: 31-38

Gracious God, we thank you for sending us your son Jesus Christ to suffer and die for us. And during this season of lent, teach us the meaning of your suffering so that our hearts and minds are attuned to suffer with you to attain the glory of the Father. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

We are invited to meditate on the theme, "Cross: A call to vicarious suffering." The term 'vicarious' refers to something that is experienced in the imagination through the feelings and actions of another person. Here we are called to experience the sufferings of Jesus on the Cross in our imaginations. However, we must realize that this is not a mental exercise only. In Christian living, vicarious suffering leads to action. As Martin Luther puts it, so succinctly, in his commentary on the sermon on the mount, "it is not your duty to creep into a corner or into the wilderness, but to come out briskly, if you were therein, and offer both your hands and feet and your whole body for use… in short you should have such a hunger and thirst for righteousness that will never diminish or cease or cannot be satiated, so that you care for nothing else, only so that you may accomplish and maintain what is right, despising on the other hand everything that would hinder you. If one cannot make the world altogether pious, let him do what he can." So if anyone thinks that one experiences vicarious suffering within the recesses of one's own mind only, may he reconsider his suffering in the light of what Martin Luther says, "We are not Christians who run away, but participate in the suffering of Christ."

In the following points, let us look at how each person of God participated in the sufferings of the world vicariously, and then took efforts to alleviate the sufferings they participated in.

1. In the first passage found in 1 Kings 17, Prophet Elijah meets with the widow of Zarephath, who is on the brink of death due to famine, making her last meal with whatever is available for herself and her son. The prophet immediately experiences the suffering of the widow within himself. He not only restores the flour and oil in abundance, he also revives the son who has died. Perhaps the Lenten season gives us an opportunity to re-look at our world filled with hunger and death. There is hunger for food, hunger for spiritual nourishment, hunger for justice. And the immense power of death that looms large over our fragile world. How could we allow ourselves to be sufficiently broken by the suffering in this world and allow ourselves to work in this world in which Christ worked and died?
2. The epistle passage comprises of Paul's unparalleled hymn of Christ taking upon himself the form of a slave. This requires an immense amount of inner experience to see the beauty of God's unfailing love. But experiencing the kenotic experience of Christ requires us, as Paul says, looking not only at our own interests, but that of the others. Experiencing kenosis means to go down to the level of death itself. This is not a suicidal mission entrusted to Christians, but a call to duty in which we serve Christ gladly even to the point of death. Death ceases to be a barrier to Christian mission.
3. The gospel text admonishes Peter for being a hindrance to the mission of Christ which must culminate on the cross. This is Peter's signature trademark to avoid suffering, even vicarious suffering to which Christ calls him and his disciples. And then Christ goes on to mention that it is essential to lose one's life to safeguard his soul. And forfeit the world for a greater glory. This call is not without its benefits, if one wishes to see them as benefits. For when the Son of Man will return with his father to establish the fulfilled kingdom of God, we may stand before them without being ashamed for the crosses that we carry. The cross that we carry is our glory essentially. And this is not even a statement to make us feel 'good' about our sufferings. It is the ultimate war declared upon the evils of the world that guarantees us instant gratification without the cross experience. Such is the power of vicarious suffering.

Conclusion

The call to vicarious suffering should not instill in us a fear of living as most often preachers make us feel, especially if they are of the sadist kinds. Nor is it as rosy as worldly prosperity. The call to vicarious suffering is a joyful journey in which we learn to live without care for the morrow. It means to preach a better sermon tomorrow, love a person a little better, care for the family a bit deeper and do as much as we could do, as the arms, feet and the body of Christ. May this Lent bring us this joy in the call we get from the Cross.

Rev. Rajasingh Gnanaraj

Redemption as Understood in Christianity

March 7, 2019
Thursday

Introduction

God's redemption of humankind through Jesus Christ constitutes the core of Christian faith and doctrine. A cursory glance of the Nicene Creed reveals to us that Christ's incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection and ascension were oriented towards the redemption of humankind.

In the ancient world, which served as a backdrop to the Apostle Paul's thought, Redemption referred to the liberation of the people of war and, also, to those who had sold themselves into slavery to repay a family debt. This term was employed as a metaphor to describe Jesus' saving work to deliver human beings from sin and evil.

“It is a striking fact about Christianity that, in its mainstream forms, it has never officially defined one doctrine of salvation” (David Ford). The diversity of understandings about God's redemption of human beings can be attributed to the complexity of human life and the ingenuous and incomprehensible activity of God.

Purpose of Redemption

Athanasius of Alexandria, through his famous statement, 'The son of God became man so that we might become God,' asserted that human beings had to be redeemed so that they become divine. This line of thought was prevalent in Eastern Christianity. While Martin Luther and C S Lewis advocated that the goal of redemption is to be reckoned as righteous in the sight of God, John Wesley and the proponents of American Methodism insisted on an individual's personal holiness or perfection. The Existentialist thinkers like Rudolf Bultmann and Paul Tillich understood redemption as authentic human existence. For the Latin American Liberation theologians, political liberation was the essence of redemption.

Modes of Redemption

The early Greek fathers contended that the incarnation of Jesus is the basis for God's redemptive agenda. For instance, Irenaeus of Lyons (earliest of the church fathers to speak explicitly about the redemptive

work of Christ) asserts that the narrative about Jesus, the new/final Adam, is a recapitulation of human history. Christian thinkers like Anselm of Canterbury and the protestant reformers emphasised that the crucifixion of Jesus is central to his project of redemption. Eastern Christianity went beyond crucifixion to insist on Christ's descent, resurrection and coming of the Holy Spirit, as well. But, it has to be admitted that a strong connection has been made between Christ's crucifixion and redemption in the development of Christian thought. The significance of the crucifixion is manifested in the sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist.

Various theories of atonement have been employed at different times and places to help people to comprehend the link between the crucifixion and redemption. The term, atonement, was invented by William Tyndale in the 16th century (when there was no English word, meant for reconciliation) and he used it in his translation of the New Testament into English. A few important theories of atonement are as follows:

Moral Influence: Peter Abelard is commonly credited with developing this theory, which asserts that Jesus Christ came to earth and died in order to bring about a positive change to humankind. This moral change comes through the teachings of Jesus alongside his example and actions.

Sacrifice: This theory, developed around the idea of sacrifice coming from the temple cult and the book of Hebrews' depiction of Jesus as the self-sacrificing High Priest, has been the most profound and enduring metaphor for the crucifixion. Augustine of Hippo defines sacrifice in his book, *The City of God*, as something 'offered in every action which is designed to unite us to God in a holy fellowship.' In order for humanity to be restored to God, the mediator must sacrifice himself. In this sacrifice, Christ was both the victim and priest, because no pure victim was found. This understanding was very important and it shaped the western perspective on Christ's death.

Victory: This theory contends that we are trapped in our situation and our hope lies in help from outside; it depicts Christ as the all-conquering hero, who defeats the devil.

‘The word of God was made flesh in order that he might destroy death and bring us life' (Irenaeus).

Satisfaction: This theory was inspired by the feudal system and its characteristics of allegiance and honour. Anselm of Canterbury asserted that God's righteous anger had to be satisfied; in other words a payment had to be made to compensate for the offence of human sin. As human beings do not have the ability and God has no obligation to make the satisfaction, the God-person (Jesus) had to make the same because he had both the ability and the obligation.

Penal Substitution: This theory was inspired by the Law Court and advocated that Jesus, in his death, took the place of those who deserved condemnation, thereby, paying the debt to satisfy God's justice. This view was very popular among the protestant reformers.

Scapegoat: This perspective, promoted by Rene Girard and others, is rooted in the philosophical concept of the scapegoat. In this anthropological approach to religion, Jesus dies as the scapegoat of humankind.

The contextual theologies of liberation developed an understanding of redemption as liberation from all that oppresses and liberation for communion with one another and with God, with God's love as the impetus. Although they acknowledged the personal dimension of redemption, they asserted that the individual is always part of particular historical communities and redemption has concrete social and political implications for these communities - which together form the church that becomes a sacrament of redemption. These communities of the poor and those committed to a preferential option for them, are the main subjects of redemption. Reiterating the communitarian dimensions of redemption is very necessary in a context of dominant, neoconservative, neoliberal orthodoxy that ignores the social context of evil and denies sin as structural reality.

Feminist and Womanist theologians have criticized the mode of redemption, advocated by the popular atonement theories, for being

Sado masochistic in nature. According to them, these theories have valorized suffering as redemptive and modelled unconditional obedience as necessary for redemption. Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza dismisses the notion of atonement by stating, 'The Sophia-God of Jesus does not need atonement or sacrifices. Jesus' death is not willed by God, but is the result of his all-inclusive praxis as Sophia's prophet.'

In India, Brahma Bandhava Upadhyaya attempted a synthesis of Sankara's advaita vedanta and Christian theology stressing the jnana marga (way of knowledge) for redemption. A J Appasamy, following the way of devotion (bhakti marga), tried to synthesize Ramanuja's vishishta advaita with Christian spirituality.

It was in the last quarter of the twentieth century that Indian theologians began to take the questions of socio-economic justice more seriously. M M Thomas defined redemption as humanization (fullness of life and liberation) in a total and eschatological sense. A P Nirmal, the primary proponent of Dalit Theology, questioned the 'brahminic' tradition in Indian Christian theology and believed that any authentic soteriological striving should reflect the struggles and aspirations of Dalits for life, identity and dignity.

A Few Contemporary Questions:

Was Jesus' death on the cross a religio-political execution? Has the Church (by advocating divine salvation plans) suppressed this radical fact? (Mark Lewis Taylor)

Can redemption be institutionalized? (Outside the church there is no salvation - Cyprian of Carthage)

'Can a male saviour save women?' - Rosemary Radford Ruether

‘Can a slave be liberated by another slave? Can the enslaved dalits be restored to human dignity by the self-abasement of the crucified servant or the silent sufferer or the humiliated deity?' - Maria Arul Raja

Rev. J. Christopher Samuel

March 8, 2019
Friday

Redemption: *Discernment*

John 8:31-38

God of life and liberation, we pray that you will grant us the wisdom to discern your redemptive work in our lives and the courage and commitment to be channels of your redemption in this world. Amen.

Discernment, literally, means to sift apart and thus, to detect or distinguish. Jesus, emphatically, stated, "You will know the truth and the truth will set you free" (John 8:32). In other words, discerning the truth paves the way to experience redemption.

The season of lent, with its emphasis on redemption, invites us to cultivate a 'habit of discernment' (Rowan Williams). In a context of economic anxiety, rejuvenated casteism, misogyny, fake news, manufactured fear, hypernationalism and 'christofascism' (Dorothee Solle), we are challenged to move beyond a black-white or right-wrong authoritarian notion of truth and, instead, discern it as the impetus towards a redeemed living in this world. To be redeemed necessitates discernment of the truth that was manifested through God's sharing of God's image with us and dwelling, physically, with us through the incarnation event, which can be termed as God's most profound and personal redemptive intervention in the history of humankind. Redemption involves a casting away of identities, which are imposed upon us by societal institutions and discern our true identity in relation to the creator and the created order.

Discernment involves Identification

Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free." (John 8:31-32)

It is important to observe here that Jesus is addressing a group of people, who have already believed in him. "Belief" seems to be the fundamental theme of the Gospel of John. John the Baptist came as a witness to Jesus, so that people might "believe through" Jesus (1:7).

The purpose of the gospel is to encourage people to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing they may have life in his name (20:31).

But believing in Jesus was just the starting point; mere belief in him or his teaching is not sufficient. They will have to continue in his word to, truly, be his disciples. He will continue this line of thought, when he accuses his audience of not knowing God, even though they address God as "our God" (John 8: 54-55). Therefore, to believe is just the beginning of a journey of discipleship towards redemption and mere affirmation of faith does not guarantee knowledge of God.

Jesus' call to his prospective disciples to continue in his word or teaching can prove to be very difficult. His teaching was considered so offensive, blasphemous (5:18), difficult and unacceptable (6:60), that "many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him" (6:66). Moreover, many conspiracies were hatched to kill him.

Therefore, the radical choice of communing with Jesus by continuing in his word and being his disciples, will initiate the process of 'knowing' the truth and attaining freedom. In other words, Jesus, the embodiment of truth, invites his audience to identify with him and his teaching. This identification, exhibited in the form of faithful discipleship, will pave the way for discerning the truth, which will emancipate. In the words of Pope Francis, "*To discern the truth, we need to discern everything that encourages communion and promotes goodness from whatever instead tends to isolate, divide, and oppose."*

The truth, that Jesus embodies, continues to be revealed. Jesus had stated to his disciples that he has not taught them the entire truth, because they lack the intellectual, spiritual and emotional faculties to comprehend it (16: 12). But he assures them that the 'Spirit of truth' will guide them into all the truth (16:13). Therefore, for anyone to claim comprehensive knowledge of the 'absolute' truth, is preposterous. In this context, it is pertinent to analyse the Church's understanding of itself as the custodian of the 'absolute truth' and its intolerant and violent attitude towards those who contradicted its belief systems. For instance, the medieval church's hounding of

Galileo Galilei for his advocacy of heliocentricity, which was in contradiction to the former's geocentric views.

Discernment involves Introspection

We are descendants of Abraham and have never been slaves to anyone (John 8: 33)

The people, who were listening to Jesus, understood their identity as 'descendants of Abraham' and it is ironical that they claim that they had never been slaves to anyone, even while celebrating a festival that commemorated their liberation from the Egyptian slavery. In this context, Jesus asserts that the true meaning of claiming Abraham as one's ancestor was in manifesting what he did - acts of generosity and hospitality, which affirm truth and life (8:40). Moreover, John the Baptist's assertion that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from stones (Luke 3:8) dismisses any sense of exclusive pride or privilege in one's physical origins.

This fanatical obsession of the crowds with their physical lineage from Abraham was enslaving them to the extent that they had digressed from the values that he represented. Therefore, the redemption of these people depended on how they saw themselves. The assertion of Martin Buber that 'we can be redeemed, only to the extent we see ourselves' is very appropriate.

The Johannine prologue has, emphatically, asserted that everyone who receives and believes in Jesus will become children of God (1:12). This becoming is the consequence of the pursuit of every individual to imagine her future in connectedness with God. Redemption involves the aspect of becoming, to imagine ourselves in radical opposition to the constructs that may enslave us. Bob Marley, very succinctly, furthers this idea by singing, 'Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery. None but ourselves can free our mind.'

Discernment involves Interpretation

We are not illegitimate children…..you are a Samaritan and have a demon (John 8: 41, 48)

Jesus' listeners have a problem, not only with the way they see themselves, but also with the way they see and interpret the world around them. It is manifested, in particular, in their 'us' versus 'them' attitude. Historically, we have seen the dangers that come from interpreting people as being 'other' rather than being human (Nazi Germany, Apartheid in South Africa, Caste discrimination in India, to name a few).

By asserting that they are not illegitimate children, Jesus' adversaries seem to be insinuating that he is a child born out of wedlock and thus, an illegitimate son of his parents. They claim that he is not a 'pure' Jew like them, but a Samaritan and they, also, assert that he is demon-possessed. Therefore, they attempt to corner Jesus by adopting a moralistic, discriminatory and demonizing approach against him. This represents their world view and they attempt to legitimize it. It is true to contend that, in the history of Christianity, it is those who believe that they are protecting God, their traditions and their faith, who display hostility towards others.

The tendency to, aggressively, moralise, demonise and discriminate against everyone who is different and, also, vulnerable has been an integral part of human history. Popular Christian imagination has very often succumbed to this tendency and, thereby, the church has drifted away from being a movement that turned the world (and its values and practices) upside down (Acts 17:6). This has been manifested in a moralistic attitude towards the victims of stigmatized health disorders, marital breakdowns and so on. The church's active legitimization and, later, indifference towards the sins of racism and casteism is a fact that cannot be denied. Moreover, Christians have, also, been involved in the demonization of certain groups of peoples. Martin Luther's demonization of the Jews as 'devils incarnate' contributed to the long history of Christian anti-semitism which reached its peak in the horrors of holocaust.

Barbara Brown Taylor, in her book, *'An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith'* states, “The problem is, many of the people in need of saving are in churches, and at least part of what they need saving from is the idea that God sees the world the same way they do.”

Rev. J. Christopher Samuel

Discerning the Image of God

Gen. 1:26-27

To discern is to build an ability to obtain sharp perceptions or to judge well. In case of judgment, discernment can be moral in nature or psychological. But when this is fastened to Christianity this particular word has several meanings, “Discerning can describe the process of determining God's desire in a situation or for one's life or identifying the true nature of a thing.” This thing can be good, evil, or may even transcend the limiting notion of duality. On a larger level, it also describes the interior search for an answer to the question of one's vocation or God's calling.

To understand the phraseology of “Image of God,” the hebrew phrase, '*Tzelem Elohim,*' and the latin phrase, '*Imago Dei,*' (which asserts that human beings are created in the image and likeness of God) are used. For ages, theologians and philosophers have debated on this subject. Ancient Jewish Scholars like Saadia Gaon and Philo have argued that human beings made in the 'Image of God' does not mean that God possesses human features; it is a figurative language for God is bestowing special honor to humankind, which was not conferred to rest of the Creation. In Christian thought the 'Image of God' is closely linked to the idea of original sin. The image that was in Adam at creation was lost when he had fallen. And by the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, humans regained the lost image.

Man in *'His'* Image (Gen 1: 26-27)

The creation account states that God made man in his own image and likeness. It is not expressed precisely in what likeness human beings were created. On this topic, various interpreters are still toiling hard to find an answer. It is impossible to frame it with anthropomorphism for likeness does find any physiological structure and it is highly conflicted with the transcendental nature of God. “In our Image” and “after our likeness” - these two phrases signify the same thing. Here again we can see how eminently he has placed humans above the brutal creatures. However in the soul of man we must look for the

divine image. And here we easily discern it. Like God, man's soul is an invisible, active, free and immortal spirit. But human beings became like the beasts that perish! Kohler proposes that “Likeness consists in the erect stature of man, which symbolizes his elevation over the animals and his power to rule them.” Vriezen states that “Likeness means a direct and positive relation of community between God and man which does not place the two terms of the relation on the same level.”

Conclusion

The image which was fallen through Adam was found in the incarnation of Christ and, thereby, Paul develops theologically in his writings that the image of God is first and most properly Christ, the new Adam and the head of a new race of men (2 Cor. 4:4, Col. 1:15). He adds that men realize the fullness of the image of God in them by sharing the form of the image of the Son to which they are predestined (Rom. 8:29). God discerned to give his only begotten Son to save his creation and uphold the image which he had set upon humankind before the fall. By the sacrificial offering for the atonement of sin, the glory of God was attained in order to bring back the covenantal relationship. Now we have to discern to live a covenantal life with Christ, in Christ and through Christ. Amen.

Rev. Elisha Devanandam. V

Being With Outcasts and Marginalized

March 10, 2019 Sunday

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

Gracious God you sent your only beloved Son, Jesus Christ, to redeem the entire humanity from the bondage of sin. In this act you identified yourself with the outcasts and the marginalized of your day to exhibit to the world that you have come to call them. Inspire us to emulate you and to have your mind and heart to accommodate and accept the outcasts and the marginalized in our society. Strengthen us to root out this inhuman system and help us to establish an egalitarian community. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

The main theme set apart for our Lenten Meditations this season is LENT: A TIME OF REDEMPTION. Lenten season in the spiritual journey of a Christian, which beckons him/her to focus his/her attention towards the sacrificial, vicarious suffering and death of our Lord Jesus Christ to redeem the entire humanity from the bondage of sin. Throughout these Lenten Meditations the above mentioned theme rings around which facilitates the readers and the listeners of the preaching to understand the very purpose of Christ's vicarious suffering on the Cross. In the light of the main theme, the subject given for our meditation is BEING WITH OUTCASTS AND MARGINALIZED. The two words in the given theme, i.e. `Outcaste' and 'Marginalized,' though having different connotations, yet subscribe to each other in the deeper meaning. An outcaste is a person who is rejected, secluded, abandoned in the society. He/she has no place in the society or in a particular group. The society or a group refuses to accept him/her as one among them. The cultural, social, religious economic stigmas inherited by the society frame a person as an outcaste. The word 'marginalized' in the dictionary refers to a person who is alienated and is treated as if he/she is not an important person. A marginalized person is pushed to the edge of a group and is accorded lesser importance.

The given Biblical texts reveal the prevalence of the two words mentioned above. The OT text i.e. Esther 4:1-17 speaks about the conspiracy of Haman the king's chief to annihilate the Jews who were small in number and who lived during the reign of king Xerxes. Haman tries to influence the king to kill all the Jews on whom he reports all false allegations to the king. Today the oppressive powermongers all over our country have shut down the voices of the minor communities.

IN God's formula, it is the least or the marginalized who are counted as the highest in the Kingdom of God. Here we see that Haman was almost successful in his plan of writing false allegations against the Jews to the King. The Jews were greatly troubled as they were small in number and had no one to overpower the evil devices of Haman. It was at this time that Mordecai the uncle of Queen Esther instructs her to get into the Courtyard of the King and speak to him on behalf of the Jews. The fasting prayer of the Jews strengthens the Queen in such a way that she determines to enter into the courtyard of the King even if it demands her death.

Today the same situation exists in the Church of Christ. The voices of the influential members are heard and honoured whereas the voices of the small group of members who are not influential are either not heard or silenced. In Luke 19: 38-40, when the disciples were shouting praises to the Lord, the Pharisees take objection and ask Jesus to silence them. Jesus replies by saying that even if they are silenced, the stones themselves would start shouting. As the followers of our Lord, we are called to identify ourselves with the marginalized and make efforts to see that their voices are heard and honoured. Outsiders become insiders

John Wesley, the founder of the Wesleyan Methodist Church, and the best revival preacher of the 17th Century in England said, "The world is my parish." The Epistle passage from Acts 15: 12-21 speaks about the arguments among the disciples in the early church regarding receiving the gentiles into the Church. There were some Pharisees

who had accepted Christ and they were raising objections that without circumcision gentiles cannot be accepted in the Church. In Galatians 5:6, Paul explicitly writes to the Church at Galatia that when a person is in Christ, neither circumcision nor the lack of it makes any difference at all. Instead it is faith working through love that matters. John1: 11 says that Jesus came to save is own, but his own people rejected him. The salvific act of Christ is extended to the entire humanity. In the extension of the Kingdom of God Jesus invites all those who are branded as gentiles or outsiders to become insiders. From the ministry of Jesus one unique feature is observed and that is the concept of inclusivism.

It is sad to note that the Church in India at large seems to be drifting towards exclusivism by closing her doors to the outsiders. In John 4, Jesus invites the Samaritan woman to experience the joy of the long expected Messiah. Jesus reveals to her that he is the messiah and opens the door to her to come into the fold of salvation.

In God's sight, no human is untouchable

In the Old Testament times and also in the time of Jesus, persons with certain communicable diseases were considered as untouchables. Leprosy was one such disease. The 13th and 14th Chapters of Leviticus tells that the person who had this disease was considered as unclean, untouchable. He/she was forbidden from living with the family members, and was not allowed to walk on the streets publicly.

The gospel passage (Mark 1:40-45) speaks about a leper coming to Jesus. The parallel passages in Mathew 8:2-4, Luke 5: 12-16 also narrate the same incident. Crossing all restrictions, this leper comes out from the secluded place and meets Jesus by kneeling at his feet. The book of Leviticus prescribes that until a person is cleansed from his/her leprosy, that person was forbidden from walking in public. Probably he would have heard that Jesus did not stop the outcasts from coming to him, and that he had meals with the outcasts. With a

strong hope in his heart, that leper comes to Jesus seeking Jesus for cleansing of his leprosy. Among the three gospel narratives, only in the book of Mark, the word compassion appears.

Conclusion

Today in the world we come across several social, economic, religious and cultural disparities. But Our Lord, who is the same yesterday, today and forever, accepts all those who are considered as outcasts, marginalized and untouchables. As followers of our Lord Jesus, let us emulate him by accommodating and accepting all those who are branded as marginalized and bring them to the mainstream of the society. May God bless us all. Amen.

Rev. P V G Kumar

Discerning the Identities

March 11, 2019 Monday

Galatians 3:23-29

Gracious heavenly father we thank and praise you for the gift of life and for all the blessings you have showered upon us. We are so grateful for giving us an opportunity to identify ourselves with Christ's model. We seek your presence to be with us throughout our life. Help us to keep your commandments and glorify your name through our lives. We seek your help to reflect your love and forgiveness in our daily life. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

In this present generation 'Identity' has its own prominent place and value. Every person in this world strives hard in order to gain his/her own identity. Identity depends on one's own personal decision, determination and desires. Identity can be defined by our character, taste, values and behavior. As God's children we need to recognize our duty to reflect God's identity through our lives. In Galatians chapter 3 Paul talks about the people at Galatians who gave more priority to Jewish rituals than the salvation by faith through Christ. Paul also wanted them to understand God's promise through Abraham and its fulfillment through Jesus Christ and about the provisional function of the law in relation to God's promise.

In chapter 3 verses 23-29, we see Paul's intention to explain the connection between the law and faith in Christ. The laws of Moses had played a big role in Israelite's religious life in order to obey God's commandments. The law stood as a bridge between the people of God and God. In the same way, Jesus Christ has fulfilled God's will by obeying God to the extent of giving his life on the cross. He has made us clean and righteous. He shed his blood for our salvation. He made all of us to be the children of God. Hence we need to proclaim Jesus' sacrifice on the cross than the law and other Jewish rituals.

We are the Children of God

In verse 26 Paul tells that we are sons of God through our faith in him. It's a great privilege to be called as children of God. It is not just a

privilege to be taken for granted, for it brings certain responsibilities. It challenges us to recognize Christ's identity which is beyond everything, including caste, religion, language and gender.

We belong to Christ

In verse 29, Paul speaks about our existence which we can see within us. Lent is the time of introspection and retrospection where we talk to God through our prayers and confessions. All our confessions, prayers, decisions, determination and renewal of commitments remind us that we belong to Christ. We are called to be servants of God and to follow Jesus Christ. We become a part of Christ's community. We are in the lenten season and we need to understand that Christ is the foundation for our identity. He stands as a role model, the model who shows love, charity, forgiveness, patience. Christian identity proclaims justice and harmony. Christian identity also calls us to live and walk in Christ's path. It shows God's love to mankind. Let all our habits, lifestyle and thoughts be merged in Christ's identity.

Rev. Margan Sandesh

Discerning the Institutions

March 12, 2019 Tuesday

Mark10:42-45

Loving God, you have showed and expressed your love towards mankind by giving your own begotten son. We thank you for your love, mercy, kindness and compassion which you showered upon us. Help us and guide us so that we may live accordingly in Jesus' way. Help us to follow the footsteps of Jesus to show the same love towards our family, neighbors and to all. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

We are living in a world of competition, where everyone is fighting with each other to be on top and is trying to grab and claim the number one spot. But the values of the kingdom of God like humanity, love, kindness, compassion and mercy cannot be seen in anyone or anywhere in the world. Hence, we have to follow Jesus' way to establish the kingdom of God.

Firstly, a life of discipleship is not easy to live. It needs special qualities like love, kindness, compassion and mercy. Jesus also taught the same and lived accordingly. In verse 45, he says that he came to serve. Jesus lived and served in the world with love, kindness, compassion and mercy along with humility and obedience to his Father. He taught his disciples not to rule like the rulers of worldly kingdoms, for they rule and live for their own benefits, name and fame. The worldly rulers are like dictators and commanders. They oppress people for their own needs; they don't care for people who are left out, oppressed and marginalized. Therefore, for Jesus, authority is service and the ruler is a servant. Hence, a ruler not only rules over people but serves his people like Jesus with love, compassion and service.

Secondly, Jesus speaks about who is the greatest among all. Jesus was the greatest because he gave his life on the cross and by living with love and compassion towards mankind. Jesus showed the way to live

accordingly as a slave with these Godly qualities. The purpose of Jesus' life is to fulfill his Father's will to live the life of a slave and to become empty. Therefore, the disciples should fulfill Jesus' teachings by serving people in this world. A slave is none other than a person who obeys and listens to his master's words and will not get anything in return. Hence, the disciples of Jesus should live according to his teachings in this world. This is how the disciples can become great with their obedience to their Master by fulfilling his will.

Thirdly, the disciples have to identify with those who are marginalized, oppressed, rejected, despised, orphans and widows in the world because Jesus identified with them as 'son of man.' It indicates Jesus came from their background and has shown that he is with them. Ultimately, he lived with them and shared their pain, agony, cry, sufferings and their life too. Therefore, the son of man came not to be served but to serve, and gave his life as a ransom for many. His disciples should live accordingly by identifying themselves with the marginalized and oppressed. The disciples' goal of life is to be with these people, to serve them and to identify with them by showing love, kindness, compassion and mercy. It is our duty to take care and bring them towards the love of God and to the kingdom of God.

Conclusion

My dear friends in Christ, being a disciple and a follower of Christ is to simply follow Jesus only. We are in the world to live in obedience to our loving God. We have to show Godly love, kindness, compassion and mercy to people. We have to live in accordance with these characters. Our life should have impact on others. We are created in His image. So, we have to live accordingly to his teachings with humility and obedience to establish the kingdom of God. Ultimately, we are here to live in peace and happiness with love, kindness, compassion and mercy and not to dominate, oppress, marginalize etc. Let us serve people and live a life of servanthood.

Rev. P. Mathew Ronald

Discerning The Indicators

March 13, 2019
Wednesday

Romans 8:18-25

Gracious God, we acknowledge and affirm that you are the creator and redeemer of the entire cosmos. We pray that you will equip us to discern the inter-connectedness and solidarity within your creation and respond, creatively, to the travails of the created order. Amen

God's plan of redemption is not limited to human beings. God intends to 'reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven' (Colossians 1:20). In the given text, Paul acknowledges the suffering of Creation and compares it to the groaning of a woman in labor, who cries from the depth of her being during that time when she does not yet know whether the outcome will be life or death. Therefore, we are called to discern the indicators for redemption, emanating from earth, on account of the devastation of war, pollution-dumping industry, or any of the other myriad ways.

Contemplation

Before speaking for Creation, we need to listen to it; we need to open our ears to its inarticulate groans. That creatures groan and mourn is also seen in the prophetic literature of the Old Testament (Jeremiah 9:10, Joel 1:18, Hosea 4:3). Such groans reach the ears of God the Creator. If we pay attention we, too, can hear this groaning, manifested in the stillness of a quiet forest with fewer birds, the reduced chirping of insects, the melting down of the warming glaciers.

Hence, we are called to look, listen and reflect, attentively, on the ecosystem around us. We are challenged to move away from a consumer-commodity relationship and adopt a non-utilitarian or contemplative approach towards the created order. Jesus' exhortation to us to look at the birds of the air (and) consider the lilies of the field (Mt. 6: 26, 28) is a challenge to accept the eco system as a teacher and relate to it with an attitude of mutual learning. .

Connectedness

Paul contends that humankind and the rest of creation have a common destiny; they are inseparably connected to each other because both are

created by the one creator. As we act with the notion that we are not connected to the Earth, melting ice caps, contaminated water sources, and rising temperatures are indicators that remind us that we are working against God's plan to redeem the cosmos.

Paul places a lot of emphasis on humankind's solidarity with creation. This solidarity offers a strong rebuttal to the theology of rapture, which describes the end as a time when 'believers' will be transported to heaven while 'unbelievers' and the rest of creation will be left behind to experience suffering and destruction. As a corrective to this "left behind" theology, Paul testifies to God's intention of redeeming his creation, in its entirety.

Concern

In the given text, Paul expresses his concern for the Creation, which is subjected to decay (8:22) and his desire for its ultimate freedom from bondage. Paul reminds us that God values all of creation and works toward its redemption. Hence, Paul admonishes us for our indifference towards the travails of the earth and encourages us to care for the world that God so values.

Harry Hahne, the author of *The Corruption and Redemption of Creation: Nature in Romans 8.19-22 and Jewish Apocalyptic Literature,* asserts that "Christians should not care for the earth merely from enlightened self-interest that is only concerned for how it affects their quality of life and that of their children (an anthropocentric approach to ecological ethics). Neither should they care for the earth because they see humans as merely a part of nature (the view of evolutionary science and many religions). Rather Christians should see their responsibility to care for the earth as a stewardship given by God, which obedience to the Lord Jesus demands (a theocentric approach)."

God's redemption cannot be limited to a portion of the created world; it extends to the entire universe. We are called to participate with God in this cosmic redemption.

Rev. J. Christopher Samuel

Discerning the Incarnation

March 14, 2019 Thursday

John 1: 14-18

Lord, in a world that takes your incarnation lightly and foolishly, grant us the wisdom to discern the true meaning of your incarnation. Help us live and preach this Gospel. Heal our hearts and minds to look at your brokenness in the face of the broken humanity. May the Word that became flesh help us to heal and respect the flesh of those whose flesh has been disfigured by violence. In Christ's name we pray! Amen.

"The Word became Flesh," says John, as a way of telling his audience that the Word that created the world has now taken human form, or as Paul would put it later, the form of a slave. "This Word dwelt among us" clearly proves that this is a post resurrection statement, "and we have seen the Glory of the Father". Since the language is put in the past tense, we are now engaged in the arduous task of discerning the incarnation. This becomes harder for us in the face of the time lag existing between us and the Johannine community.

India and the various philosophies it has taught over centuries, allured the early Indian Christian theologians to look at incarnation from the brahminic point of view. Some even had the audacity to equate Christ with Krishna. Not only were their views deluded, they drove a minority of well learned people to leapfrog common sense and arrive at wrong conclusions.

Therefore, it is even more important to go back to the Johannine community and its Gospel to truly understand, even if it means partially, the meaning of incarnation. God did not take an 'avatar'. But God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten son to be like you and me, but the indwelling presence of the Father gave him courage to teach, preach, heal, fight and die on the cross like a common criminal. This incarnation is not magic. It is the everyday reality of God's ongoing work in our lives. If the word became flesh, this must have been the flesh of the leper that he healed. This must have been the flesh of the prostitute that he forgave. This must have

been the flesh that experienced labour pains. This must have been the flesh that was scourged like a common criminal. In other words, this is broken flesh. This incarnation is painful birth in a world filled with violence, where the Word became flesh in order to preach and practice the peace that the world cannot give. Can we discern this incarnation in our brokenness and in our everyday lives? That is the question.

Rev. Rajasingh Gnanaraj

Redemption: Disengagement

March 15, 2019 Friday

Genesis 50:15-21 St. John 8:1-11

Introduction

Life is a flowing river; it is said that we cannot touch the same river water. We, also, cannot laugh again when the same joke is repeated. But we cry over the same hurt and disappointment repeatedly, making our life miserable and burdensome, thereby, damaging our life and also decaying our faith; this becomes a compilation of sins. As we are called to live our life to the fullest, we must disengage ourselves from these compilations (sins). Disengagement from the past is a saving grace for redemption today. Holding on to the past will lead us to stagnation in the present and isolation in the future. Redemption becomes a lived reality when there is disengagement from life-destroying forces. Sins are those factors which damage life. Hence, disengagement from sins provides a healthy life and peaceful bonding with God, human beings and creation.

Genesis 50: 15-21

The great famine hit the land of Israel; so the Israelites went in search of food for them and their cattle. In this search, Jacob's sons found their lost brother Joseph had been saved from starvation and death. The brothers recollected their cruel behavior in the past and feared that their brother Joseph will hate and pay them back for all the evil that they did to him (50:15). This sense of guilt was overcome when Joseph revealed himself to them for the first time and wept bitterly (45:1). Joseph's brothers remembered that they had sold him as a slave and assumed that he was dead. Joseph did not remember their sins because he engaged himself to the present reality and disengaged himself from the past. But his brothers were not willing to disengage from their guilt of sin. So fear surrounded their lives as they disassociated themselves from their sibling bonding and related to

Joseph as servants (15:17). They pleaded with Joseph to forgive their sin/transgression. Joseph, by being freed from the pain was redeemed, although he was the victim here. But the abusers were still unable to move out of their past actions. Hence, redemption was yet to be received.

St. John 8:1-11

Jesus came to the temple again, early in the morning to teach people who were following him. Meanwhile the Scribes and Pharisees were also following Jesus to find fault with him and accuse him. To accuse Jesus these people brought a woman who, they claimed, was involved in adultery. The accusers did not bring both the people involved in adultery as the Law of Moses in Deut 22:22 says, 'if a man is found lying with the wife of another man, both of them shall die, the man who lay with the woman, and the woman.' We brand this woman alone as an adulteress, forgetting that a man was also involved in the act of adultery. So it is clear that the trial began in an unfair/unjust manner with the intention to accuse Jesus. Keeping the law of Moses as a trap, they are forcing Jesus to accuse the woman alone (5-6). Jesus wrote on the ground and told them that the one who has not sinned can throw the stone first as per the law. The writing on the ground revealed their sin and made them realize the law of Moses is just and fair for everyone who is involved irrespective of their gender. The writing on the ground provided justice for the woman, who was left alone with Jesus. Accusers who came to condemn the woman and accuse Jesus left the place. The woman who was brought for condemnation was disengaged from condemnation.

Nothing can destroy iron; only the rust within can destroy it. We can take the horse to the water but we cannot make it drink. In our Christian Faith, a time is provided to feel the need to disengage from faith and life-destroying factors and that time is Lent. May this season help us to engage with life and faith-nurturing factors and give us the discernment to disengage from factors that destroy life and faith. AMEN.

Rev. Hemalatha John

March 16, 2019
Saturday

Sin as Deviation

1 Samuel 19:1-10

God of peace and love, your word is a lamp in our life and a light to focus our living. Grant us the mind of Jesus Christ to focus on our commitment and hold on to the promise which we are called to fulfill. Help us to be mindful of our thoughts, words and action. In the name of the triune God. Amen

To depart from an established and accepted standard is a deviation. When people drive on the road, they must follow standard rules and regulations which all should abide by. These standards are first taught while the person is given training in the driving school. When the driver deviates from the standard accepted rule accidents are inevitable and both the driver and the victim are injured; there are possibilities of them, dying also. Thus an accepted rule protects life and deviation can lead to lose life.

A leader is chosen to safeguard the people who have been chosen/ appointed/ elected/ anointed for specific purposes. The people of Israel asked God to provide them a king like the other nations. God heard their prayer and chose Saul to the first king of Israel. God gave King Saul a list of rules and regulations to follow. These were not optional, but mandatory to follow and practice. King Saul was responsible for protecting his nation and people. Saul knew how to protect even when he did not go to the battle; for example, the battle between David and Goliath. As promised, King Saul had to keep his promise to David for winning the battle. But King Saul deviated from his word and broke the promise. David was gaining popularity and King Saul could not tolerate it. And the spirit of deviation took him to the extent of attempting to kill David.

Jonathan delighted in the friendship of David and saved the latter's life by disclosing the plan of his father. He went to the extent of pleading with his father to not harm David. King Saul obliged and promised his son that he will not harm or kill David. Saul, again

deviated from his word. King Saul lost his humane quality when he was unable to rejoice in the victory of David.

Deviating from human standards and his responsibilities, King Saul lost his crown and life. Winning and losing are part of the life cycle. An ECG shows that the lifeline moves up and down; an indication that we are alive. Christ Jesus, in his suffering and death, never deviated to insult and hurt the other; instead asked forgiveness and united relationships. How are we accepting our failures and others' success? Do we get deviated by the spirit of jealously to harm and insult or do we rejoice in their happiness?

Many victims of acid attacks have a common story to narrate. When a girl rejects a boy's proposal of love, the latter expresses his anger by attempting to destroy the former by pouring acid on her. We are called to pour humanity and share love. Love protects and rejoices with one another. May the Lenten season lead us to reflect upon the cross and remember the Jesus who never deviated but abided by accepted human standards. AMEN

Rev. Hemalatha John

March 17, 2019

Releasing from the Burden of Sin

Sunday

2 Samuel 12:1-4 Acts 8:9-25

Mark 2:1-12

God draw us closer to you and help us to walk in your ways of love, peace and Justice. Lead us together as communities of faith to share your grace, a gift from you. May we together celebrate the joy of being your witnesses in this world. We pray in the name of the one who has come to save us, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Introduction

The word, "Sin," is probably discussed more during the season of Lent, since it is mostly loaded with the baggage of a 'feel good,' or 'feel bad,' factor. In many Christian traditions, the notion of "sin," has reduced to the personal or the private. We tend to either glorify or demonize an individual because we tend to think of sin as the failure of a single individual's free will choices or an indicator of moral weakness. Sin is not merely a violation of a moral code or a deviant social behaviour as we popularly assume, but sin is primarily, the disruption of our relationship with God. As the psalmist writes, "Against you, you alone, have I sinned" (Psalm 51: 4). The disruption of our relationship appears in different forms, which disrupts our collective faith and practice as a community. All the three passages begin with the different forms of sin. The focus however will be on **Acts 8:9-25,** probably one of the least discussed passages and located in the margins, in Samaria, which is highlighted prominently in Luke-Acts. It is also interesting because the discussion here is about Philip the Evangelist (not Philip one of the twelve apostles) who was one of the seven commissioned (Acts 6:1-6). In all Philip the Evangelist makes three appearances in the biblical narrative, all in the book of Acts. In Jerusalem, opposition to the church came in the form of the deceit of Ananias and Sapphira (5:11), the imprisonment of the apostles (4:3; 5:18), the death of Stephen (7:60), and the great persecution (8:1b).

In **Acts 8:9-25,** the story revolves around Simon, who has 'previously practiced magic' (Acts 8:9). The arrival of Philip and the Apostles and their encounter with Simon can help us to understand the broader

meaning of sin and our own experience of faith. We can understand the passage with three ideas and intersect them with the other two from the Old Testament and Gospel. The three ideas can help us to understand the idea of sin in a broader sense and help us to structure the passage.

Encountering Faith (vv. 8-13)

Faith is a response to God's call, to accept our freedom as a gift and live in freedom. Sin is the expression of the desire to dominate and subjugate the other, and to overlook the work of God. We do not realize that we are tossed around not because of the lack of faith but because of lack of convictions to exercise the faith. The people of Samaria listened eagerly to Simon, because he had 'amazed them with his magic' (8:11). But listening alone is not faith. They believed Philip not because of who he is, but because he was 'proclaiming the good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ' (8:12). Faith helps us to discern, which makes all the difference in understanding the reality of sin. The reality of sin can be better understood in the light of the good news, and not by a comparative understanding of sin. In the OT story, the good news is proclaimed by Nathan and in the gospel text, it is the four of them, because Jesus saw 'their' faith (Mark 2:5). Interestingly, Simon himself believed (8:13). We all encounter faith for different reasons, but the intention of our faith makes all the difference.

Experiencing Forgiveness (vv. 14-17)

The Apostles at Jerusalem intervene in an initiative taken by Philip - a risk by going to Samaria. They prayed that the Samaritans 'might receive the Holy Spirit' (v.15). The gift of the Holy Spirit is not another casual experience, but reminds us that affirming differences and excluding people in the name of identities, status or birth, increases the burden of sin. Being passive and insensitive to the grace of God is an expression of sin. Experiencing the work of the Holy Spirit is not a pre-condition for the experience of forgiveness, but is a continuing act of God, demonstrated at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4). Jesus' words to the paralytic are path breaking, 'Son, your sins are forgiven' (Mark 2:5). In the same sense, Nathan's words to David, “Now the Lord has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2 Samuel 12:13).

Experiencing forgiveness is not an end, but a new beginning to overcome sin, to overcome barriers in our relationship with God.

Exercising Freedom (vv.18-25)

The Biblical witness illustrates that we are created in the image of God, not as solitary beings, but as social beings (Genesis 1:27). In Genesis 3:1-24, the account is taken as a narrative of "original sin," although the word "sin" never occurs in it. The narrative instead is a story of human freedom in relation to the created order and to each other. It demonstrates that obedience to God is not blind submission to the ways of God, but trusting more and more in the will of God. Simon is an archetype of human greed, the willingness to trust in the power that the world offers and an attitude of self-deception that is nothing but an obsession of the self. Simon equated the power of God with the power of money, and was not willing to exercise freedom with responsibility. His words are a reminder of the danger of idolatry of money, power and greed, "Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit" (8:19). Sin is the inability to put our trust in the power and grace of God, to exercise the freedom that is there in us and among us. For the paralytic, his sins being forgiven meant trust in the words of Jesus, "Stand up and take your mat and walk" (Mark 2:9). Walking in freedom is an act of liberation from power of evil, societal norms that are dehumanizing and political structures that are oppressive. When David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13), it is not an act of submission of guilt, but an act of freedom, a new beginning. Overcoming sin is the ability to exercise the freedom that we all have in the grace and power of God.

Conclusion

It is uncomfortable to talk about sin, but we need to do it with a new understanding that goes beyond the personal and private. The paradox of our times is the obsession with the self and our inability to see the collective good, in the midst of plenty. The story of Simon and Samaria is in many ways our own stories, as individuals, families, churches and societies. At a time when exclusion is becoming a compulsion, the embrace of God's love is the need of the hour and it is urgent.

Rev. Dr. Dexter S. Maben

Sin as Discord

1 Corinthians 3:1-9

When chords are joined together, it makes an exhilarating accompaniment to the melody; if it is not joined together in harmony then it is a discord to the listeners. In the same way sin acts as the voice of discord between God, humanity and creation. This has to be overcome by the spirit of God, which frees us from sin.

The Apostle Paul, in his first epistle to the Corinthian church, asserts that all are servants and stewards of the mysteries of God. As a Christian community in Corinth, they were distorted and the impression about them was fading because of their shortcomings. Let us meditate through St. Paul, who calls us to be the chords that cannot be broken.

1. **Living by the spirit is to be mature:** In verses 1-3, living by the spirit of God is referred to be holy in nature and not live as worldly because the world is filled with jealousy, quarreling and hatred. As Jesus, the son of God, increased in maturity (Luke 2:52), Christians are also called to grow mentally, physically and spiritually. That is why St. Paul recommends milk and not solid food because milk contains essential vitamins for life which results in overall growth. Hence, in today's context as the human body of Christ is filled with sinful nature, we are called to be mature Christians and the mature body of Christ and not to be infants without growth.
2. **Living by the spirit of God is to be servants of the servant God:** St. Paul calls us to remember that we are all called to work in the vineyard of God. As there was division in the early church in terms of following Paul, Cephas, Apollo or Christ (Verse 5), Paul tells the Corinthian church that Paul, Cephas or Apollos are only servants, through whom they came to believe. Although God has assigned work like planting the seed, watering to Paul and Apollos, it is God who makes things to grow. He calls us to nurture and witness in the world in order to be servants of the servant God, because God is also working for us in order to be

away from the contact of sinful divisions.

3. **Living by the spirit of God to receive the reward for their labor:** according to Ps 128:1, it is God who blesses the fruit of the labor of our hands. Hence we are called to live in word and deed for the Glory of God. In Acts 18:3 St. Paul, who was self sufficient and worked in Corinth as a tent maker in order to support God's ministry, calls us to work hard in order to receive the reward from God. For we are all God's fellow-workers and called as God's field, God's building, where all are equal and no one is high or low; all are called to work without seeing any differences.

Rev. Robinson

Sin as Distortion

March 19, 2019
Tuesday

Acts 5:1-11

God our parent, we thank you for creating us in your image and likeness. We knowingly or unknowingly fall short of your glory by discriminating against our fellow human beings. Forgive our wrong doings which lead us to sin and distort your image. Help us to restore your image in us and rebuild ourselves for the glory of your reign. Amen

We sometimes try to have fun at the cost of others, by giving wrong directions to people who ask address and, thereby, mislead their journey. This is childish behavior. St Paul warns us that when we were children, norms of kids are fine; but grownups need to act and be mature. Many of us are stuck between childhood and adulthood and never get mature, still continue to mislead others. Distortion means misleading.

Our accountability is our integrity. A person filled with integrity accomplishes holiness of God Almighty. And this holiness reminds us the first commandment of God, ' I am holy, so you also be holy.' We see God connects and demands a personal holiness in relation. Thus God communicates the personal holiness in and through our mediator and high priest, Jesus Christ.

The story of Ananias and his wife Sapphira is a remarkable story of accountability. The couple sold their possessions and kept a portion of it for themselves and the laid the remaining at the feet of Peter. When Peter told Ananias that he had held from God and lied to God, he immediately fell down and collapsed. Not knowing about this incident, his wife came and she also repeated the same disobedience. Their combined act of disobedience let them to be unaccountable and, thus, they lost the flavour of God and became unholy.

A small fire can lead to a forest fire, which may destroy the entire forest. The lack of accountability in the lives of Ananias and Sapphira cost them their lives.

Disregarding God's instruction led to their downfall. We are called to regard the command of God and follow them with all our heart, mind and soul. Recite the commandments day and night, writing it on the wrist and on the door post. A constant reminder at the time of temptation is necessary; as the hymn is sung, 'yield not to temptation for yielding is sin...' May the Lenten meditations help us not to yield into temptation and sin before God and human.

Accountability is being sensible to the will of God and obeying the voice of God. When we trust God, we render our best by obeying God's commandments. As the Sunday school chorus echoes, 'obedience is the very best way to show that you believe.' God's instruction is constructive in nature when we trust and obey. Amen

Rev. Ebi Devasirvadam

March 20, 2019
Tuesday

Sin as Discrimination

John 12:1-8

We live in a world where people are discriminated against on the basis of their outward appearances, the content of their character, economic status, gender etc. The wealthy, the educated, the famous are favoured over the poor, the uneducated and the unknown. Therefore, someone is worthy, and someone is not worthy of our love and respect. So we treat people differently as they look different from us. This means we show favoritism or partiality.

We tend to forget that everyone is made in the image of God and by showing favoritism to one and discriminating the other we are offending our creator. The scripture says that God shows no partiality (Romans 2:11). If we show partiality or discriminate anyone it distorts the image of God. And anything which distorts the image of God is a sin.

In John chapter 12:1-8 we come across Judas Iscariot who condemns and discriminates Mary on the basis of her gender and her action.

Discrimination on the basis of Gender

A woman's place was thought to be in the home. Men were not to greet women in public. And it is taboo for a man to be touched by a woman. When such is the case Judas Iscariot could not accept Mary wiping the feet of the Lord with her hair. Mary's action was uncomfortable to Judas Iscariot and the other apostles present there. Mary does it out of her devotion. Judas Iscariot wanted to block the good deeds of a woman. In contrast we find Jesus Christ who welcomes the good deed of Mary. In John 12:7 we find Jesus saying, “Leave her alone. She brought it’ so that she might keep it for the day of my burial. Mary’s love, affection and reverence was found worthy in the sight of Jesus Christ. Mary too rightly saw that Jesus Christ is worthy of all that we can give him and even more. People may discriminate against us on the basis of gender. They may fail to recognize their acts as sins; but we should be mindful of

our true devotion to God which will draw us near to him and be made worthy of our deeds.

Discrimination on the basis of Action

Judas Iscariot was a self-centred person. He was focused on the evil plans of the chief priests and was worldly-concerned. It is natural for the treasurer to be concerned with the expenditures and objection from him is no surprise. Judas Iscariot is not actually concerned in giving the amount that may be received from the sale of perfume to the poor. In John 12:5, we read "why was this perfume not sold for three hundred denarii." This means he valued money more than he valued the poor people. So, Judas Iscariot condemns her action and her mind of devotion. His idea was to make money out of that perfume. In John 12:6 we read that he did this not because he cared about the poor; but because he was a thief, who used to steal from what was put into the common purse. Mary loved Jesus Christ, but Judas Iscariot loved money. People may discriminate against us on the basis of our actions but what matters is our selfless devotion which will make us worthy.

People look at our Outward Action but God looks at our Inward Devotion

Man and woman are created in the image of God [Genesis 1:27]. Like man, woman has self-determination, personal freedom and responsibility for her actions. Discrimination against anyone should not be made on any grounds. God values the services of all people. As Paul says in Galatians 3:28, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus."

Arch Bishop Desmond Tutu- ''God's dream is that you and I and all of us will realize that we are family, that we are made for togetherness, for goodness and for compassion''

Rev. Usha Rani

Sin as Denial

Genesis 4:6-9

God of compassion and love, we pray for the sins that we have committed and our unwillingness to admit them. Give us a contrite heart and a willing spirit to return to you. Amen

Then the Lord said to Cain, "where is your brother Abel?" He said, I do not know; am I my brother's keeper?"

Introduction

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, denial means a statement that is not true or rather saying a false statement and refusing all the charges against the self.

In the primitive story of Cain and Abel, which we heard from our childhood, Sunday school teachers have taught about the offerings brought by the two brothers - Cain and Abel. God accepts the offering of Abel and rejects the offering of Cain. This led to anger, vengeance, and jealousy; it resulted in the revengeful act of Cain's killing of his brother Abel.

1. ***Individual Denial:*** Denial can be a course of action for which he or she is not willing to accept his/her mistakes or wrong doings. In spite of God asking Cain about his brother Abel, whom he had killed, he said I do not know him. God had received the same sort of reply from his parents, Adam and Eve, when God asked them, 'have you eaten from the tree which I have commanded not to eat?' They denied it and blamed each other, not willing to accept their wrong doings and not feeling guilt. In the words of theologian Samuel Rayan, 'the disintegration of this relationship of love and brotherhood/sisterhood is sin. Sin has a breach of friendship with God and a person is a social and historical reality brought about by people's attitude and actions, by their decisions, omission and cruel deeds."
2. ***Corporate Denial:*** Many scholars and theologians had interpreted the story of Cain and Abel as a story of not only two individuals

But two communities or classes of human societies. *Saint Augustine* interprets it as the tale of two cities, Cain belongs to the "*City of Men"*, which is evil by nature and in other words he is a carnal man. Abel belongs to the "*City of God," w*here he is considered to be a spiritual man. *Prof. Dr. Russell Chandran* interprets it as a story of two communities, where Cain hails from an agricultural community and Abel hails from a nomadic, shepherd community. Cain's murder can be considered as the outcome of a competition for earthly possession between farmers and shepherds, settlers and nomads, multinationals ans nationals, foreigners and natives. According to *Julian Andres Gonzalez Holguin* "it is a Fratricidal Struggle." Cain's anger is the unintentional consequence of God's unexplained rejection of his sacrifice and, thus, God becomes complicit in Cain's act of fratricide. In a brother murdering his own brother, one community trying to destroy the other, one race killing the other race, and one nation destroying another, the person or the community does not feel guilty on one side and tries to legitimise the act on the other side.

Conclusion

The Roman Catholic theologian, *R.E. Browne*, states that Abel's blood that spilled on the ground cried for revenge whereas the blood of Jesus cries for forgiveness. The act of denial can distance us from God's presence and promise. This denial can be individual or corporate, when we refuse to accept our wrongdoings, mistakes and crimes. The season of lent gives a chance to repent from our sins and wrong doings and return to God as individuals and communities.

Rev. Robin Marshall. I

Redemption: Dialogue

John 1:1-14

Our creator God, you created everything out of nothing. We come before you acknowledging your gift of life. We thank you for the redemption that you gave us on the cross which redeems us from different forms of sin that we have bound to. We pray that you would give us the mind to realize your presence in our lives so that your word may reach us and our belief may reach you. Enable us to live our life in a continuous relation with you so that we would respond to your saving grace in our lives. Through Jesus Christ our Redeemer who became human for our sake, we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Dialogue is defined as an exchange of communication between two individuals. Dialogue is the opposite of monologue. Monologue is a communication from one person to another person/group. Dialogue on the other hand is a constant and continuous exchange of communication from one person/group to another person/group. Dialogue is an exchange of ideas/words, whereas, monologue is a one way transfer of ideas/words. Dialogue can lead to conflict if it is not constructive. Constructive Dialogue is characterized by the following:

- it is a mutual need for an exchange of ideas
- it is a mutual respect for each others' ideas
- it is a mutual co-operation in developing each others' ideas

Constructive Dialogue leads to Redemption but, dialogue which leads to conflict creates chaos. Dialogue seeks to remove conflict through the process of reconciliation and truth. Therefore reconciliation and truth are the most important requirements for dialogue to take place. Dialogue which is not based on truth and reconciliation will not be constructive.

Redemption is the cessation of conflict and the beginning of co-operation. Redemption is not escapism from situations of conflict but it is the resolving of the causes of conflict. Dialogue is a catalyst to redemption because it opens the communication for further co-operation. This is the model of the OT wherein God created everything out of chaos (Gen. Ch 1&2). This model becomes the basis of redemption though the OT and is culminated in Jesus Christ. Redemption for humanity in Christ is understood as the constructive and continuous dialogue between God and humanity. Humanity, therefore, continues to find redemption in Christ through its response to Christ.

Content outline: John 1:1-14/ Johannine Theology in John Ch 1.

The thought, presented in the gospel according to John Ch 1, is a narration of the redemption of humanity because of the initiation of the dialogue of God. This redemption contains the following features:

- it is a presentation of the religio-socio-political context of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Gospel is beyond any particular religio-social-political context.
- In vs. 4, John introduces the larger context of the Gospel. The 'light' was for all people. It was not for a single/sectarian community. The Gospel is beyond all sectarian principles, yet it was relevant to individual communities.
- Vs. 9 is an introduction into the purpose of the 'light', i.e. for enlightenment for all people
- Vs. 10 presents that the redeemer was in the world through 'incarnation.' The incarnation was the initiation of dialogue of God with humanity. God choosing to become flesh is the greatest step of God towards reconciling humanity. Incarnation is the tool of God to communicate to humanity the universal truth and redemption.
- Vs.11 is the break in the dialogue on the part of humanity. Humanity did not accept him by rejecting or refusing to recognize the divinity in the incarnation.

- Vs. 13-14 is the privilege of those who choose to believe. Belief is the means to understand the divinity in humanity and the humanity in divinity. Belief is the human response to divine communication. By way of belief we become children of God. This is the continuous process of redemption, wherein, the cycle of belief and redemption is broken through unbelief. The cycle of communication with God is not broken because of God, but it is broken by human unbelief.

Conclusion

Dialogue is a way of redemption used by God. From the creation narrative, we find that God used the 'dialogue model' and not the monologue model. Even in political terms, democracy is seen as a dialogue and dictatorship is seen as a monologue. In social terms, dialogue is seen as the coming together of communities and monologue is seen as a separatist ideology. In religious terms, dialogue is seen as the relationship with God that continues in everyday life.

Christian life is a monologue if faith is limited only to our own needs. In order for our faith to be a dialogue, it must be beyond our self and our own needs. Redemption is not limited to any single community/group, redemption is for all people/communities, so that they can come together in common belief/faith. This is the expression of the 'Ekklesia' which is a coming together of people from different religio-socio-political contexts in one faith.

Rev. Navin K. John

Dialogue as Engagement

March 23, 2019 Saturday

Genesis 1:28-31 & 2:1-3

Creator God, we thank you for your wonderful purpose of creating us. In this time of lent, help us to be channels of transformation towards restoring of relationships and engage in a process of unity and solidarity for all. Amen.

Lent is a season of reformation, transformation and ongoing formation. It is not only a time to focus on our spiritual journey with penitence, fasting and almsgiving but also a time to desire for a restored and reconciling relationship with God and others. God's spectacular design of creation is the redemption of humanity from human loneliness and restoring to human relationship. Love of God and love of neighbour is intertwined in God's creation. This fulfilment of God's purpose comes into effect when we participate in a dialogical engagement.

Renewed Engagement:

When God created humanity, God said that it was not God for man to be alone. In a sense, we find that Adam was not alone; the paradise home was filled with birds, trees and animals. Yet God's intention of the other human was deliberate because "the human need of the other human alone brings completion to creation." It is to mean that none of us could ever be human in isolation or in stark solitude. We need another human being to help us to become human in turn, by learning from each other through dialogical engagement. Ironically, in the present world, humanity suffers relationship disorders; we often find ourselves in dialogue with technologies rather than in dialogue with people around us. This has, in fact, driven us into the pool of isolation, loneliness and selfdom. But God's wonderful purpose for humanity was "togetherness." This togetherness brings joy, wholeness and solidarity. While we dialogue with the other, it enables us to engage in a process of learning and unlearning, creating a space for all and an opportunity for renewed relationships.

Reconciled Engagement:

The present day relationships are divided on the basis of caste, class, creed, gender etc. In a recent militant attack in Srinagar, it was sad to note that one of the CRPF Jawan martyr's burial was delayed in his village by the so called upper caste because he belonged to the lower caste community. Such divisions in the society bring abuse to God's creation. We are all created to be inter-dependent on each other; we are not and cannot be self sufficient; because all of us do not carry same talents and attributes. Each of us lacks something or the other. Therefore God has created us in a way that we need to rely on each other, being dependent on each other, extending our care and concern. As Desmond Tutu quotes "We are beautifully made with in-built insufficiency so that we can know the desperate need for each other."

As people of God, created in God's own image, let us also cherish the purpose and intention of God's wonderful creation, who invites us to engage in a relationship that integrates and compliments each other.

May this time of Lent lead us to serious transformation in acknowledging God's purpose of creation, inspiring us to engage in renewed and reconciled relationships.

Rev. Beena Priyadarshini

Acknowledging Faith beyond Boundaries

March 24, 2019
Sunday

Isaiah 44:28-45:8 Acts 10:24-33
Psalm 125 Matt 15:21-28

Dear Lord you are a respecter and lover of all people. You have concern for those who are not in your fold and you want to bring them also. You said that they too will listen to your voice and there shall be one flock and one shepherd. You are always mindful of all people who come to you for help. During your earthly ministry you acknowledged the faith of people beyond boundaries and used them as examples to teach us many truths. Thank you lord for being our example and enable us to follow in your footsteps. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen

Introduction:

Faith is an act before the outcome. Faith plays a vital role in the redemptive act of God. Without faith, redemption is impossible. Through faith in God, redemption is experienced. The scriptures reveal various examples of God choosing pagans for his redemptive work. God had faith in a pagan king, called Cyrus. Cornelius had faith in God before even knowing the God he believed and the Canaanite woman had unshakeable faith in Jesus and all three acted upon their faith and saw results.

Cyrus the Pagan King - Isaiah 44:28-45:8

God saw faith beyond man-made boundaries.

1. God used Cyrus a **pagan king** as his instrument. He was called as Cyrus the great of Persia. A monarch under the Babylonian captivity. (he was labelled as "the lord's **anointed**" in Deutro-Isaiah. Because he conquered Babylon, it was possible for Jews to return to Jerusalem. About 50,000 persons, including 4,000 priests and 7,000 slaves returned under Sheshbazzar, a prince of Judah).
2. God **acknowledged** him, chose him, called him by name and anointed him as a shepherd to take care of his people.
3. God **accomplished** all the tasks that pleased him in rebuilding the temple through him and the lord God was with him.

King Cyrus 'response to God's call:

1. He actively assisted the Jews to **rebuild** the temple. A patron of deliverer of the Jews and he created a national existence for the Jews.
2. He **restored** the temple treasures to Jerusalem and allowed the building expenses be paid from the royal treasury.
3. His leadership initiative helped to **restart** the temple worship practices that had languished during 70 years of Jews' captivity. The temple became the centre of worship and this was completed in 515 BCE under the administration of Zerubbabel and became the place of uninterrupted sacrificial worship for the next 350 years.
4. Cyrus was known for his advancement of human rights. His brilliant military strategy and his bridging of eastern and western cultures.
5. He was a king of tremendous influence and a person, God used to help fulfil an important Old Testament prophecy - to be a "shepherd" for his people.

Cornelius, a pagan - the Roman Centurion - Acts 10: 24-33

God found faith in people beyond boundaries during the early church. God commended the faith of a pagan roman officer (a centurion and a gentile). He represented Rome, but his home was in Caesarea. He had a reputation as a godly man who put his faith into action and he was respected by the Jews.

There are four significant aspects of his character, which is noted in Acts:

1. He, actively, sought God
2. He revered God
3. He was generous in meeting other people's needs
4. He prayed to God and God told him to send for Peter, because Peter would give him more knowledge about the God he was already seeking to please.

God reaches those who want to know him; gospel is for all people.

Canaanite, Gentile, Pagan Woman - Matt 15:21-28

The gospel writer Mark in 7:26 mentions that this woman was born in Syrian Phoenicia; she was from the territory northwest of Galilee,

where the cities of Tyre and Sidon were located. Jesus began to withdraw far up the coast to the region of Tyre and Sidon because he wanted to get away from difficult events in Israel.

Jesus reveals the attitude of the Jews towards pagans because they considered the pagans as dogs. This term was commonly applied to gentiles because the Jews considered them not more likely than dogs to receive god's blessings.

While many Jews were losing God's blessing and salvation because they rejected Jesus, many gentiles found salvation because they recognized and accepted him.

The significant faith of the Canaanite woman:

1. She recognised and accepted Jesus as the messiah.
2. She was convinced that Jesus is the only resource from whom her request will be answered.
3. She was consistent and persistent in her faith to receive the blessing for her daughter. At that moment her faith must have been gratifying to Jesus and thus granted her request.
4. She was rewarded for her unshakable faith and became an early gentile to enter his kingdom.

Conclusion

Jesus was mindful of everyone because he came to seek and save all people. It is very clear that God showed mercy to those who demonstrated their faith and fulfilled their needs. The faith of the pagans is always very simple, powerful, sincere and passionate than the others because they ultimately feared God and God's people and treated them with high reverence, respect and genuine devotion.

The Jews were unwilling to accept Jesus as messiah because they were looking for a different image of their messiah who will come to be a powerful king to deliver them from their emperors who ruled over them. Thus Jesus honoured their faith and acknowledged faith beyond boundaries.

Rev. Salome Joshua

Dialogue as Enlightenment

March 25, 2019 Monday

John 9: 24 - 34

Our Parent God, light of the world, we thank you for your word through which you speak to us. We also thank you for your wisdom that enlightens us. You have strived to reform the world through your teaching and deeds. We pray that you continue to enlighten us through your word. Amen.

Introduction

A young martial arts student was under the training of a famous master. One day, the master was watching a practice session in the courtyard. He realized that the presence of the other students was interfering with the young man's attempts to perfect his technique. The master could sense the young man's frustration. He went up to the young man and tapped him on his shoulder and inquired, “What's the problem?” “I don't know,” said the youth, with a strained expression. “No matter how much I try, I am unable to execute the moves properly.” The master replied "Before you can master technique, you must understand harmony. Come with me, I will explain.” The teacher and student left the building and walked some distance into the woods until they came upon a stream. The master stood silently on the bank for several moments. Then he spoke. “Look at the stream,” he said. “There are rocks in its way. Does it slam into them out of frustration? It simply flows over and around them and moves on! Be like the water and you will know what harmony is. The young man took the master's advice to heart. Soon, he was barely noticing the other students around him. Nothing could come in his way of executing the most perfect moves. Dialogue with the teacher enlightened the student to overcome his problem.

In John Ch 9 (vs. 1-5) we come across a dialogue between Jesus and his disciples regarding sin and a man being born blind Jesus enlightens them that all people are created for the glory of God without regard to any disability they may have. This man was born blind that God would be glorified through him.

In vs. 8-12 the neighbours converse with the blind man who had received sight. From vs. 13 onwards the man is questioned by the

Pharisees, followed by his parents and then the man again. The then Jewish society considered a person being born blind as sinner, but here the so called 'blind man' is the 'enlightened one' in this dialogue.

Enlightened to Enlighten (vs. 13 - 17)

As Jesus had healed the blind man on a Sabbath there was a division among the Pharisees as there were two basic assumptions in conflict. The first group reasoned that anyone who broke the Sabbath, or more accurately, their Sabbath rules, could not be a godly person. Therefore, Jesus could not be from God. The second group reasoned that anyone that could do such a miracle could not be a sinner. As there was hesitation in their belief, their statement is phrased as a question, instead of a declaration. The enlightened man testifies that Jesus is a prophet, who gives sight to the blind and liberates. He is sent to enlighten.

Enlightened to Challenge (vs. 24- 25)

In vs. 24- 25, the enlightened man is not afraid of the Pharisees as were his parents through his dialogue with them he emphasis the fact that Jesus gave sight to him. Here the man challenges the religious belief and practices, mentioned in Mosaic Law. He also asks the Pharisees if they also wanted to be the disciples of Jesus. In verse 31 he speaks for Jesus stating that God hears only the God-fearing who do his will and that he does not listen to sinners. Jesus was heard by God in order to perform a miracle of a nature that had never been performed before. He insisted that Jesus must be from God or he could not do such a miracle.

Enlightened to testify (vs. 35- 39)

The third dialogue in this pericope is between Jesus and the enlightened man. In response to Jesus' question on the 'Son of man,' he testifies to his faith by affirming "I do believe, Lord." We, being the followers of Light, are called to be enlightened to enlighten, challenge and testify.

Rev. Rajesh Kumar. J

Dialogue as Empowerment

March 26, 2019 Tuesday

Luke 13: 10-17

God of empowerment, we thank you for encouraging us through your living words from the scripture, which enriches us when we are in despair. We also thank you for enabling us to meditate on your living word in this Holy Lent to transform our words, deeds, actions and lives to glorify your name through our lives. Amen

Introduction

Luke 13: 10-17 is a story of controversial dialogues between Jesus and the synagogue leader. At its core is a healing that demonstrates Jesus' power and his compassion towards the crippled woman. Let us reflect upon the text to understand how Jesus initiates dialogues with the crippled woman to empower her and the synagogue leader to disempower him and his religious laws.

Jesus the Great Dialoguer

Jesus had to face strong enmity throughout his ministry due to his bold and courageous dialogues with the Pharisees, Sadducees and Synagogue leaders. In the midst of all those challenges, Jesus empowered a woman who was accused of adultery, by stating to the religious leaders who were accusing her, “But let the one who has never sinned throw the first stone” (John 8 : 7). In Mark 3: 3-4, Jesus went into the synagogue again and noticed a man with a deformed hand. Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. If he healed the man's hand, they planned to accuse him of working on the Sabbath. But Jesus argued with the religious leaders by asking, “Is this a day to save life or to destroy it?” But they wouldn't answer him.

Jesus' Dialogue with the Crippled Woman

The Gospel writer Luke clearly mentions that the crippled woman came to synagogue to worship God in the midst of her struggle. Although she was crippled for eighteen years, she remained faithful

to worship God. Among the worshippers in the synagogue, Jesus identified only the crippled woman and called her forward to heal her.

Jesus dialogued with her before he could heal her by stating the faith-affirming and empowering words, “woman you are set free from your infirmity.” This shows that, dialoguing with a sick person is the initial step to empower and instill hope in that woman's life to strengthen her to prepare for the healing. Although we do not hear about the woman who has been healed at the end of the passage speaking with Jesus, yet we can imagine that she was overwhelmed with gratitude to thank him for the miraculous healing from her disease.

Jesus' Dialogue with the Synagogue Leader

A synagogue leader in Luke 13:14 tries to argue with Jesus indirectly by pointing out that the healing was a work that could be done on any of the six days set aside for labor, instead of the Holy Sabbath. Jesus' dialogue with the synagogue leader is reciprocal which led to teach the leader that how hypocritical he was in his thinking. The worth of a human has been minimized with the so called traditional religious laws. Jesus said to the crowd by pointing out that any of them would take care of an animal needing help on the Sabbath, so how much more should they respond to a human being in need.

In Mark 2: 27, Jesus clearly states that the Sabbath was made for man, and not man for the Sabbath. He also made the believers to understand that “the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath” (Matthew 12:8). Jesus' opponents were furious while people in the synagogue rejoiced to witness the healing. With Jesus' powerful teachings, conversations and dialogues he had confronted many of his opponents and brought great transformation in the lives of the vulnerable communities.

Conclusion

The crippled woman was healed from her bondage of infirmity and was named as “the daughter of Abraham.” We all have burdens that weigh us down and bend us over. And just as Jesus did for this woman he has been doing for us. That is the reason he said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11: 28).

Being bent over and twisted can be physical, spiritual and psychological; many people live in the same pain and see nothing but the ground today. As we observe the Holy lent, let us remember and identify the vulnerable victims in our church and society, who have been discriminated for various reasons. Have a Blessed Holy Lent!

Rev. Asha

Dialogue as Experience

Matthew 16:13-20

Creator God, redeemer of the whole creation, we come to you as your people, confessing you as the Christ, confessing that this is not from our own thought and experience but as revealed to us by your spirit, and so we ask you to show us Christ, reveal Him to us through your spirit that we would honor and glorify Him in all that we do. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen

Introduction

Dialogue will always lead us to have a good experience. At the same time dialogue will be significant when the participants are well-experienced. In the given text, the dialogue between Peter (on behalf of all disciples) and Jesus was immense and unfeigned as they were together always and their experience with one another was substantial.

The dialogue in the given text leads them to proclaim one another's identity, to experience God's intervention and to motivate the disciples to be the partners in God's mission.

Proclamation

The disciple Peter was called, commissioned, set apart, taught and loved by Jesus Christ to the core of His life. The dialogue starts with Jesus' question (v13, 15) and Peter's answer on behalf of all disciples was clear and direct. In verses 16 and 18, the positive proclamation in their dialogues is mainly due to their intimate relationship. Proclamation reveals a deeper kind of experience with one another's character. We also notice Peter's confession came against the background of confusion and false teaching about Jesus. Looking at Peter's faith, Jesus reaffirms him as the rock because he understood the unique ideology of son-ship (11:27).

God's Intervention

In v17 Jesus appraised the work of the father in Peter. In spite of the leaven (teaching) of the religious leaders, confusion among the

people, Peter understood who Jesus was. So Jesus said that the truth was revealed to Peter by God. Such knowledge cannot originate from flesh and blood but it has to come from above (1Cor 15:50, Gal 1:16, Eph 6:12). Our qualification, position and experience are worthless without God's intervention. V.19 demonstrates that the church has God's power. There is no force, not even hell that can destroy what God has declared He will build.

Partnership in God's Mission

Jesus wants Peter to be clear about the goal towards which they are aiming. Vs. 17-19 is Jesus' teaching about His mission and powerful authority given to the apostles. Vs. 18 says the church will be built by Christ upon the strong faith of the apostles. Isaiah 22:22, Rev 9:1-6, 20:1-3 are about the 'key,' a symbol of authority or power, which is given not only to Peter but to all of us. This authority is to preach the truth of the gospel and proclaim that Jesus is the Son of the living God.

Conclusion

In the above text, the dialogue between disciples and Jesus was very consequential and purposeful. It developed the interpersonal relationship and led them to have a creative thought and concept of building church. Church means the universal group of all people who have trusted Christ through the ages (Matthew 16:8, Ephesians 5: 23-27). Peter's proclamation is not only because of his experience with the miracles or teaching of Jesus but also indicates God's intervention. Friends, in this Lenten season, we need to examine ourselves before the crucified God. Is our dialogue helping us to recognize the strength of our co-believers, to explore God's presence, and to build the relationship? Amen.

Rev Shailashree Suresh

Dialogue as Emancipation

March 28, 2019 Thursday

Matthew 9:1-8

Our Savior and redeemer Lord, we come before you acknowledging the new life that you have given to us through your death and resurrection. We come to you seeking redemption from those things that seek to hinder life. We pray that you will emancipate us from the bondages that we have willingly submitted ourselves to. Save us by giving us your mind so that we may overcome all hindrances and obstacles. Amen.

Introduction

Emancipation is a very important aspect of salvation. Emancipation in the context of dialogue is seen as God's response to the human condition. God's response is in the role of being the emancipator and human beings and creation as being the emancipated. Emancipation is completed only when the need for emancipation is acknowledged. However, it is often understood only in the context of sin and redemption from sin. Although redemption from sin is the core of the salvific act of God through history, the implication of this is found in many ways in life. In the many healing miracles of Jesus, we find that the concept of 'emancipation' is found in many areas:

- Emancipation from Social stigma
- Emancipation from Economic oppression
- Emancipation from Political suppression
- Emancipation from Religious oppression

Content

In Matthew 9:1-8, the healing of the paralytic is an instance, wherein Jesus is directly criticized for forgiving the sins of the paralytic. It is to be noted that the healing is completely overlooked by the scribes and they focus on the forgiveness of sins as a point of blasphemy. The scribes looked at the act of Jesus as blasphemous, because Jesus acted as 'God' in taking the authority to forgive sin. Hence, Jesus' question to

them was, ‘which is easier, to say, 'your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'stand up and walk?’

This question presents the divine authority through which Jesus healed people. The healings of Jesus was not a demonstration of his power and authority, but it was his message of emancipation.

This narrative presents the kind of needs that the paralytic needs to be emancipated from. The needs are:

- Need for emancipation from stigma in the society because of his illness/infirmity.
- Need for emancipation from the economic oppression because he was dependent on others for livelihood
- Need for emancipation from political oppression from being labeled as a sinner
- Need for emancipation from religious oppression as he had no place in the religious hierarchy.

Conclusion

The healing of the paralytic was an emancipation of the paralytic from the above mentioned areas of life. It is the total view of emancipation that gives meaning to the Gospel of Jesus Christ in our lives. Emancipation is not just the deliverance from the bondage of the sin of the heart; it is the sin that constitutes the socio-political-economic-religious oppression of a person.

Rev. Christy Rajkumar

March 29, 2019

Redemption: Discard

Friday

Galatians 3:23-29

God in Christ discarded the evil that hindered lives, God gives us the courage to discern your ways in this world and enable us to walk your way without fear. We thank you for the gift of apostle Paul' wisdom, inspire us not to be confounded by the orders of this world but engage in transforming the confounded life in this world, in Jesus' name who discarded unnecessary aspects those which restrained life. Amen.

Introduction

J Krishnamurti, one of the progressive and critical thinkers of our times opined that; "it is no measure of health to be well adjusted to a profoundly sick society", societies that we live are inherent of numerous contradictions, on one hand, we have age-old, but modernized mechanisms of slavery and on the other hand we are governed by principles of democracy. Democracy is a place where the caste bias neo-liberal capitalistic misogynist and sexist structures find their way to establish oppressive structures and on the other hand leftist, anti-caste, anti-capitalist, feminist and LGBTQ critique survive in par. Religious bigots, Spiritual fascists, liberationist and liberal's, all fish in the same waters. The complex web of life and our histories are chained and loaded with unnecessary practices that curtail and demean life. Our societies are not only profoundly sick, but they also live by and reflect incivility and are predominantly indifferent to the plight of dignity. Living-spaces are toxic in nature, in that way it cripples progressive and critical whereabouts. We are not here to adapt to the situations that curtail and cripple us, but to consciously discard aspects that demean the basic essences of life, the life of the poor and the vulnerable people and communities.

To discard is to do away with things that hinder the experience of redemption IN Christ and to throw away facets which limit our closeness to freedom and expressions of freedom, Paul intends to his congregation at Galatia. As followers of Christ, we believe in faith

that; Christ redeemed us (Gal 3:13) to God, and God redeemed us (John 3:16) through Christ. The experience that we have 'in Christ', 'with Christ' and 'to Christ' directly denies the validity of any sorts of slavery and inspires us to discard patterns of life like caste, class, color, chauvinism, and communalism that negate progressive and critical lifestyle.

Discard inhuman regulations

For Paul, life 'in Christ' or life 'in the spirit' means the exact same mode of transfigured Christian life committed to the justice of equality(The First Paul, Borg and Crossan, pg111), further it is also understood that these liberationist praxis are baptismal in nature, 1 Cor. 12:13. Paul in Galatia is a troubled person with the fiercest oppositions, directly head-on against him, Gal. 1:6-9, 3:1, 5:2, 10 and 12. The entire question is on the compulsive regulation of circumcision, Paul' emphatic outlawry propagated a new life in Christ which unconditionally discarded the requirements of the law that conditioned the new way. Paul' efforts are to be theologically understood as efforts that articulated genesis and exodus in a completely new horizon, the new genesis without polarity and the new exodus leading to eschatological premises where not only slavery ceases to exist but every notion that led to indifference crumbled like the walls of Jericho, opening up a new realm where the divine in all its existence enhanced life to newness coupled with fullness.

Discard inhumanity

Human territoriality and cultural rigidity defied the divine ontological inclination in humans. Community' self-centered political polytonality gave birth to severity in rituals and traditions. Neil Elliot, while opining about Paul' promotion of resisting communities, he understands Galatian non-Jewish converts as "gentile converts who would rather acquiesce in the religious roles dictated by their society than live out the challenge of the gospel",(liberating Paul, pg- 197), the ruthlessness of Jewish converts' adherence to their ritual purity subdued the power of the liberating Gospel of Christ, the non-Jewish converts were belittled and they were dehumanized to limits where they lost their freedom in Christ. The Jewish practice of circumcision

was assumed as a sign of resistance against dominant cultural patterns and ancient Empire worship, However these covenantal obligations changed in their history, resistive signs and symbols in transition contributed to exclusionary practices, Apostle Paul, warns the community to be aware of such possibilities hence, teaches the community to discard inhuman practices and inspires the community to approach life transition and celebrate life beyond limitations.

Conclusion

Paul called his community to a radically vulnerable collect. Paul' Ekklesial beginnings were fundamentally vulnerable in nature because they were referring to newer horizons of life IN CHRIST and WITH CHRIST, thereby apocalyptic and prophetic in conception. Friends let us be reminded of these facts while we intend to participate in an apocalyptic and prophetic movement, what we might simply call it as, THE CHURCH.

Rev. E. Immanuel Nehemiah.

March 30, 2019

Discard Caste

Saturday

Hebrews 13: 10-17

Dear Lord Jesus, you were born in the east, came to save the whole world and transcended all boundaries for the sake of our sins and thereby redeemed the world through your bloodshed for us on the cross. We are sanctified by your sacrifice. In Jesus name. Amen

Text: "Jesus suffered outside the city gate in order to sanctify the people by his own blood."

Introduction

The concept of Karma and Jati reflects in quite separate dimensions of Indian social, economic and ideological systems, the common practice of translating both terms as "CASTE"

The meaning of caste, in general, is to throe with various degrees of violence; usually with force. Even after converting and being baptized to Christianity caste prejudice remains in most cases. The Dalits as the Avarna were assumed as the fifth category to which the abuse was intense. Christians owe much to others who have taught and contributed to their lives. The laws influence conduct, but they could not change the heart. Lasting changes in conduct begins when the Holy Spirit begins to work in lives. The struggles of the Jewish Christians were being ridiculed and persecuted by Jews who didn't believe in Jesus as their Messiah. It may be necessary to leave the "camp" and suffer with Christ or to be outside the camp. Here outside the camp means, to be unclean. During the days of the exodus those who were ceremonially unclean had to stay outside the camp. Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. As followers of Christ we need to go forth into the world which is outside the camp, bearing abuse for the sake of his Gospel. Hence, the Christian commitment of faith is described in three ways.

Outside the camp means where the Cross is

Jerusalem was the sacred city and no crucifixion occurred there, therefore, the son of God was taken outside the walls of the city, to the rugged brow of Golgotha, a place that was unclean and violent. We as

his followers must go outside the holy city, outside the comfortable sanctuary and willing to walk the road of the cross because Christ died in such a place, those things that caused his death are still evident outside the main course of life, we are to fight those evils that kill many in this world.

Outside the camp means on the March

The camp refused Levities, because of the place of light in the dark wilderness; the land of promise lay beyond people but was achievable by faith & hope in God who saved them from the bondage of slavery and sin. In the book of Exodus, the camp was the only place of safety. The weak and the vulnerable, the women and the destitute, the stranger and the leper, the polluted and the unclean were kept outside the camp, like the Dalits and other marginalized communities are kept away from the mainstream of life in our country. We as Jesus' followers, should reach out to the people out there for Jesus' dwelling place is out there, a place where redemption was possible; outside the camp is to march towards the place where the neglected live.

Outside the camp means to believe unseen world

We must believe in the city of God, not the powers of this world that oppress the Dalits and other vulnerable communities in the name of caste. In the letter to Romans, Paul writes 'do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind', nothing is more destructive for the Christian faith than building an organization and imagining that this is an abiding city where god and caste and other related evils co-exist. By the sacrifice of Jesus Christ outside the camp, an alternative Kingdom (the rule of God) was built against the rulers of this world. The church realizes such efforts by god and propagates the kingdom where life is imagined outside the camp where God's sacrifice is witnessed.

Conclusion

Christ is always outside, beyond any established city, but warning us not to be confused to any worldly patterns and thereby he crossed over all the caste and regional differences and made a revolution and sanctified the people through his blood outside the city gate.

Rev. R. Daniel

Transforming the Oppressive Structures

March 31, 2019 Sunday

Nahum 1: 1- 15 Acts 4: 32 -37

Psalm 113 Luke 13: 10 - 37

God of Justice, enable us to be seekers and doers of justice. Empower us to be prophetic in prayer and praxis, embolden us towards breaking the yoke of oppressive structures, humbly we beseech thee. Amen.

Introduction:

There are structures in any given society. They are a distinctive stable arrangement of institutions whereby human beings in society are presumed to interact and live. Sometimes institutions in society are structured in a way that prevents members of a certain group from equitable treatment as a whole. In our context, the Caste system is a structure which denies equity of all due to its hierarchical stratification of society. Likewise, with Patriarchy, racism, religious extremism and so on... These kinds of structures have been oppressive denying equal opportunity, dignity, and respect for many within any society.

Amidst these life-negating realities, we as a church are constantly reminded to 'transform' the oppressive structures. Transformation is the change from a condition of human existence contrary to God's purpose to one in which people are able to enjoy the fullness of life in harmony with God. This transformation can only take place through the obedience of individuals and communities to the Gospel of Jesus Christ, whose power changes our lives by releasing us from the guilt, power, and consequences of sin, enabling us to respond with love toward God and toward others.

Nahum 1:1-15 call to speak truth bluntly

Nineveh was a city of vast extent and was also a centre of civilization and commerce of the world, But for prophet Nahum, it was a "bloody city all full of lies and robbery" (Nahum 3:1). Before Nahum, Jonah had announced its destruction earlier (Jonah 3:4), but the people

repented and the destruction was temporarily averted. Not long after that, however, Nineveh reverted to its extreme wickedness, cruelty, and pride. The brutality reached its peak under Ashurbanipal (669627), the last great ruler of the Assyrian empire. Chapter 3:1-4 gives an account of Nineveh's oppressive nature. It denotes how the Assyrian empire was built on wickedness and tyranny by persecuting the people of Judah. God listens to the cries of his people and promises them to break the yoke of oppression from their neck and tear their shackles away (1:13).

Today the call for us is to speak the truth bluntly and courageously to the oppressive structures as prophet Nahum did with the powerful Assyrian empire. If we believe that our calling is only to proclaim the Gospel and not get involved in political *Diakonia* and other actions, our very non-involvement lends unspoken support to the existing order. Hence there is no escape: either we challenge the evil structures of society or we support them.

Luke 13:10-17 call to re-humanize the de-humanized

Here is a woman who has been crippled and unable to stand up straight. The text says she was bound by a spirit. The very fact she was left unattended or uncared for eighteen long years points us to the failure of the collective moral responsibility in society. What might have happened those eighteen years that so crippled her life? Was she abused by a domineering husband who treated her as inferior and unworthy? Was she silenced by people in her community when she cried out for help? Was she forced to live a battered life in silence because she had no advocates crying out for justice? The woman in the passage is also a person with a physical disability due to her condition. She does represent the plight of many people with disabilities within our own congregations and community for whom accessibility in terms of structural, attitudinal and information communication and technology barriers are still to be addressed.

The passage also cautions us in not making our customs and traditions associated with religiosity a burden for others like the synagogue ruler who set rules for healing and became indignant because the healing took place on a Sabbath.

In this context, Jesus re-humanized the woman amidst the de-humanizing system. He prioritized the person over a structure which reduced her to a 'lesser' human. In our collective struggle to liberate people we, like Jesus ought to question and critique not just the regressive systems that perpetuate labeling and violence, but also the silence of many in not critically questioning it.

Acts 4:32-37 call for life-affirming systems for all

Today, our societies are caught up in individualism, hedonism, consumerism and materialistic market-driven economy. In an era of building stronger financial systems by the capitalist economy to perpetuate wealth in the hands of only a few, the witness in the early church as documented in Acts 4:32-37 challenges us with a new system which looked at the benefit of all making sure no one within the community goes hungry or remains needy. It emphasizes the communal ownership and mutual responsibility of the community members for each other.

It inspires us to come up with new systems of alleviating poverty and move beyond charity. It challenges us to reflect on our own attitudes to material goods: how we acquire them, how we use them, to what extent we share our material blessings with those in genuine need and not just out of our surplus are questions that cannot be avoided.

Conclusion: Transforming the oppressive structures calls us for sheer commitment towards justice and empowering *diakonia*. Our faith in its totality is not extrinsic to the afflictions of the oppressed, but it is rather a motivating force which demands that the oppressed must be liberated and set free. Even under conditions of the most severe repression, we the church, are called to transform the oppressive systems in society, through our lifestyle, selfless love, quiet joy, inner peace and patient suffering (1 Pet. 2:21-25). Amen.

Rev. Solomon Paul. J

Mark 10:16-31

Classless God, teach us, to be your disciples, who work towards a classless society. In a context where economic and other injustices prevail, enable us to be ambassadors of your love, your justice, and your peace, in Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

Jesus' life and context was a continuing age of exile, the successive rule of the foreign invaders until the Roman Empire affected the socio-political aspects of the local people. Biblical narratives embed the conflict of the superior and the inferior, and the context has never changed, till day. The Hierarchical way of life has been part of human existence from time immemorial, trade capitalized on the existence of disparity among human societies.

Jesus' miracles, teachings, healings, and life unravel God's political consciousness and God as the poor stranger emphatically is fused with the pathetic reality of human existence. Jesus' movement resonates the trade unions, civil rights movements, and Dalit movements in a religious and political context of the Roman hegemony, and the Jewish creamy layer' oppressive religious regulatory practices, Which affected the simple and the vulnerable.

The modern day Trade unions and other labor base movements were the outcome of persistent Class consciousness in society. Class consciousness is a human construct that jeopardizes human affairs, where the weak and the vulnerable are subjected to intense pain and agony. The Class is complex; the sense of class could be of various sorts like age, gender, wealth, occasion, geographical inclinations, caste, race, language, an accent in speech patterns, fashion and so on. Class as a social system thrives on the idea of inferiority and superiority, rich and the poor, male and female, normal and abnormal, heterosexual and homosexual, educated and uneducated, urban and village, etc… Class consciousness is unacceptable in biblical

standards, however Church has incorporated class consciousness as a normative, hence it is important to discard the idea of class for Church to resound Jesus as its head.

Markan subversion

Ideology either legitimates or subverts the dominant social order; Mark places Jesus as a measuring scale/ruler/yardstick for subversion, Mark' ideology is Jesus himself. For Mark, Jesus' location isn't the cradle as it is for Matthew or Luke nor the Word as John understands which caused all life, rather Mark, locates Jesus from Nazareth in Galilee, the most unexpected social location which is politically rebellious, religiously polluted, and existentially "othered". While describing radical discipleship, Ched Meyers, identities the young rich ruler as a NON-DISCIPLE. The Markan intention is unlikely to the soft-peddling of the idea on wealth; Mark ascertains commentary of the Decalogue in terms with its accountability to social-spirituality that affects the poor of the community. The communities of Jesus are those who can easily pass through the eye of the needle unlike the monstrous wealth freaks who uphold the values of slavery and substantiate it with religious textual and religious ritual practices, Mark eliminates the idea of mammon freaks joining the company of the motley crowd (*oklos*) and elevates the blind beggar Bartimaeus (Mark 10:52), as the sign of subversive discipleship, who joins Jesus' march towards Jerusalem, a city known for killing the prophets, unlike the rich young ruler and the disciples who were worried about their own positioning in Jesus' return (10:37) like the many Christians who are after Jesus for their own Selfish guilt trip today.

Jesus' Inversion

Jesus' reply to the young rich ruler defies the notion of religious apologetics of the time, a practice that was held high among the early church leaders in demeaning the "heretics". Jesus is not seen as a defender of religious text, rather he rejects the very idea of the spirituality of the rich rulers, feudal lords and the elites of the time, those who harassed and subjugated the poor lesser than a commodity, human scrap/surplus would be an understatement. Scholars report that the economic elites who drove the slave market let some humans

as surplus, fit for nothing, misfits and even used them as prey for their own domestic wild animals, the poor and the vulnerable lived in such hazardous conditions. Jesus inverses the question and makes him feel ridiculous in his own religious thought pattern, the rich walks away from God' kingdom, because the rich in the bible compromised their covenantal values for wealth, hence, the rich are left behind, sometimes cursed and punished like the withered fig tree, like the temple and the nation like rhetoric.

Conclusion

Gustavo Gutierrez, opines that; "the lived experiences of many Christians undertaking different journeys in solidarity with the marginalized and insignificant of history have revealed that the irruption of the poor- their new presence on the historical scene- signifies a true irruption of God into our lives", in line with the Latin American liberation theologies Indian liberation theologian Sabestian Kappen, furthers the argument and measures the presence of GOD in; divine revelation is evident in the solidarity movements of the poor and the vulnerable' protest against the hegemonic strides of the rich and the powerful'. While we reflect on the grave realities of class oppression, let us be reminded that the God of the bible defies all notions of class; hence we are to discard class from our imaginations of Christian life.

Rev. E. Immanuel Nehemiah

Discard Colour

April 2, 2019
Tuesday

Matthew 15:21-28

God of all Race and Color, while gather here to meditate upon your words help us through the Holy Spirit to discard notions that contribute to hatred in this world, especially our indifference to racial and color prejudice, In Jesus name. Amen.

Introduction

Anthony J. Saldarini, in his monograph, Matthew's Christian-Jewish Community, discourses that; "Matthew is an authentic witness both to the shared traditions that unite and too deep hostilities that divide the Jewish and Christian communities", the Gospel of Matthew indeed inhere the multifaceted nature of Jesus' mission which is universal in nature and broadens the horizon of God' communities to witness God's justice and peace in this world.

India is complex in life, it has nations within a nation, hence the concept of diversity is integral in the conception of the nation. The grave reality that strikes the country' mundane reality in racial and ethnic disparity, people have become the defenders of their own language and race. To read the Gospel of Matthew in India necessitates harmonious alternative living patterns. To discard color is to discard our racial inclinations while discarding color we also discard our indifferences in relating with our fellow beings. One of the most critical voices from the civil rights movement in America, James Baldwin' central idea was; the need to accept reality as a needed fundamental for individual identity and hence the logical requirement for a kind of saving love in which he places his faith. Further Baldwin, understands this progression as an immediate formula for redemption and self-realization, thereby he says; "Know from where you came. If you know whence you came, there are absolutely no limitations to where you can go", drawing inspirations from Baldwin, we can see our roots in Jesus. Matthew' Jesus particularly takes us to unpleasant places and situations to imagine God' love for humanity and the lost

people of Israel, Israel as a concept, more than a tangible nation-state, the Canaanite Woman' faith and perseverance is to be understood from these aspects of social and political facets of the Gospel.

Unpleasant demography; a site, where Jesus was transformed, to transform

verse 21, records Jesus at TYRE and SIDON, the most unbearable place to many Christians even now, the very mention of the place is a taboo, the traditional Christian would relate the place in relation to God's wrath, however Jesus over rates the place against the places where he belonged like; Chorazin, Bethsaida, and Capernaum (11:20-23). In Tyre and Sidon, a Canaanite woman seeks Jesus' help but shunned by his disciples who were still amateurs in understanding the mission of God' love. The place, the woman, and the origin of the woman all are suggestive of racial disparity, yet Jesus' presence advocates us to imagine the dwelling power of God, which is beyond the human conformed state of being.

The woman' persistent plight for justice breaks Jesus' own notions of belonging and her need is provocative of dire necessity of God' intervention to heal the broken history, which could have caused ill-health to her daughter. Jesus is transformed by the PAGAN FAITH of the woman; inspired by her faith Jesus acknowledges her faith as the causative element of redemption. Matthean Jesus' redemption knew no boundaries.

Unpleasant imagery; signs of new imaginations:

The imageries like; the places, reference to son of David, tormented by Demon, lost sheep of the house of Israel, Dog, Table, Children, Food, Master' Table, Faith all of these refer to the intensity of the oppressed state of being of the woman in a given socio-political and religious location, where historically the Jewish kingship and religious ritual adherence contributed to the ill-health of many. The tormenting of the Demon; is to be considered as the failure of Israel' covenantal prerequisite in the sight of the prophetic legacy of the community. However, Jesus according to Matthew is the New David, unlikely a

lavish king of the Jewish history, the New David is without a place to rest his head (8:20) who wills to reach out to all those who were discarded from the community through which God intended justice to the rest of the world. His table unifies humanity and his hunger for God' justice provides the basic rights and contributes to the dignity of the vulnerable and discarded beyond racial naivety, unpleasant truth but radical of God' intentions to the created beings.

Conclusion:

It is indeed an unpleasant truth that we are to embrace to be part of God' Gracious life, the Matthean Jesus calls us to disregard and discard all notions that separate us from relating to our fellow humans and the rest of creation.

Rev. E. Immanuel Nehemiah

Discarding Chauvinism

April 3, 2019
Wednesday

Luke 1:5 - 25

God, our father and mother, as we meditate this word, may your source of wisdom enable us to discard the values of hatred, the attitude being influential and structures of patriarchy that exists even now, condemning the value of woman. Mighty God help us to breakthrough your word as we become the channels of your justice and love. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Introduction

We live in a world where every aspect of life is being dominated or trying to dominate, whether in our home, church, society or in any workplace. Rights and Dignity of people, especially women, marginalized people of our society, children, and even ecology are at bay because of our chauvinistic attitude towards them. Chauvinism is an attitude of superiority; a person with the prejudice of superiority, Chauvinism is discriminatory.

The scripture portion Luke 1:5-25 calls us to discard the chauvinistic behavior or attitudes and this lent season gives us a chance to develop ourselves more in a positive way. The scripture portion talks about the announcement about the birth of John the Baptist.

Cultural Chauvinism

Zechariah and Elizabeth were parents with human problems, being righteous with God did not free them from problems of this world just as all people think. But their experiences were different. They were upright in the sight of God yet they had serious problems 1. They were childless 2. They were elderly. As a priestly class, during those times, they were considered to be superior, yet they underwent shame and guilt. As one of the eighteen thousand priests, Zechariah served in the temple twice a year, but only once in his life, he got to assist in the daily offering by going into the holy place.

This honor had fallen to him by the practice of lot. This Priest would have had dark and distressing circumstances. But by making, he served the lord on the weak. We see clearly the notions of shame and guilt being broken down. And being childless was considered a shame and was considered as punishment for sinful behavior in the past, through the message of Angel Gabriel, Zechariah and Elizabeth were discarded from this blind belief and dominant view and through the birth of John the Baptist and they were made models to follow.

Religious Chauvinism

Zechariah was faithful to his priesthood. He was faithful to his call; he was faithful and steadfast in his duties despite the lack of blessings from God, i.e. being childless. Bearing a son in those days was considered one of the greatest blessings from God. Being childless, Zechariah was still very faithful to God's call. Many a time we think that being faithful to God will give blessings alone but James 1:12 says Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him. Zechariah being faithful to God was rewarded with a son. Here the meek and humble are raised out of chauvinistic culture; which is seen in Vs 6, both of them were righteous before God, living blamelessly according to all the commandments and regulations of the Lord. A certification of their life is seen here.

Male Chauvinism

Zechariah and Elizabeth were childless; this was a terrible disgrace to the people of that time. Children were considered a blessing from God. if a wife of a Jew, is barren, then the Jew is considered to be gone astray from God. Further, he was expected to divorce his wife, remarry and bear children. This crucial problem was troubling their hearts and minds. Zechariah did not let Elizabeth down by divorcing her; he stood by her and was faithful to her. We need to discard unnecessary thought patterns which break and hurt, the institution of family or marriage should encourage people in concern to lead a peaceful life.

Conclusion

The Lenten season reminds us that fasting, meditating and waiting for the Lord never goes in vain. May this lent help us introspect our attitude and discard means that cause prejudice, oppression, and intolerance, with our fellow beings and all the creation of God.
Let not we be chauvinists' anymore.

Rev. Mary Shalini

April 4, 2019

Discard Communalism

Thursday

Amos 9:7-8

God you created all things visible and invisible, your omnipresence we acknowledge, give us the courage to live in harmony with people of other faith, enable us to near your mysterious presence in this world, drive our hearts and mind to your heart of love, Jesus our Redeemer. Amen.

Introduction

Communalism can be understood as an individual's strong allegiance to his own community or ethnic group rather than society as a whole. It is an ideology, which asserts that a particular religious or ethnic identity is superior to other identities. Very often, political power is employed to establish the dominion power of that particular identity over other identities, resulting in oppression, discrimination, and violence. In the pluralistic context of India, communalism destroys the beauty of diverse identities, thereby, leading to ideological conflicts, intolerance, and disharmony. Amartya Sen believes that "harmony and cooperation can be created through the plurality of identities which is resonant of differences. This plurality of identities can work for the benefit of all and it may remove the sharp divisions among people".

Indian Christians, generally, take a stand against the majoritarian religious fundamentalism and right-wing communalism in India. But ironically, we are firm adherents of Christian Zionism, which uses biblical verses, irrelevantly and irrationally, to uphold Israel's ownership over the land, that it presently occupies, and supports its violent, racist policies against the Palestinians.

The chosen Biblical text includes the prophecy of Amos during the final days of the northern kingdom of Israel, in the days of Jeroboam II. During that time, Israel possessed great military power and economic prosperity. But the exploitation of the poor and vulnerable by the rich and powerful was rampant. The ethical and social values of

the nation were eroded. In this scenario, Amos, who understood the dynamics of God's relationship with Israel, pronounced a message of condemnation against the Israelites. In Amos 9:7, Israel' arrogant understanding of its special status as God's chosen nation and it's monopolizing of the redemptive work of God is questioned by the prophet.

Unbiased Redeemer

Are you not like the Ethiopians to me?

The Israelites understood themselves as the one and only chosen people of Yahweh. When God asks them, "Are you not like Ethiopians to me?" it implies that both the people of Israel and the Ethiopians are the same to God in all respects. Thus God refutes Israel's assumption that they stood in a privileged relationship with God because it reduces Yahweh to the status of a private deity of a particular tribe or race. Amos, vehemently, critiques such distorted portrayal of God. The people of Israel and the Ethiopians are ethnically, physically, culturally and religiously different from each other but both are considered to be equal before God. Amos claims that Yahweh is not a mere ethnic deity, who is biased towards a particular communal group.

Peter, on account of the life-altering transformation experienced by him just before encountering Cornelius, states, "I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation, anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him."

Universal Redemption

Did I not bring ….the Phillistines from Caphtor and the Arameans from Kir?

The Exodus event was understood by the Israelites as God's unique intervention in the history of humankind through the act of redeeming Israel from the Egyptian slavery.

But God asserts that Israel's experience of redemption through the exodus event is not unique; the exodus has its parallels in the histories of other nations too which emphasise the plurality of God's liberative

actions in history. God's redeeming of the Philistines and Arameans from captivity in Caphtor and Kir, respectively, affirm that Yahweh is truly universal. Yahweh is the God of all nations, including Israel's traditional adversaries. God's redemptive work cannot be confined to a particular community.

Conclusion

Therefore, the affirmation of God as an impartial redeemer and the recognition of God's redemptive interventions in the histories of peoples, whose origins, faith persuasions, practices, cultures, traditions and characteristics are in stark contrast with ours, will enable us to discard our communal ideologies and, truly, experience God's redemption.

Rev. Princy Samuel

Redemption: Discipleship

April 5, 2019
Friday

For the coming week the theme for our meditation is **Redemption: Discipleship.** It lays emphasis on Cross as a New Paradigm to discipleship. The word "Redemption" refers to the act of saving something or somebody from a declined, dilapidated, or corrupted state and restoring it, him or her to a better condition. In the New Testament the word "Redemption" refers to the act of deliverance from the sins of humanity by the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The theme "Redemption: Discipleship" implies that a disciple is someone who has been saved from the sins of humanity by the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross and has been rescued from a declined, dilapidated, or corrupted state and restored to a better condition. The focus of the disciple, henceforth, should be on the Lord and pleasing him in every area of life. The disciple puts off self-centeredness and puts on Christ-centeredness. Further, the disciple accepts and follows the teachings, principles and beliefs of his role-model Jesus Christ, and grows to be his follower. Discipleship, therefore, is a state of condition of a person, willing to work for the fulfilment of the vision and mission of Jesus Christ.

In Jesus' time the *rabbis* or teachers of the law groomed disciples for themselves to whom they translated their doctrine. The disciples in turn could hope to become rabbis under the instruction of their master, and add to the tradition which they received. The relationship between Jesus and his disciples was not entirely the same as that of the rabbi and his disciples. Jesus demanded a more complete personal surrender to himself. He expected that their entire life was to be spent in his discipleship. They had to be witnesses rather than mere channels of verbal tradition.

Discipleship, as envisaged by Jesus, is a process of being, becoming and bonding to his norms. This process involves restoration, regeneration, re-imagination, reconciliation and resilience. During this week, we will be focusing on each of these themes.

The Characteristics of a Disciple

Mark 8: 34 -38

Lord, our God, despite our weakness, you have made us witnesses to hope and faithful disciples of your Son, who desires to show evidence of his victory in a sceptical and troubled world. Enable us to grasp the characteristics of a true disciple and fulfill the vision and mission of Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

Discipleship is a calling. In *Mark 8:34-35* Jesus gives three indispensable marks of a true disciple namely: self-denial, cross-bearing and following Christ. Let us look at each of these characteristics.

1. A True Disciple Denies Self

In verse 34, Jesus asks his disciples to deny the egocentric self-deifying urge, ungodliness, worldly lusts, retaliation, self-pity, self-enrichment, self-service, self-absorption, self-praise of our own reputation. In other words, the self-denial that Jesus expects is not an option, but a demand. If we profess to have received Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior then we must deny our self. We must submit our self to the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ and declare a lifelong war on old ego. Denying oneself does not mean we deny our own individual identity and existence. And at the same time, Jesus is not inviting us to be puppets, or robots, and give up our freedom or our rationality. Nor does Jesus mean that we deny ourselves the legitimate God-created pleasures.

Denying oneself basically means a choice between serving our own self or serving the Lord Jesus Christ. The first definitive denial of self comes when a person becomes a Christian by believing Jesus Christ and accepting him as his/her Lord and Savior. Further, the denial of self involves giving up all reliance on one's own talents, attainments, achievements and good works for being accepted by God. And it involves turning away from relying

on everything that is religious like praying, fasting, church attendance and taking Holy Communion.

God is calling us to lose our life for Christ and the gospel in order to find it, to deny our self and go after Jesus Christ. Our Lord may let others be honoured and put them forward, and keep us hidden in obscurity, because he may want us to produce some choice fruit for his coming glory, which can only be produced in the shade. He may let others be great, but keep us small. He may make us work and toil without others knowing about it; and then to make our work still more precious, he may let others get the credit for the work which we have done, and thus make our reward ten times greater when Jesus comes. Whatever may be God's plan, we must lose our life for Christ in order to find it. God is a loving Savior and loves us deeply, and He knows what he's doing and it's for our good. We must, therefore, deny our self.

The apostle Paul is a good example for self-denial. He says, "What things were gain to me I have counted as loss for Christ." So at the beginning of the Christian life we bid farewell to the old unbelieving self. Then for the rest of our lives, every day and every passing moment, we continue to say no to self and yes to the will of Jesus Christ, pleasing and obeying him in everything.

2. A True Disciple Takes Up His Cross

What is this cross the Lord Jesus is referring to here? In the first century the cross was a symbol of repugnance, especially to a Jew. It symbolized Roman oppression. It was a cursed symbol of cruelty, dehumanization and shame. It was part of the Roman apparatus of oppression and terror. The question is what is this cross that Jesus is referring to? The cross that is referred here is not the cross of our redemption. There is only one saving cross and that is Christ's. There is only one completed work of redemption, and that is Christ's. We contributed nothing but our sins to the cross of salvation. Our crosses are not redeeming crosses. Further, our crosses are not the same as our thorns in the flesh the various need, illness, distress, weakness, hardships and difficulties which

come into all our lives in this groaning creation. These are the sufferings of the present times and we are no different from any of our neighbours in terms of the sickness, loss and bereavement that we experience in our lives. The difficulties that we face in our lives are not our crosses.

Christ was condemned to suffer death on the cross because of how he lived and what he said. We get a cross because of living like him and saying what he said. The cross is something which is inevitable while we follow Christ. If we are silent, if we looked the other way, if we did what everyone else does, if we lived just like the world lives, then we would not have this cross. We live out the life of Christ in the market place, business world, lecture room, and the lab and then as a result we experience cross.

In this verse, the Lord is talking about his total claim on the allegiance of the disciples. They were to follow him even if it leads to death on the cross. That is what Christ asked of them. Carrying a cross was required of those whom society condemned. Their rights were all forfeited, and they were being taken for execution. In other words, Jesus is saying "Come after me. Come and die!" That is the description of the life that follows Jesus. Paul says, "For your sake we are killed all day long." Saint Paul and other apostles died in the faith, believing, and they are this very day honoured within the portals of heaven for their martyrdom.

3. A True Disciple Follows Jesus

The third constituent of true discipleship is following Jesus. Jesus' call, "follow me," is not a geographical summon to physically walk behind the Messiah across Galilee and Caesarea Philippi. Following Christ is acknowledging the sovereignty and the lordship of Jesus Christ; he's our King; he's our example; he's our God. We are called to commit ourselves totally to him, to follow him without hesitation and without reservation. A leader is the one whom people follow, to whom people look up to; they model themselves upon him, they imitate him, and he is their example.

We follow him in utter submission to his will. But such following inevitably involves suffering, because to follow Christ is to follow in the steps of the one who himself knew suffering and grief. Christ's whole ministry was in a context of bitter conflict. Right from the beginning and throughout his earthly life, he was engaged in conflict and facing constantly the onslaught of the evil one. Following Christ means to be involved in this hand-to-hand combat with the evil one.

If we are to follow Christ, we will face the antagonism of power as Christ himself did. We can recall surely the prophecy of the Old Testament in Isaiah 53. How was this suffering servant of Jehovah described? “He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.” If we read the gospel narrative with the background of Isaiah 53, we could understand that how completely, and in detail, it is fulfilled. The way they tried to trip him up, the way they misrepresented him as “a gluttonous man and a drunkard, a friend of publicans and sinners.” They misrepresented what he did, accusing him of casting out demons in alliance with the prince of the devils. When they get him near Calvary, contempt and scorn, as it was, flowed over. They take him into a barrack room and they hit him and they spit on him, and that is a foul insult to give to any man. When he is taken out from that and taken to Golgotha, he is the butt of the ridicule and cheap jokes of the Roman soldiers, and they hang him on a Cross with a mocking inscription over his head. It was Pilate's last fling of defiance against the Jews and shows his opinion of their King; this is what he will do with their King. We are to follow him!

There is wonderful encouragement in the call of Jesus to follow him, because we have the utmost confidence that whatever he commands his people to do, he also gives them the grace to do it. He never gives us hopeless impractical and merely idealistic commands. If Jesus dwells in your life, if you have ceaseless access to the indwelling Spirit, then you can deny yourself, and you can take up your cross and you can follow Jesus Christ. Keep obeying him, and keep asking him for grace to obey him.

Bonhoeffer in his book, 'Cost of Discipleship' says, “To be a disciple of Jesus we must learn to adapt, adopt, and acquire.” In the light of our meditation, redemption, therefore, means a lived-reality in the process of adaptation, adoption and acquirement of the teachings of Christ and be willing to work for the fulfilment of the vision and mission of Jesus Christ

Rev. Dr. Vincent Vinod Kumar

Discipleship as Restoration

April 6, 2019
Saturday

John 13:31-35

O God, who by a cross of love did turn the counsels of sin and hatred into the healing of the world, we ask to send the spirit of understanding and love so that we will work toward restoration of your image and likeness in everyone; through Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

We are living in a broken world and human relationships are being constantly broken, due to selfish agendas. In this context the passage is very appropriate and there is a clear message in it. Being a Christian or a follower of Christ, we have great responsibility to accept the teachings of Jesus Christ and to implement the same.

Jesus, the Guru, trained and taught His 12 disciples for three and half years and set an exemplary life to all of them. He summarized the Ten Commandments into two great commandments, viz., to love God and to love the neighbor as one self. But the mind-set of Jesus Christ and his disciples were different.

The purpose of the life and ministry of Jesus Christ was to adhere to or obey God's will and to bring reconciliation and restore the broken relationship between God and human beings / Creation through love and sacrificing himself on the cross.

In this passage, we read about a disciple whose character is totally opposite to his Master. He was the treasurer among the disciples. Although Judas Iscariot was with Jesus and was trained under him, neither his teachings nor his way of life impacted / influenced him. But he was very much attracted and fascinated with the teachings of other religious fundamental leaders that involved destructive kind of works. Because of this Judas had to lose his relationship with his master Jesus and also his fellow disciples.

Definition of Discipleship:

A Disciple is a person who is a pupil or adherent to the doctrines of another; one who embraces and assists in spreading the teaching of another; any follower of another person.

In Christian discipleship, we are not only called to learn the teachings of Jesus Christ, but also to live them.

Definition of Restoration:

An act of restoring or the condition of being restored involves the bringing back to a former position of condition or reinstatement. Judas Iscariot, being the disciple of Jesus, should have been adherent to the doctrine of his master. But he did not and more than being a disciple of Jesus, he was attracted to other destructive thoughts by other religious leaders. Finally he left Jesus. Unless we embrace Jesus' teachings, we cannot become his true followers.

After Judas left, Jesus addressed his final message and gave a new commandment, "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, just like I have loved you; that you also love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

Here, love is not an option for the followers of Jesus. Jesus says, "A new commandment I give to you." This statement means that his new commandment is neither a suggestion nor recommendation. It is a command to love. This new commandment was necessary because it is human to rebel against the idea of pure, conditional love.

We are happy to love in a selective kind of way. We are comfortable with the kind of love that doesn't make us feel uncomfortable. But here when he said, love one another, just like I have loved you, it means that his love is sacrificial and self-giving. We see that on the cross. He loved us so much that he willingly gave his life for us. He was prepared to suffer, even to death, because his love for us is unconditional. That's how he commanded us to love willingly and sacrificially.

Restoration refers to reestablishment, restoring of something to former or original condition. The primary duty of disciples is to make known to the world that they are Jesus' disciples by loving one another. In other words the disciples' calling is to, lovingly, restore a person to the image and likeness of God. True discipleship is to follow Jesus' footsteps that involves in building communities through restoring true love and forgiveness.

Rev. Paul Dinakaran

Passion Sunday: Cross and a New Paradigm to Discipleship

April 7, 2019 Sunday

Gen.26:12-33 I Cor.1:18-31

Psalm 92 Mk 10: 46-52

God, our perfect model, we thank you for choosing us as your disciples and also assuring to be with us. Lord help us to be worthy of our calling and bear the cross like Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen

The Gospel is a beautiful and powerful grassroots tool for knowing and following Jesus. The paradigm to discipleship, set by Bartimaeus in Mk 10: 46-52, challenges modern Christians to become completely sold-out followers of Jesus, to make cross, ministry, and mission the work of every believer, and to give their primary allegiance to the kingdom of God rather than to any person, nation, political party, or movement. He calls the Christians to look for their answers in the person and work of Jesus and Jesus' followers, revealed in scripture.

Mk 10: 46-52: Following Jesus on the Way: "Moving from Blindness to Sight"

As Jesus leaves Jericho, a surging crowd presses on him. For the first time, Jesus did not curtail their enthusiasm. Jesus is intently undertaking the fifteen-mile ascent from Jericho to Jerusalem for the last Passover of his life. In just a few days, he will undergo his passion, death, and resurrection. He knows what lies ahead. But, the multitude did not.

On his way to Jerusalem for the last week of his life, Jesus passes through Jericho. Mark tells us of Bartimaeus, the blind beggar at the city gates of Jericho (cf. Mk 10:46-52). Bartimaeus, after receiving sight, eagerly follows Jesus. Mark wishes to use the narrative of his healing to teach his disciples.

The spatial dimensions of this story contribute to our understanding of Bartimaeus' salvation (note that in 10:52 Jesus literally says, 'Your

faith has saved you'). Bartimaeus begins the story alongside (*para*) the road. He ends the story as a follower (compare 8:34). He follows Jesus on (*en*) the road. The shift of prepositions reflects Bartimaeus' move from the invisible periphery of society to the heart of the scene. The movement also suggests more when we consider that 'road' (or 'way'), as Mark uses to indicate Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and his suffering; it is the same 'way' that he calls his followers to walk on (see 8:27; 10:32; 11:8; compare 1:2-3). 'Way' is a new exodus in Mark. Mark uses the word 'way' to conclude the story of Bartimaeus and illustrate the nature of discipleship.

In Mark, Bartimaeus is not the first person to approach seeking a miracle, but he is the only one who ends up following him, presumably, straight into Jerusalem and into his confrontation with the temple-based aristocracy. Bartimaeus shows Mark's readers that faith in Jesus remains possible and potent.

Bartimaeus, with his needs and prophetic insights, Jesus with his compassion and grace, the crowd with its determination to keep Bartimaeus both blind and invisible, and others with the opportunity to guide him to Jesus with the hopeful words, 'Take courage; get up; he's calling you!' - all these characters in the narrative, with various roles, compel us to a new paradigm to discipleship.

The Way of the Cross in Mark's Gospel

This passage sets some exclusive and transformative choices one should make as Christ's disciples. Following are some theological and practical implications for a new paradigm to discipleship.

1. **Coming to Jesus is always a renouncing of the past way of life and an upward movement filled with joy.**

Called by Jesus, Bartimaeus leaps up from his seated position, decisively casting aside the cloak that he used to collect alms. Bartimaeus exemplifies true discipleship. As the other disciples give up their boats and employment, so Bartimaeus gives up his cloak and follows Jesus on the way in Mark 10:52, which is a metaphor for the Cross. Bartimaeus grasps the reality of discipleship while Jesus' disciples failed. Like Bartimaeus, the disciples are invited to leave

everything and follow Jesus along the way.

2. **True faith cannot be squelched into silence**

As soon as he learns that Jesus of Nazareth is passing by, he immediately begins to shout, 'Son of David, have pity on me!' He knows his own wretched condition and he believes that only Jesus can save him. He does not let the moment pass. The crowd quickly tries to silence him, but he is not to be deterred (cf. 1 Cor 1:27, 28). True desire cannot wait. In our context, the strident voices of secularism, materialism, hedonism, violence, persecution, imprisonment seem more forceful than the voices of those who, like Bartimaeus, acknowledge Jesus as their master. Our secularized culture fosters the idea that faith is irrational and must be relegated to the 'least of these.' Those who criticize religion brand moral principles based on natural law as religious bigotry. But, as disciples, we are to raise our voices above the mob for the truth that Jesus offers as the Savior who heals our broken lives, restores justice and peace.

3. **Jesus' command 'Call him here!' converts the crowd keeping Bartimaeus from Jesus to the ones who bring the blind man to him.** The Lord issues the same mandate to us, the many who follow him today. He bids us to bring others to him by our words, especially, by our manner of life. 'All people have the right to know Jesus Christ and his Gospel and Christians, all Christians- Pastors and laity - have a corresponding duty to proclaim the Good News.'
4. **Enthusiastic and Exemplary Model.** Bartimaeus did not simply join the crowd on the journey to Jerusalem. Rather, once enlightened, he becomes a true disciple who follows Jesus on the way that leads to the cross. This is the path of true discipleship. Our following of Jesus always includes our sharing in his death and resurrection (cf. 1 Cor 1: 31).
5. **We need daily to put God's will before our desires, his truth before our opinions and the joy of his presence before the unlawful pleasures of this world.** Thus, by following Jesus, the

Son of David, along the *via crucis*, by dying to self, we rise to new life. Like Bartimaeus, following Jesus along the way, is the cost of discipleship.

The call of Bartimaeus reminds us that we must surrender to Jesus. Bartimaeus persevered. He did not leave Jesus until he had his miracle experienced. Bartimaeus reminds us to persevere in our relationship with Jesus. The church cannot promise cures; she promises what Jesus promises on the 'way' that leads to the cross. Like Jesus' first disciples, we are to journey with the Lord 'on the way,' moving from blindness to sight.

The heart of Christianity is to, simply, imitate Jesus and wholeheartedly follow Jesus. Moving away from de-stabilisation, shifting out of dis-orientation, journeying towards re-orientation and transformative process is a **New Paradigm to Discipleship** set by Bartimaeus.

Rev. Silvan Chandrakumar A.

April 8, 2019

Discipleship as Regeneration

Monday

Mark 3:1-6

Almighty God, who has called us to discipleship through our Lord Jesus Christ, teach us to follow you as true disciples by bearing the cross everyday and grant us the experience of your empowerment; and help us to enable everyone to return to a revitalized state and become transforming agents of God; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in unity with the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

Regeneration refers to form again or to return from a state of decline to a revitalized state, to restore and renew somebody morally or spiritually. The duty of a disciple is to enable a person to return to a revitalized state so that he or she will be able to become a transforming agent of God. Regeneration means that a person receives a new, holy and natural form from God. The disciples need nature to inherit God's kingdom which is full of justice, peace (which is wholesome), righteousness and equality which is opposed to denigration (which means sin, decay and death). Regeneration also means born of God. Firstly, those born of God are the ones, who are opposed to the world and who are characterized by God's love 'agape' (1 John 4:7).

Secondly, those born of God are the ones, who believe that Jesus is their master, rabbi or Guru (1 John 5:1). The concept of Guru means a person who dispels darkness in the life of people and brings light. Gu' means darkness and the word "ru" means the one who removes darkness and shows the path of light.

Thirdly, those born of God are born of the spirit as opposed to the flesh John (3: 6,8). They are new creations, who think new in the light, shown by the guru. The concept of new creation means a state where people of God involve in doing justice that comes from God's word - the truth and logos which became flesh (John 1:1).

Finally, being born again also means to allow our mind and actions to be transformed (Rom 12:2), and not to allow theworld to shape our action but allow our life to obey God's will.

In the givenpassage (Mark 3: 1-6), the Pharisees and his enemies are trying to resist Jesus the rabbi, master and guru who is their messiah. They hated his kingdom concept and his miracles which were related to glorify God the Savior. Jesus was exposing their evil mind which was exhibited as darkness in the religious circles and temple activities. He was exposing their false, corrupt religious standards. This was hindering the transforming power of Sabbath. Their shallow understanding of Sabbath was hindering people's lives and Sabbath was interpreted as anti-life. Jesus expresses his concern and advises them to be pro-life (vs. 4). With anger, Jesus understands their stubborn heart and he is distressed.

And he was disappointed with their hardness of heart and religious stubbornness that rejected God's renewing power. Jesus wants us to be concerned, careful and sensitive to communal and traditional aspects of our religious beliefs, such as caste, untouchability, discriminations, purity and pollutions and unwritten traditions which have creeped into our church life. God, in Jesus Christ, wants such hands to be stretched for healing. A new life and a new heart are a must to regenerate our life in God to serve people who are around Jesus' cross.

Rev. Dr. D. Manohar Chandra Prasad

Discipleship as Reimagination

Mark 12: 35-40

Lord of the universe, through your word of love, peace and life you began to establish a new order on the earth with a new sense of freedom and responsibility. Enable us to re-imagine your reign in the given reality and work towards establishing your kingdom; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

'Imagination' is defined as the act or power of forming a mental image of something not present to the senses or never before wholly perceived in reality. The disciples' mission involves re-imagination of the kingdom of God in the given reality and working towards bringing everything under the reign of God. Bible points out that, God spoke to people through Word. God brought heavenly truths to human kind through logos. The human mind failed to grasp this truth.

In the Scripture, both in Old Testament and New Testament, God uses parables, similes, visions and dreams to unravel the truths of God's kingdom. To a large extent, these mediums allow its hearers, readers and teachers to imagine God's truth and to discern it for people's life and context. Therefore divine imagination is part of communicating God's truth. It transforms life into death and destruction to life and restoration. Discipleship also expects disciples to create interest in ministering God's word.

God with us (Immanuel) was revealed through His son Jesus Christ in the Christmas event and on the cross. People failed to imagine this lord who eternally existed from the beginning of the creation (Proverbs 8: 22-31), who is going to exist eternally with the father. People in his times recognized him partially.

Jesus, therefore, made provisions to reveal his truth and His presence through a Helper, the Holy Spirit. Realizing their cynicism and

hypocrisy, Jesus was looking positively to clarify his purpose in coming to this world. Jesus is questioning the religious people in the place which was the center of Jewish religious laws, worship and learning. He is quoting from David's reference to the anointed messiah (Psalm 110).

David declares with the help of the Holy Spirit the savior and messiah. Jesus refers back to Psalm 110 to remind the religious about a promise which was spoken by King David. As a son of David, Jesus authoritatively counters the false religious attitudes and wrong interpretations of the religiously corrupt. The temple authorities totally failed to recognize the savior who is before them. For Jesus Old testament was the bible He preached the prophecies, wisdom literature, laws, the Pentateuch and constructed his kingdom message. His mission, passion, crucifixion, resurrection, commission and ascension formed the New Testament. In this passage Jesus recited David's prayer and applied to his own presence before temple authorities.

The phrase, "the lord said to my lord," refers to King David who becomes the founder of the royal throne, and who establishes God's kingdom. These words also refers to Christ's final destruction of the wicked rule (Revelation: 6-9), prophecies of Christ's rule (Revelation 20; 1-7), and also Christ's priestly work and mission which points to his body - the new Israel, the church (Hebrew 5-9).

Rev. Dr. D. Manohar Chandra Prasad

Discipleship as Reconciliation

April 10, 2019
Wednesday

II Corinthians 5:18-19

O God of love, who in a world estranged from you, sent your Son our Lord to turn humankind from darkness to light, from the power of evil to the living God; help us to engage in the ministry of peacemaking and reconciliation through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

Introduction:

Globalization and the age of communication bring distinct parts of the world together in closer contact and yet exclude the invisible and vulnerable people among us. Mission takes many forms, focusing on the sharing of life together and the creation of a just, sustainable and peaceful world order by accompanying those who are oppressed. The church as an agent of God in this world is called to engage in the ministry of peace-making and reconciliation which would encourage concrete steps toward the communion of all humanity and creation with God and one another.

In the text, St. Paul brings before us in a very clear definite way, the supreme reason for the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was willing to die as a martyr for truth, but we see the one who took his place as a sacrifice, instead of others, through His liberated act and brought us a new relationship with God.

New Creation

The Apostle is speaking of the new creation and it is in the new creation that, "all things are of God who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ." When we come to Christ, all our sins are forgiven; more than that, we are justified from all things (Romans 5:1). Reconciliation goes a step further; it is not only that our sins are forgiven and that divine justice has nothing against us, but it is that he has received us as his own to his loving heart and we are reconciled to God and we have joy in him.

Reconciliation is at the very heart of God

The first chapter of Genesis tells us about God's creation. God saw that what he was creating was 'good.' He then created man and woman and declared them to be 'very good.' Adam and Eve lived in God's land under God's blessing (Genesis: 1:28). Our First parents experienced the perfect relationship, friendship, order and peace with God, each other and the environment. However, in Genesis 3 we are told that God's good creation was corrupted and spoiled by sin. The perfect order and peace of the Garden of Eden was destroyed. People's relationship with God was broken. This resulted in the broken relationships between God and man, between people and environment.

The rest of the Bible is a story of God's plan to redeem, reconcile and restore his creation i.e. to bring His creation back into a right relationship with Him. Human's separation from God is not God's fault. Our own sins stand between us and God, and we are powerless to remove the penalty that sin brings. The only solution is a divine act of grace. When we begin to understand that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself," we are standing on the very foundation of all reconciliation. At the cross, mercy triumphed over justice. Because of Christ, we can be reconciled to our Creator and to each other. God desires to shape lives and communities that reflect the story of God's new creation, offering concrete examples of another way and practices that engage the everyday challenges of peaceful existence in the world. Through recalling the stories of scripture and faithful lives, and learning the virtues and daily practices those stories communicate, reconciliation becomes an ordinary, everyday pattern of life for Christians.

There will be no reconciliation with anybody until we bring our broken hearts to Jesus first. Healing begins when we honestly confront the past. Before we can even contemplate forgiveness, we need to face what really happened and bring it to the foot of the cross.

Reconciliation is God's gift to Humankind

Reconciliation is God's gift to everyone in Christ. The Bible teacher us what it means both to be reconciled and to be ambassadors of

reconciliation in and through the church. The healing of the world's deep brokenness does not begin with us and our action, but with God and God's gift of new creation. When we neglect the story of God's life and action, reconciliation will always remain vague. Christians often try to fix the brokenness of the world in a way that puts either us or the world at the center. In responding to the urgent needs of the world, our first question ought not be "what should we do?" but rather "what is going on?" The story of our lives and the story of the world begin with what God has already accomplished. The center of that story is Jesus Christ. When reconciliation is connected to God's story and life, the invitation to be ambassadors of God's reconciliation in the world is made clear and urgent.

Discipleship

In an ever changing world scenario, we need to remind ourselves that we are the followers of Christ. We are to lead our lives according to the word of God without being distracted by the attractions of the world. Our focus should be Jesus alone. How do we know if Christ is focused? Look at our life. Do we confess God with our lips yet, deny him in our daily life? It is easy to belong to a Church or recite a creed, but difficult to lead a Christian life. Being a Christian is not expressed in just sitting in a pew and saying a prayer; instead a disciple is willing to grow in Christ for a life time. The cost of discipleship is to respond with the attitude of Prophet Isaiah, "Here I am God, ready to be used by you."

Reconciliation is a continuing process

Reconciliation, which is often called "Peace with God," is the sign of God's continuing love and forgiveness. If we keep in mind that Christ's death reconciles us to God, we must remember that reconciliation is a call to a whole, healed relationship with each other. Reconciliation enables us to be reconciled to God, community and self.

According to the text, reconciliation is both an accomplished fact (v. 18) and a continuing process (v. 19). Although it is a done deed as a

result of Christ's work on the cross, it nonetheless must be personally appropriated. Reconciliation is a continuing process. We function as God's agents in proclaiming what has been accomplished. To use Paul's language, God has appointed us to preach the word of reconciliation and so we proclaim: Be reconciled to God. Our reconciliation with God is not the result of our own efforts or performance; it is exclusively the result of God's work in Christ. We, Christians, should be committed to reconciling people to God.

In Corinthians 5:18-20, Paul tells us that God has given us the ministry of reconciliation. He calls us 'Christ's ambassadors' and instructs us to share the message of reconciliation with others. This is our call to witness to those who are not yet reconciled to God through the cross.

Conclusion

Human beings, without God, are strangers in this world without hope and peace. Our greatest need is to be reconciled to the Creator God. Christian reconciliation is a glorious truth! Reconciliation is living it out. The gospel is both spoken and lived; it is walking the talk. We are to be like a walking billboard for the gospel. We are to show the proof of our transformation. We have been reconciled to God. Therefore, there should be changes taking place. If there is no change in our behaviour then what message are we sending? If we do not show ourselves to be a new creation then we are not showing people what the power of Christ can do.

Rev. I. J. W. Ambler

Discipleship as Resilience

April 11, 2019
Thursday

2 Corinthians 4: 8, 9

O God, who in your great mercy has provided the means of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord, though we are weak by our mortal nature, grant us resilience so that in spite of the odds and challenges, we will be able to accomplish the mission that has been entrusted through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and ever. Amen.

Resilience is the quality of being able to adapt to stressful life changes and "bouncing back" from hardship. Resilience is a response to tragedy, crisis, or other life-altering changes that allows us to move on despite the loss. Showing resilience does not mean that a person is unaffected or uncaring about the life change. Resilience is the human heart's ability to suffer greatly and grow from it. Resilience is what gives people the psychological strength to cope with stress and hardship. It is the mental reservoir of strength that people are able to call on in times of need to carry them through without falling apart.

Resilience is the biblical norm for a disciple of Christ. The Bible contains many admonitions to press on (Philippians 3: 13 - 15), overcome hardship and temptation (Romans 12: 21), and persevere in the face of trials (James 1: 12). It also gives us numerous examples of people who suffered greatly but continued to follow God's plan for their lives. Proverbs 24: 16 could be seen as the theme verse for the resilient: "Though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes." The disciple, despite the odds and challenges that he or she has to face, should with resilience and hope accomplish the mission that has been entrusted.

A resilient discipleship emerges when the disciples of Jesus Christ are put to test for doing justice and resisting injustice. And it is also a state of suffering for the just cause with hope in the God of Justice and peace. Justice and righteousness is the character of God. In the Old testaments, God's people and God's Prophets were put to test by the

forces of evil. In the New Testament, Jesus displays resilience in the face of evil from the beginning of his ministry - from the days of temptation to the suffering on the cross. St Paul, in this great passage, explores this act of God's resilience as the human person on the cross. And as a privileged disciple, he exhibits a resilient attitude amidst injustice.

The concept of ministry also includes doing justice. God expects his people to act with fairness. Psalm 47: 28 says the lord loves the just. Do what is right. Rescue from the hand of his oppressors the one who has been robbed. Do not wrong or do violence to the alien, the fatherless or the widow. (Jeremiah 22: 3). God's Justice is revealed in preaching kingdom truths, and Jesus declares his mission in Nazareth Manifesto - "The spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the lord's favour" (Luke 4: 18ff).

Jesus was quoting this message from Isaiah in the context of Israel's release from the Babylonian clutches and the year of Jubilee. It also referred to debts being cancelled and all slaves, freed. And properties are returned to original owners. Jesus also ended this verse and prophecy by saying, 'today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.' During Jesus' ministry, this salvation message came true and he inaugurated this kingdom's plan and he authorized his disciples saying, 'Therefore go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and he Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I commanded you. And surely I am with you always. To the very end of the age" (Mathew 28: 18 – 20).

The disciples are commissioned to make disciples who are committed to the gospel of salvation which contains God's justice and peace, His grace and salvation. Therefore, as a committed disciple, he humbly presents his status as a humble servant as a jar of clay, which is vulnerable. Paul concentrates not on the perishable human jar,

but the content which is there in the Jar. God's dwelling power in the life of faithful and disciples is amazing. Though the human beings are weak, God uses us to communicate good news to others. He empowers us with the Holy Spirit.

Rev. Dr. D. Manohar Chandra Prasad

Redemption as Defiance

April 12, 2019
Friday

John 18:19-24

Introduction

Among the varied theological significance of John's Gospel, the prominent ones are, the 'I and Thou' relationship, and juxtaposition of 'The Kingdom of God and The Kingdom of World'. Martin Buber, a Jewish philosopher, expounds the 'I and Thou' relationship in defying the 'I and It' relationship. He discloses a radical difference between one's attitude towards the other person and one's attitude towards a thing. He avers that the 'I and It' relationship portrays or treats the other as an object to be used, enslaved and manipulated. Whereas, the 'I and Thou' relationship understands the other as a person in real to live and to relate with. John Dominic Crossan, a Roman Catholic Priest, and a Liberation theologian divulge the Kingdom of God, defying the Kingdom of the world. He makes a categorical distinction between the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world and declares the Kingdom of God as non-violent resistance, and the Kingdom of Rome (World) as violent repression. He opines that the Kingdom of Rome accentuates violence and injustice, whereas, the Kingdom of God authenticates justice and non-violence. The given text brings out the 'I and It' relationship between the religious and political authorities that coalesce to incriminate Jesus, and, it also unveils the unjust violence imposed on Jesus by the Kingdom of Rome. Though the Jewish authority and Rome's political authority are not a real mutual relationship, they tend to relate in order to uphold their imperial status quo. According to Warren Carter, a New Testament scholar, the Jewish world had learned how to live within the confines of the Roman rule while finding ways to resume their life, including their way of worship.[1] It is in such cleaved 'I and It' relationship (Roman rule and Religious rule), the fourth evangelist constructs a complex and countering Christology that confirms the 'I and Thou' relationship (Jesus and God) establishing Jesus, the God embodied, as the one

[1] Christopher W Skinner, "*John's Gospel and the Roman Imperial Context*", in "Jesus is Lord Caesar is Not", Edited by Scot Mcknight and Joseph B. Modica (IVP Academic, 2013), p 123.

who is not only greater than Caesar but also greater than all other symbols of human power religious, political or otherwise. In other words, Jesus, the God Incarnate, is greater than all imperial gods.

John 18: 19-24

The given text discloses Jesus' preliminary interrogation under Annas, the High Priest. According to the Jewish tradition, the procedure is to interrogate the witnesses, not the defendant. During Maimonides, it was clearly established that a defendant according to the *Mishnah* was not required to testify, but that charges had to be made and supported by witnesses. Thus, Jesus challenges the illicit form of interrogation. Annas' interrogation was mainly concerned with Jesus' disciples and his teaching. Jesus, rather giving them a direct answer, annoys the court by saying, “I have spoken openly to the world, I have always taught in synagogue and temple, I did not teach in secret”. Enraged by Jesus’ response the guard slaps Jesus and tries to intimidate him, but Jesus continues to speak boldly. On one hand, the passage discloses the 'I and It' relationship between the Empires' to implicate Jesus and impose unjust violence on him, and on the other, it exposes Jesus' bold defiance that nullifies Annas' expectation of reducing Jesus to a whimpering defendant.

Defiance: To Speak in Public

In Challenging Annas' interrogation, Jesus responds that he has spoken openly to the public and nothing in secret. However, it does not mean that Jesus did not have any private conversation with his disciples. His private discourses further unpacked what he said in public. One of the uniqueness of John's gospel is its lengthy discussions, be it public or private (With Nicodemus, Samaritan Women, Bread of Life discourse, Farewell discourse). All the discourses, especially the public discourse, were unmasking the masks of religious fundamentalism and political suppression in the public. As a result, the religious and political authorities were losing their hold in the public. Thus, they wanted to insult Jesus in the public on one hand, and on the other, they wanted to threaten the public,

especially his disciples, not to dare to rebel against the empires'. While Jesus was slapped, the expectations would have been either that, he will turn on the other cheek, as he taught, or he will be silent. However, Jesus did not give in for the expectations, rather, he withstands the insult of being slapped[2] in the public in order to disclose the violent nature of the religion, and continues to speak the truth boldly in the public. Turning the other cheek without bearing witness to the truth is not the fruit of moral resolution but the terrorized cowardice of the wimp. The ploy of empires' to use the public sphere to insult and threaten the defying community was shattered by Jesus, and the place of insult (Public) was inversed as the place of unmasking the criminality of the religious and political leaders.

Defiance: To Teach in the Synagogues and Temples

The Jewish Synagogues and Temples were considered to be an important part of the Jewish educational system. The synagogue was a multi-purpose assembly place used for prayer, worship, court, community center, and school. To be precise, the synagogues and temples were places of transformative education. The preliminary interrogation, initiated by the temple authorities was more with regard to theological controversies than political challenges. According to John's Gospel, Jesus' mission of transforming the evil structures begins with the cleansing of the temple (Chapter 2). However, the synoptic gospels record the cleansing of the temple as the culmination of Jesus' mission. Further, John's gospel asserts Jesus as the Messiah (Realised eschatology) and challenges the Jewish authorities' expectation of the Messiah. Thus, John's gospel records about people being threatened of excommunication from synagogue on account of following Jesus and proclaiming him as Messiah. Jesus, though a Jew, was vociferously critiquing the ritual practices of Jewish synagogues and temples, which were discriminating people based on ethnic differences and physical ailments. The synagogues and temples, supposed to manifest God's love and freedom of life, had succumbed to the powers and principalities of the Roman Empire and imitated

[2] Acts 23:2-5 records Paul accusing the High Priest as 'You Whitewashed Wall'. However, Paul was cowed by the violent response by the guard and apologizes for what he said.

Roman Empire in the religious realm. Thus, Jesus condemns the synagogue and claims to rebuild it. In other words, the teaching of Jesus will bring forth a new understanding of God, and envisage a new mission of God, a mission that proclaims life in defying death.

Conclusion

Jesus' teachings, be it public or private, unmasks the masks of religious hypocrisy and political exploitation. It also discloses the criminality of a coalition between religion and politics in order to exploit life. Thus, Jesus encourages defiance as ‘divine action' or ‘incarnated discipleship' in God' transformative and liberative mission.

May, Jesus' defiance against empires' empower us to defy anything and everything against God and God's Reign.

Prayer: Loving God, our Parent, we thank you Lord for the gift of life, love and liberation manifested in Jesus. Help us O Lord to embrace Jesus' zeal for God's Kingdom, and empower us to defy the exploitative and unjust structures that demean life. This we ask through Jesus our Lord who lives and reigns. Amen

Rev. Christy Gnanadasan

Cry as Defiance

April 13, 2019
Saturday

Matthew 26: 36 46

"Yet it was the Lord's will to crush him and cause him to suffer" - Isaiah 53: 10

Crucifixion, the most agonizing moment in the life of Jesus reminds us of His amazing patience and love for the humankind. The prayer and cry in the garden of Gethsemane was a sort of preparation for the final laying down of his life. Was Jesus' cry, a Defiance? He shared his pain, agony and all His emotions with his dear disciples by saying 'my soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death' (vs 38). However, Jesus' intention in expressing his pain with his disciples was a sign of suffering within Himself. Later, an outpouring of His agony was not rebelling or rejecting to the will of God but accepting and reaffirming His desire to do God's will. The word translated 'overwhelmed' is a word that speaks of deep grief and sorrow. Jesus is overwhelmed with this sorrow to the point of death. Jesus' experience of grief and sorrow goes far beyond anything you and I have ever experienced or ever will experience.

Cry can be understood in a broader sense:

a. A time of deep agony
b. A time of wrestling and resolution
c. A time of acceptance

The depth of inner agonies can be shared with God. Jesus was troubled, and hence, he shared it with his disciples. Some Christians think of any form of depression as a weakness of faith. If that was true, then many of the Bible's greatest saints were weak. Also, Jesus was weak in the Garden of Gethsemane, He was, but it was no sin. Weakness is common in all human experience and at times, it is the very thing that drives us to god.

A prayer and plea at the time of inner wrestling paved way for a resolution to grow strong in faith and prepared Jesus to accept the will of God.

Jesus prayed, ‘not as I will but as you will'... and God's will was done in acceptance. We may never face death on the cross, but we may see some other appalling future that sends through our whole being. At times we also tempted to say, 'how can God be so ruthless? Where is God in a time like this? The answer is God is right there. Just as He was in Gethsemane, as He was at the Cross, and as He was at the tomb raising Jesus back to life. Through all these events, God presence was affirmed. Time of acceptance to the will of God ensures life everlasting.

Our challenges and our agonies overwhelm us and push us to a state of loneliness. But, God asserts his Omni-presence. He is not hiding, nor gone astray, nor is unwilling. Rather, God is at work, and His work is always good and perfect. When Jesus left Gethsemane, the challenge of the future was still there. The agony of the Cross was still ahead. Easter was about to come. But Jesus came through Gethsemane strengthened in knowing God's will more surely and He prepared himself to come across anything God allowed in His life. Because of what happened in Gethsemane, He was now prepared even for the Cross. Jesus' time at the garden of Gethsemane with His disciples reminds us to put our trust and depend on God and God alone in times of suffering and distress. Let us be reminded during every Lent that God's will in our lives is the ultimate, and there is nothing more or less.

May God also prepare us for His perfect will in whatever we experience.

Prayer: Gracious loving, we praise and thank you Lord for the gift of love manifested in Jesus, help us to pray as Jesus prayed in Gethsemane in fulfilling your will. This we pray in Jesus’ mighty name.

Rev. S. Sujeeth Kumar

Palm Sunday Hosanna: Lord Save Us.

April 14, 2019
Sunday

Zechariah 9: 1 -12 Psalm 118:19-29
1 Timothy 4: 6-16 Luke 19: 29-40

Hosanna: Lord save us, is not just a cry for deliverance in the present, but, it is also an affirmation of the path of deliverance in the future too. The cry 'Hosanna' is to affirm the salvation/salvific work of God in Jesus Christ, and on the other hand, it is also to remember that we are saved and called to fulfill His purpose. Hosanna: Lord Save us, is to realize that God has saved us and has given us tasks to do. The 3 implications of Hosanna are:

Remembering God's act of Salvation and being Saved for Restoration: Zechariah 9: 1-12

The word 'Zechariah' means 'Yahweh remembers'. Zechariah as a prophet was used by God to show the people of Israel that God remembers the covenant made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Zachariah was himself the message of God. He was one of those who returned from Babylonian captivity and his name itself suggests the Deliverance of God. The Aramaic word 'Hosanna', which means 'Lord Save us', is a reflection of the prophetic message through Zechariah. Zechariah recollects the salvation from God which enabled the Israelites to come out of the Babylonian Captivity and urges the people to work for the restoration of the temple. His focus was not just on God's salvation, but, on the purpose of salvation from the Babylonian Captivity. The restoration of the temple was the purpose of Salvation in Zechariah.

Remembering Christ and The Teachings of Christ and being faithful: 1 Timothy 4: 6-16

This text is about the instructions given to Timothy for the purpose of correcting the faith of the community of Believers which was entrusted to him. The problem addressed was that of heresies/false teachings. The early Christian community was constantly under pressure from different teachings about Christ and false teachings preached in the name of Christ. Paul is constantly trying to defend the

faith which he affirmed in his life and ministry. In this text, it is a very specific instruction to Timothy 'not to forget Christ as the foundation of faith. Heresies and False teachings are those which contradict the life, ministry, and mission of Christ. Paul instructs the Church to remember Christ and his teachings, so that they may know the difference between false teachings and true teachings. Only if we remember Christ and his teachings, we will be faithful Christians.

Remembering the purpose of being Saved: Luke 19: 29-40

The Triumphal entry of Jesus into the Temple on a donkey is perhaps the most celebrated narration in the life of Jesus in the Gospels. Jesus is accepted as a saviour as the people cry 'Hosanna' which means 'Lord save us'. The cry of the people for salvation is a resonance of the oppressive life of the Israelites under the Roman rule. However, it is not just the Roman imperial rule, but it was the oppression of the religious system. In Jesus' time, the religion was corrupted. As Jesus entered into the city of Jerusalem, he cried looking at the temple. This is evident that the writer of this narration, namely, Luke, was able to identify that Jesus disapproved of the religious system of his time. The cleansing of the temple is a direct message to restore the temple/ restore the purpose of the temple. However, the cry of the people can be understood as a cry to be liberated from political oppression and also religious reformation, from a religious system that was oppressing people.

Conclusion

The purpose of the temple was that it would be a house of 'prayer' for all nations. That means that a temple is a place of intercession, a place where people can find God. The temple should not be a place where people find business and profit. The cleansing of the temple is a regaining of the purpose of God in the temple. 'Hosanna' is a cry for deliverance from those things which deviate the purpose of the Body of Christ, i.e. The Church. The purpose of the Church is defined by Christ and not by our own expectations. May we find our calling through the Salvation that we receive from God in enabling us to fulfill the purpose of God and not the purpose of men(people), may we seek not to please the purpose of people, but be faithful to the call of God. Amen.

Contributed by the Team

Defiance as Condemnation

April 15, 2019 Monday

John 2: 13-25

Triune God, we thank you for reforming, renewing and cleansing the Church. We recognize that Christ has the power to abolish the structures of unethical spirituality. We thank you, Lord, for defying temple's idolatry and cleansing it. Purify us O Lord, from all our immoralities, discriminations and unfairness and unite us to be part of your mystical body. We pray through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives, and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit one God world without end. Amen

Introduction

The author of the fourth Gospel communicates spirituality through signs and symbols. The prescribed text is considered as a symbolic action, which tells directly about the action of justice and equality for the underprivileged. And it also indicates a mystical spirituality, which tells Christ as the center of the worship, and He is the Temple. This idea was against the Jewish community, which believed that every aspect of their spirituality is centered on the Jerusalem Temple. Jesus' act of purification echoes that He is the Lord, and beyond the Temple. The New Testament theologian Jose M says that "Evidently, there are two happenings here: one, the Temple cleansing, two, the Temple *logion*" (= authenticity of Christ). [Jose. M., *The Gospel According to the Beloved Disciple: A Test Book for the Gospel of John,* 2011, 224-225]. Though the Evangelist John, recorded three times about the Passover festival (2:13-25; 6:4; 11:55), in his narration he never recorded the events as history like the Synoptic Gospels writers have done, but in his doctrinal outlook, he approached the existing problems in that society. According to synoptic, the Temple cleansing takes place in the last week of Jesus' ministry, after His royal entry into Jerusalem (Mk: 11:15-19; Mt. 21:0-17; Lk. 19:45-48), which was incorporated as a passion narrative.

The Defiance as Condemnation

Jesus' act of cleansing the temple is an act of defiance that condemns the misuse and abuse of the temple. Particularly, denying the place for gentiles to worship. The Temple authority interpreted this act as part of their belief. The Temple is not a place for corruption and lust of power. They disposed the offerings of the people, levied a heavy tax, and received the commission from their business partners. The Gentile Court (*hieros*) was changed to 'Annas' Market' (Annas was the High Priest), Therefore, it was a protest against exploitation, the righteous wrath of Christ in action. The Greek word *Kermatiste-* money changer, (*Kerma-* coin, *Kollubbistes* discounter vs.15) indicates exchanging coins, providing discounts and also exchanging foreign currencies. (O. M. Rao. *A commentary: St. Johns Gospel*, 2000, 94-95).

It was the Fulfillment of the Old Testament Prophecy

The house of prayer has already become a den of thieves. And the priests, inclined to materials supported it. Jesus condemns them severely. Theologically, Jesus' action is a protest against the profanation of the Temple of Jerusalem, a prophetic protest, fulfilment of the Old Testament prophecy (Mal.3:1-4). The re-establishment of the temple is the vision of Ezekiel (Eze. Chs.40-46.). It was an eschatological expectation. Here, Jesus fulfills the prophecy by referring His body as the new and eschatological temple, which is the center of the new mode of worship in spirit and truth (Jn.4:23). Therefore, the Old Temple is to be destroyed and a new Temple is to be raised (2:19), i.e. the body of Jesus.

It was an act of *parabolism* (parabolic act)

Through this parabolic act, Christ reveals the true worship as *Christocentric,* God *tabernacled* with humanity (1:14). He Himself is the Temple (Vs.19**),** which is rebuilt within three days by His death, resurrection, and ascension. The Father's house, the Church, the body of Christ, is not an organisation for social gathering, but it is a moment of communion and relationship with God as well as fellow

beings which are seldom seen today. The present ecclesiastical scenario is more are less the same as the Jerusalem Church in Jesus' time. This Temple (Church) needs to be reformed from every form of disparities, segregations, and discriminations.

Rev. Dr. K. Sathyanadh

April 16, 2019

Defiance as Curse

Tuesday

MARK 11:12-25

Heavenly Father, you continually cleanse your house which is meant to be a house of prayer. We pray that through this meditation, you will cleanse our hearts. In Christ's name. Amen.

INTRODUCTION: The text presented to us comprises of three parts the cursing of the fig tree, cleansing of the temple and lesson learned from the withered fig tree. This makes it easier for us to look at the text from three distinct points.

1) **Cursing of the Fig Tree:** Jesus curses a fig tree that has borne no fruits because it was still not a season for figs. But Jesus curses the tree saying that nobody will ever eat any fruits from it. Though Jesus explains later what he meant by cursing the fig tree, we know nothing about Jesus' discontent with a tree that is innocent of its crime. Trying to find an explanation for this act of Jesus will be an exercise in futility because there is the danger of excessive moralism and a biased, judgmental reading. At all times, Christians have to resist the temptation of an anti-Semitic reading of this text.
2) **Cleansing of the Temple:** Followed by the cursing of the fig tree, Jesus goes on to cleanse the temple of the abomination he finds in the name of trading for sacrificial purposes. It is possible that Jesus from the rural Galilee could have found the urban practices in Jerusalem deplorable. However, his emphasis is on restoring the temple as the space for prayer, rather than cultic practices.
3) **Lesson Learned From the Withered Fig Tree:** Peter sees the withered fig tree and asks Jesus about it. Jesus explains to him nothing about the withered fig tree. Instead, he is given a lesson in praying with faith and forgiveness as the basis for prayer. Peter is told to pray for what he wants from God and then give thanks as though what he has asked for as already

been given by God. But there is a catch here. He is also reminded, perhaps for the second time, that he needs to forgive those who have trespassed against him before praying.

Conclusion

Very often, we have the tendency to read defiance in this Markan structure in the acts of Jesus cursing the fig tree and in the cleansing of the temple. Such defiance indeed is a curse from which our narrow minds have to break free from in order to come home to the space of prayer and forgiveness. Defiance and curse are incomplete without prayer and forgiveness. Mark structures these episodes so beautifully as painting in which the angry Jesus himself transforms from being the cursed fig tree that blossoms into a life-giving savior through his forgiveness on the cross. To read this passage as anything else will only put us in positions of judges who pronounce curses and forget the language of prayer and forgiveness.

Rev. Sounder Rajan

Defiance as Confrontation

April 17, 2019
Wednesday,

Mathew 23:23-33

Gracious God, we thank you and praise you for the gift of your only Son Jesus Christ who has liberated us from the bondage of unjust structure by deifying the unfair authority and the Lordship of the world. Help us O Lord, as we look up to the Cross of Jesus, to understand the purpose of his very life and the death on the Cross and to challenge and courageously confront the evil of the world. Through Jesus Christ our Lord who lives and reigns with the Father Almighty forever and ever. Amen

Introduction of the theme

The word defiance is a behavior or an attitude which shows that a person is not willing to obey someone, or it is one's courageous defiance against the authority of the government. Defiance also means resistance, challenge opposition, and confrontation. A confrontation often refers to a battle between two groups of people. It also means fight, crisis, argument, encounter etc. God's redemptive history is a history of Defiance. The liberation narrative from the book of Exodus discloses God's defiance over and against the exploitative empire of Pharaoh. Similarly, the prophetic literature unveils God's defiance against religious idolatry and political repression. The death on the cross for Jesus was the result of Jesus' defiance against life-threatening structures of the society of his time.

Jesus' Defiance against Socio-Political Structure

The central social structure of the society at the time of Jesus was organized with purity-pollution as the core value. This system generated a class of untouchables and outcasts. In general, the pure/impure or clean/unclean social structure got attached to other binaries such as rich/poor, male/female, righteous/sinners, Jew/Gentile and so on and so forth. Patriarchal society encouraged hierarchy and male dominance within the family and also outside the family. Jesus accuses and challenges the evils purity-pollution and male

domination Jesus violated the purity-pollution system in his healings by touching those who were considered to be unclean. Politically there were tensions between Jews and Samaritans. The Jews' hatredness towards the Samaritans grew stronger over time.

Jesus' Defiance against Religio-Cultural Structure

The temple leaders were considered to be above others, both, in terms of economy and purity-pollution. It was crucial to see the centrality of the temple and the temple aristocracy in the whole system. Because of the centrality of the temple in Jesus' time, He stands in the tradition of the prophets of Israel who critiqued the temple culture in the name of God and became voices of alternative consciousness. Jesus destabilizes some of the most sacred taboos of his time by speaking to women and welcoming women as members of his gospel group. Purity-pollution was political and it was the ideology of the temple elites. The Jerusalem temple was geographically and symbolically the center of the purity system. Jesus' action in the temple was an anti-purity act.

Pharisees, Sadducees, and Scribes were concerned not only with religious behaviour, but also with the political issues of their day. The Pharisees did not hold political offices but rather influenced governing leaders. Mark portrays the Pharisees as plotting with the "Herodians" to destroy Jesus (Mark 3:6, 12:13). They did, however, serve on the council ("Sanhedrin") that advised the high priest (Acts of the Apostles 5:34, 23:69).

Jesus' Defiance against Economic Structures

Money changers and sellers were serving the ruling elites, facilitating payment of taxes and system of purity through sacrifice. Jesus' action protested against the temple as the center of an economically and politically oppressive dominating system. In ancient Judaism, there was no sharp distinction between religion and politics. The common people were taxed by both government and religious authorities. Taxes were paid in three ways: like money, as a percentage of crops or animals, or as forced labor. The local tax collectors were among the most despised members of the Jewish communities for several reasons: (1) they earned money by collecting other people's money,

which was considered dishonourable in itself; (2) they had a reputation for dishonesty

Jesus Corrected and Confronted Publicly

Jesus confronted the false teachings of the Scribes and Pharisees by teaching His disciples to be on constant guard against it. Jesus directly confronted false teachers in the church by saying, "Woe to you…hypocrites." When they came to trick Him, Jesus frequently silenced the Chief Priests, Scribes, Pharisees, and Sadducees by putting them in their place. Jesus did not fear to tell people in the most confrontational way "You're wrong." Jesus often exposed the true nature of the wickedness of false teachers by using animal names to metaphorically describe Pharisees as the "offspring of serpents" and false teachers as "wolves".

Conclusion

Jesus' message and an act of defiance embodied an alternative social vision. The heart of his message was about the coming of "the kingdom of God." Jesus' message was also religious: he was passionate about "the Kingdom of God" where peace and Justice prevails. That passion led him to defy the Lordship of Caesar and confront the unjust structures and authorities by his teachings and actions, to proclaim the kingdom of God.

Rev. Victor Prabhakar

Maundy Thursday
Eucharist: Communion of Suffering Humanity

18th April 2019
Thursday

Exodus 12:2-171 Corinthians 11:23-34
Psalms 116 Mark 14:17-25

Prayer: ***Thank you, Lord, for inviting all of us to your throne of grace. We wish to acknowledge this time of taking part in your precious body and blood as a memorable one in our life. Give us the grace to realize that this bread and wine is your precious body and blood. Transform us through your atonement. Help us to realize your presence in our day to day life. Let your spirit lead us in Jesus name. Amen.***

Today's meditation draws our attention towards two important events in the journey of Lent. Firstly, it is observed as Maundy Thursday and secondly, to commemorate this event, church all over the world observes the Lord's Supper to fulfill the commandment given by our Lord himself, the fulfiller of scriptures and prophecies. Particularly, our Lord's action mentioned in Mark 14:17-25 recalls the gospel of John 1:29 "Behold the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the whole world." In this connection, I presume the prescribed texts shall certainly do needful.

Exodus 12:2-17: Yahweh's command

Following are the salient features of this text. The account speaks of the first Passover which took place in Egypt, during the slavery in the land of Goshen. It is the commandment of the Lord that the day of the Passover to be the first month of the year (v. 2 narrates “this should be the first month”). Some of the primordial issues in the first Passover are as follows. 1) Passover always has the provision of God, 2) The Passover required preparation on the part of the people. They had to find a lamb and make the preparation. 3) They had to appropriate the provision. 4) They had to apply it, by putting the blood on the doorpost and by getting ready to leave. 5) Then God comes to act and performance came forth on His part. It was celebrated for seven days beginning from the fifteenth day of the month Abib (Nisan, the period

March-April; Exod. 23:15; 34:18-20). It was later combined with the Passover (Exod. 12:1-20; Ezek. 45:21-24; Matt. 26:17; Luke 22:1).

Historically, Passover was Hebrew's nomadic spring festival which was observed even before they arrived in Egypt. *Pesa* obviously indicates the Hebrew thought of reflecting that Yahweh skipped over and spared the Hebrew firstborn. It was a night celebration, held at full moon before the spring equinox. Unleavened bread and bitter herbs were always part of the celebration of the spring full moon. These were taken care before the nomads would begin their trek to fresh pastures. Nevertheless, Passover bread was an agricultural feast fused with unleavened bread.

Passover is the fundamental festival of the Exodus event which is connected with the Exodus-Sinai and the ongoing life of the Hebrew community. While celebrating Passover, Hebrews' actualizes God's mighty redemptive act in history both past and future. It was an act of sacrifice, looking back to the sacrifice of the firstborn as well as looking forward to the sacrificial system of the Jerusalem Temple.

Passover encrypts in itself the bondage under Pharaoh in Egypt, the coming out from Egyptian slavery, miracle at the Red Sea and all the events that took place in Egypt, from the journey through the wilderness and their settlement in the Promised Land. Through the sacrifice which takes place in Passover, the relationship between Yahweh and His people is restored, re-established and maintained. A communication between divine and human is carried on through material things. In other words, it is a mode of converse between deity and humanity. The relationship between Yahweh and His chosen community is thus sealed when people act according to the command given.

1 Corinthians 11:23-34: Paul's warning

The text witnesses the only reference to the Lord's Supper outside the Gospels. With regard to the text, it has been said that the focus of unity had become the focus of division, an irony often repeated in the history of Christianity. The primary motto of unity and mutual sharing (10:16-17) has become an expression of greed and selfishness (11:21) in the church at Corinth. Consequently,

appreciation in Ch. 11:1 disappears but the warning has been issued in v. 29.

With regard to Paul's warning to the Corinthian way of approach to Lord's Table, it is quite important to observe the following statement of the first century A. D. Musonius Rufus, philosopher, and moralist noted that Greco-Roman meal times provided opportunities for not one but for many sins. The ancient literary and archaeological records make clear that which Paul addressed and censured in this section were widespread also in Greco-Roman culture and practice. Failure of recognizing the bread during the sacrament as the body of Christ, as of the church in Paul's argument is a sin. In fact, both indifferent attitude while approaching the Lord's Table and lack of realization of the presence of Christ had led to a disaster and chaotic situation while sharing the body and blood of Christ. Paul's observation (do more harm than good) of the Corinthians behaviour at the Lord's Table reveals the depth of his displeasure.

The Greek and Roman meal time gathering is well documented with the ancient literary testimony by Plato, Plutarch, Juvenal, Pliny, and Lucian. A handful of archaeological artifacts mentions the need for religious and non-religious assemblies and guilds to regulate the problems associated with meal times. One of the Latin inscriptions from Pompeii stated it, "Be sociable and put aside if you can, annoying quarrels. If you can't, go back to your own home." Paul's passion for Christ's in-depth knowledge, respect, and commitment to scriptures lead him to condemn the reasons for the divisions during the communal meal.

Mark 14:17-25: Last Passover first Lord's Supper

In connection with the text, it would be appropriate to say, "The lost was found." What was lost? It was not the materials, but the very purpose of the institution of the Passover feast was lost. The life and witness of Christ Jesus transformed an ordinary festival of Passover into an extraordinary celebration. Through His sacrifice, Jesus opened an eternal door for all sinners. It is evident that through the

Commandment given by our Lord the festival had been observed within Israel's community. However, the same is now celebrated throughout the world by all ethnic, culture and nations. What was impossible for others made possible by the last supper of Christ Jesus. What was confined to Israel is now declared open to all. Here, it would be suitable to discuss the given theme that is "Eucharist: Communion of Suffering Humanity." It is not only for the suffering Israel but the permanent remedy was sought for sinful humanity through the sacrifice of Christ Jesus. The Biblical theology of restoration and redemption is well actualized by the Lamb of God. What was advised by the Lord in Exodus 12 is happening through the son of God. The one who told to people in the land of slavery is here involving Himself to bring forth people from not only earthly bondage but also from spiritual slavery. Thus, Eucharist (our Lord's last supper & thanksgiving) became the symbol and force of uniting people for eternity. This is possible when we take part in the body and blood of Jesus. Whenever people approach His table to take part in His body and blood, it requires, a high commitment to Christ because the book of Hebrews' narrates in ch. 11:28 "by faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood so that the destroyer of the firstborn would not touch the firstborn of Israel." 12:24 "and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel." Let us, therefore, approach the Lord's Table with commitment and love.

May God the Almighty bless everyone!

Rev. William Jones. S

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Good Friday April 19, 2019

Cross: Accomplishment of Salvation Friday

Exodus 14:15-22 John 19: 23- 30

Hebrews 13:8-17 Psalm 22.

Our Lord Jesus Christ, we thank you for the salvation which you have given to all who believe in you. We pray that your salvific work on the cross would become the expression of our life and that we would become agents to lead people in the way of salvation. We pray that you would enlighten us through your work so that you may accomplish your purpose in our life. Amen.

Introduction

Salvation is the most common term used in Christianity. Salvation is mostly understood in the context of the salvific work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. It is limited only to the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ on the cross for the sins of the whole world. This understanding leads to a very narrow and limited view of Salvation. Salvation is not a one-time-event which happened in the past, neither is it beginning and ending with Christ. Salvation is a ongoing and continuous process in the life of every individual which is accomplished in Christ. Each individual becomes a recipient of salvation from God, as it is God's gift to humanity. However, it can be said that the salvific work of God is fulfilled/completed in the life-witness-ministry of Jesus Christ.

Salvation is an individual experience, but it is not limited to an individual. The individual who is the recipient of salvation becomes the agent of Salvation in his/her continuous experience of it. Scripture as a whole presents to us the many narratives which bear witness to the saving act of God. These saving acts of God are found in abundance in the Law (Torah), Writings (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Songs of Songs, Ecclesiastes) and Prophets (major and minor). In Jesus Christ, it becomes a fulfillment of the Old Testament and the Ecclesia (body of Christ) becomes the agent of salvation from God for all people. The 3 texts present the progression/development of the salvific work of God

which is fulfilled/accomplished by/in people of every age and generation.

Ex.14:15-22: Salvation is accomplished in God, not by People

This narrative presents the salvific act of God in saving the Israelites from bondage/death. The deliverance of the Israelites was not completed after they left Egypt. The deliverance of God continued throughout the life of the Israelite community. The command of God to the people of Israelites was to cross over the sea and the command to Moses was to life up his staff and stretch it out to divide the sea. The miraculous escape of the Israelites from the onslaught of the Egyptian army is attributed to God alone and not to any leader or army or group. The cloud of fire and the parting of the sea is the work of God. Salvation is from God alone. Humans do not possess salvation or own it.

Hebrews 13:8-17: Salvation is accomplished by faith through grace, not by works

This epistle is in the context of diverse teachings within the early church which divert them from faith in Christ and leads them to faith in works. Vs. 9-10 directly warns the readers not to give into any teaching that makes food a standard of purity and pollution. Food is not the means to purity or pollution. The writer of Hebrews affirms that the grace of God is sufficient and that any rule/regulations which become the basis of distinction between purity and pollution negates the grace of God. The call for those who are part of the salvation in Christ is found in the call to go outside the camp (vs. 13). The salvation of God is humiliated and loses its purpose if it is limited to the concept of purity/pollution based on regulations of food. The call to go outside the camp is to move beyond our own regulations/ boundaries of purity and pollution and become part of the saving grace of Christ.

John 19: 23- 30 Salvation is accomplished by fulfilling God's purpose, not our own

This text presents us with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In the precise last moments of his death, Jesus Christ is able to look beyond his

death and see the fulfilling of God's plan in the life of humanity. However, the salvation of God is not fulfilled unless we, the agents of God's salvation work together to fulfill God's plan. Mission and ministry is not about fulfilling our own interest, but the higher purpose in Christ. Our mission of saving souls, converting, leading people to Christ, spreading the Gospel, preaching the goodnews, etc., is not our mission, but our mission is to fulfill God's purpose in life by experiencing salvation everyday. Our mission is not to convert/save souls. That is God's work; we are but agents of his salvation who deliver his message through our lives. Christianity is not about preaching the good news, it is about being the good news.

Conclusion

Our zeal for spreading the gospel would be futile if we are narrow-minded and unwilling to open our boundaries to others. Mission is not about extending our boundaries and conquering souls; mission is about removing boundaries so that God's grace is unlimited. Christianity, today, is caught up in the zeal to convert people/nations. Salvation has become a commodity which can be traded by works/deeds. Salvation has been reduced to a theory and a doctrine for propagation and not as an experience in Christ. We, conveniently, overlook the fact that salvation is not our property and that we are but just agents who are called to fulfill God's work by living a life which is in the experience of the salvation of God everyday.

Rev. George Jayaprabhu

JESUS' FIRST WORD FROM THE CROSS

Then Jesus said, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing." Luke 23:34

Introduction

Jesus' first word from the cross is a reflection of the most important values in humanity, i.e., forgiveness. It has the power to change a situation of conflict and chaos into a situation of mutual respect and understanding. These words of Jesus exemplify the true nature of God. The image of Jesus Christ on the cross is not an image of sympathy and empathy; it is an image of the suffering of God for humanity. The image of the suffering God is a contrast to the dominant imagery found in other mythology and narratives. These words of Jesus give us a small glimpse into the true nature of God.

Forgiveness is a Reflection of the Nature of God

The suffering Christ is also the forgiving Christ. Jesus was the embodiment of the nature of God. When people looked at Jesus they had different opinions about him. Once, when Jesus asked his disciples about how people understood him, they replied by saying that some thought of him as the reincarnation of John the Baptist or one of the prophets. It was Peter's declaration of Jesus as the Son of God that defined the personhood of Jesus. In Jesus, we experience God. It is in the experience of the person of Jesus that we are able to experience the nature of God. If Jesus had said a prayer of revenge, it would have been against the merciful and loving nature of God. The forgiveness of God in human history is a testament of God's unchanging love for all. God loves humanity and the love is expressed in forgiveness.

It is a Prayer for the Human Condition

The human condition is the basis of the sacrificial death of Jesus on the Cross. The fallenness of the human beings is the deviation from the

image which God gave to humanity at the time of creation. The deviation from the image of God by humanity is the deviation from the ways of God. Human beings have deviated and still continue to deviate from the ways of God. Jesus' prayer for forgiveness is mentioned in the context of the soldiers crucifying him and then dividing his clothes on one hand, and the people mocking him on the other. Jesus' prayer for forgiveness to these groups of people is because of their ignorance of their sin. 'They do not know what they are doing' is often interpreted as a way to claim that forgiveness is for those who commit sin without knowing that they have sinned. But, ignorance of sin is the ignorance of the consequence of sin. Sin is not committed in ignorance, but, sin is committed as a voluntary and conscious act/deed by overlooking the consequence of sin. The consequence of sin, viz., 'death' is the focus of this prayer of forgiveness. Jesus was dying for the sake of the human condition, but human beings are unable to understand or comprehend the magnitude of the consequence of sin. Sin is not just the death of the body; it is the death of relationships, death of humanity, death of truth, death of justice, death of righteousness, death of everything that promotes life.

Conclusion

The prayer of forgiveness by Jesus is the ultimate test of his teaching and ministry. Very often our preaching and ministry is challenged by how we react to suffering/pain/humiliation/rejection etc. Our reaction to difficult situations will determine our faith in Christ. May we continue to hold on to our faith even thought we may be crucified. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Solomon Thomas

JESUS' SECOND WORD FROM THE CROSS

And he said to him, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise." St. Luke 23:43

Being given the choice of choosing between Jesus and Barabbas, the crowd, much to the shock and worry of Pontius Pilate, chose to have the latter released from prison, in spite of Barabbas having serious charges of murder and insurrection leveled against him.

Table showing a comparison between the gospels of the description of the two men crucified on either side of Jesus

Event	Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Description of two men:	27:38	15:27	23:32	19:18
Reviling of Jesus by the men:	27:44	15:32	23:39 ***One*** of the criminals who were hanged railed at him, saying, "Are you not the Christ? Save yourself and save us!"	No record of any reviling/ railing by either of the criminals/ Robbers
Repentance of one of the men:	No record of any repentance	No record of any repentance	23:40-42	No record of any Repentance
Breaking of men's legs:	No record of such act	No record of such act	No record of such act	19:32

What happened to Barabbas later is not recorded in Biblical history. But the good news to him was that he was a free man of the Passover

that year. The table above captures a glimpse of the entire description about the criminals/robbers (sic) in the four gospels. It is quite clear from the synoptic readings that the criminal/s indulged in the act of reviling Jesus, probably as an outbreak of pain and agony. While the writer of John's gospel does not provide much detail of any conversation between the criminals and Jesus, except about their legs being broken, Luke alone provides extra information on the conversation between the three hanging men. Going by what Matthew and Mark wrote, the act of reviling seems to have certainly occurred. It could be safely surmised that one of the criminals underwent a change with the passage of time, while on the cross. Jesus was crucified at the third hour (Mark 15:25). According to Matthew, Mark, & Luke there was darkness from the sixth to the ninth hour. Luke records Jesus promising paradise before the description of the 3-hour darkness. Therefore the initial 3-hour period and the behavior of Jesus during that period could have triggered repentance in one of the criminals, leading him to a reward at the last page of his earthly life.

Two men experienced a change because of Jesus on that day! One, Barabbas, released at least from the earthly prison*(indeed a good Friday for him)*, and two, the criminal, who certainly was given a chance to shed his inner guilt and pass on to the other side of life (death) more peacefully. Whom do we resemble? Barabbas or…the one who received the promise of paradise? Saved by chance *(and lost in history)* or saved by choice *(and recorded in the annals)?*

Rev. Sudhakar Joshua P

JESUS' THIRD WORD FROM THE CROSS

Woman, behold your son..... Behold your mother (John 19: 26 & 27)

This third word is the most poignant one, raising questions and giving answers at the same time! The presence of women at the cross is mentioned in all the four gospels. In addition, John mentions the beloved disciple of Jesus without mentioning the name. Of all the people at the cross, it was Mary who was affected the most. She probably spent her entire life "pondering" (Luke 1: 19).

Now there are two instances in the gospels where Jesus speaks to Mary. One in John 2, at the wedding at Cana, when Mary communicates to Jesus that the hosts have run out of wine. He addresses her as woman. The other is at the cross. This time it is not Mary who starts the conversation. Christ is able to see her heart, just as he perceives the thoughts, desires, fears and motives of all humanity. He is perfectly aware of how devastating it could be for a Jewish family to lose their first born son. In comforting Mary through this third word on the cross, Jesus Christ is also putting to rest all the pondering. He is making it abundantly clear that his family is a much larger entity.

Elsewhere in the gospels, Jesus tells the crowd, "For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt 12: 50). Family is one of the most precious gifts of God. Within the family this precious relationship between child and mother finds a new expression. Jesus Christ draws Mary to look beyond family and create a new community of people who are committed to following Christ faithfully and also are bound by the same cords that would unite any family

There are several conclusions that we can draw
(1) family is certainly important. Jesus was fulfilling a duty in making sure his trusted disciple takes care of Mary. Mention must also be made of John who responded willingly and immediately. Gone are the days of joint family. Very rarely do people see the need to relate to family members beyond the immediate circle. The concept of living

together, without commitments and without the covenant relationship serves to dilute the concept of family. But Christ is not only affirming family as it is meant to be, but also affirming caring as a moral duty within the family. Many parents are left to fend for themselves, wondering where the children are and whether they will ever hear from them. Some are cruelly abandoned in bus stations and railway stations to 'wait ' for the son who will never come back. God in his wisdom has placed us in families. As we meditate on what was important to Jesus as he hung on the cross, may we reach out to our family members

Family goes beyond blood relatives

Within the body of Christ i.e. the Church, we are called to reach out to each other, simply because we belong to each other. I Corinthians chapter 12 reminds us that family implies everyone in the church "As it is there are many parts, yet one body" (v 20). Let us reach out beyond our family members, reach out to the homeless, hungry, angry, lonely, depressed, harassed, hopeless and neglected ones. Many times we are so far sighted that we care about people in another continent more than the people in the next apartment. May God have mercy on us and bless us this Lenten season with new vision and a renewed heart.

Rev. Rachel Sudarshan

JESUS' FOURTH WORD FROM THE CROSS

“And about the ninth hour, Jesus cried with a loud voice, '*Eloi Eloi Lama Sabachthani*?' that is 'My God My God why have you forsaken me?' Mathew 27: 46

At the very center of the Seven Last Words, the Fourth Word is probably both Jesus' lowest point as well as a theological high point of the crucifixion. The early crowds have long ago dispersed and the long time of waiting for death had begun. An eerie darkness has descended upon the entire area, a crushing gloom. The criminals on either side are still alive -- and might have lived for days on the cross. But Jesus is not so strong. He has somehow endured a cruel scourging that would have killed lesser men.

Six hours on the cross: He has lost a lot of blood, even before climbing the hill to Golgotha and having his hands and feet nailed to the rough cross. Mark tells us, "It was the third hour when they crucified him" (Mark 15:25). Sometime after the crucifixion took place, Luke tells us: "It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour" (Luke 23:44). Jesus lasts only six hours.

Darkness over the Land: Luke 23:44-45a

The word, used here to mean "stopped shining" (NIV), "failed" (NRSV), "was darkened" (KJV) is ekleipô (from which we get our English word "eclipsed"). It means to "fail, give out, die out." An eclipse has taken place not so long ago on November 24, 29 AD, but what takes place this day is no natural eclipse. A normal eclipse would have been physically impossible during the time of the full moon on which Passover falls. We aren't told how it happens. The darkening may have been caused locally by a *hamsin* or sirocco wind. We just don't know. Throughout Jerusalem -- and especially in this killing ground - the darkness is felt, heavy and foreboding. But what does the darkness mean? What is its significance? There are probably several possibilities and levels of meaning:

1. A symbol of moral darkness, "when darkness reigns" (Luke 22:53).

2. A fulfillment of prophecy. (Joel 2:31, Amos 8:9-10)
3. A portent of the death of a king. Philo, a first century AD Jewish writer, saw supernatural eclipses as "indications either of the impending death of some king or of the destruction of some city." –
4. The Father's anger at how his only begotten Son is being treated (Isaiah 3:10b-11).
5. The Father's judgment on the sins of the world being borne on Christ's shoulders as he hangs on the cross. The Lamb of God was bearing in himself the sins of the world!

A Darkness that Can Be Felt

The darkness was palpable, "a darkness that could be felt," reminiscent of the darkness over the land of Egypt in the Ninth Plague (Exodus 10:21-22). There is a similarity between the three days of darkness and the three hours of darkness.

"Jesus cried out in a loud voice" (Mark 15:34; Matthew 27:46). Mark uses the verb boaô to describe this cry: "to use one's voice at high volume, call, shout, cry out." It can be used of emotionally charged cries of joy or of excited crowds, but especially "of pleading petitions or anguished outcries."

Eloi, Eloi, My God, My God! (Mark 15:34-35): Jesus is quoting the first verse of Psalm 22, a psalm full of predictions of his crucifixion. Some of those listening seem to have mistaken the call of "Eloi" with a call for Elijah. Elijah was considered by Judaism of that time as one who would come in the Last Days to be a helper in time of need, to save the righteous.

It is noteworthy that this is the only time that Jesus addresses "God" this way in prayer. In all his other recorded prayers he uses the term "Father," probably reflecting the intimate form *Abba*. But here in his hour of greatest desolation, he addresses God as would any other supplicant. This doesn't represent loss of faith. The fact that he is praying, "My God," shows that he still trusts God. But the intimacy of fellowship seems to have been broken. There is a loss of contact. Jesus can no longer feel his Father's presence.

Why Have You Forsaken Me?

"Forsaken" is a hard word for us to even think about. In Greek it is enkataleipô, "to separate connection with someone or something, forsake, abandon, desert." We are so steeped in the promises from the Old and New Testaments to the contrary: But clearly, Jesus senses that he is utterly forsaken by God.

Attempts to Mitigate the Cry of Desolation

Does not Jesus' forsakenness somehow suggest that he wasn't divine after all? How could Jesus as Son of God be separated from the Father? Isn't this an oxymoron? It is true that in ancient times before the Psalms were numbered, a particular psalm would be referred to by its first line. And much of Psalm 22 obviously pre-figures the elements of Jesus' crucifixion. But to suggest that by speaking the first verse of Psalm 22 Jesus was actually signaling the hope and triumph with which the Psalm ends twists the obvious meaning of Jesus' cry.

The phrase "Jesus cried out in a loud voice" makes it clear that this is a very real prayer reflecting the agony of the Cup drunk to its very dregs on the cross.

The question, "Why is Jesus cut off from God?" reveals the quandary that we're in. It suggests a division in the Trinity itself -- which is unthinkable! We have no theology to explain or describe it. But cut off, Jesus is. Why?

A verse from the Old Testament helps us understand:

"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2).

God is holy and righteous, so much so that unholy men are in danger if they try to draw close to him -- "For the LORD your God is a consuming fire" (Deuteronomy 4:24; cf. Hebrews 12:29). We must keep our distance. Our sins and iniquities have caused a separation between us and God -- a great gulf or chasm between us. The Hebrew

verb is bâdal, "divide, separate, sever." That he has "hidden his face from you" (Isaiah 59:2b) means that we can't experience communion with him or sense his presence in our lives. "He will not hear" (Isaiah 59:2c).

The Lamb of God

But what does this have to do with the sinless Jesus? Paul explains: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." (2 Corinthians 5:21)

Jesus is forsaken by God because he has taken our sins upon him. He is atoning for our sins. He is, "the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). John is probably referring to Jesus as the ultimate Paschal or Passover Lamb, a sacrifice made on behalf of the whole world (Exodus 12:1-13).

The Garden of Gethsemane

Jesus' struggle to complete the Father's plan of redemption intensifies in the Garden of Gethsemane, the night before Jesus is crucified. Luke describes the scene: “[Jesus] withdrew about a stone's throw beyond [his disciples], knelt down and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.' And being in anguish, he prayed more earnestly, and his sweat was like drops of blood falling to the ground." (Luke 22:41-42, 44)

The "cup" is used as a figurative expression for "destiny." Several times in the Bible we read of drinking a cup of suffering and judgment. Jesus refers to drinking "the cup the Father has given me" (John 18:11; Matthew 20:22; 26:39; Mark 14:36).

Jesus' "cup," however, wasn't death, even death on the cross. His "cup" is the requirement that the holy Jesus bear our unholy sins and, as a result, receive in himself the judgment and punishment of God for our sins.

Jesus knows that the cross would mean separation from God. He struggles hard against it. Yet in the end, he prays, "Not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42). He has made his decision.

The Darkness, the Horror, and the Forsakenness

Now the horror and magnitude of this "cup" come in full fury as the darkness of God's judgment grows heavy and he feels the Father's comforting presence sucked away. He who has been with the Father from all eternity is now utterly alone!

The Father's focus at this hour is severe judgment upon the sins Jesus is bearing.

Jesus' agonizing cry, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me," enables us to have a tiny glimpse of what it must have cost Jesus to die for our sins. Our forgiveness is not free, dear friends, neither for the Father nor for the Son. It wrenches them apart and puts them on opposite sides -- as enemies -- if only for a little while.

Jesus' agonizing saying from the cross teaches us something about how much the Father and Son both love us -- so much that that they are willing to sever for a time their love for each other. Now, perhaps, we can understand better the Fourth Word from the cross: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34b) But the Evangelists, three of whom mention it, evidently consider it to have indicated in some sense the sympathy of nature with her Lord. It was as if the sun refused to look on such a deed of shame. It may be supposed that by this weird phenomenon the noises around the cross were in some degree hushed. At length the silence was broken by Christ Himself, who, in a loud voice, gave utterance to the fourth word from the cross. This was a word of astonishment and agony, yet also of victory.

As the flower, by being crushed, yields up its fragrant essence, so he, by taking into his heart the sin of the world, brought salvation to the world.

He himself bore our sins in his body upon the cross, so that, free from sin, we might live for righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed." 1 Peter 2:24

Rev. R. Mohanraj

JESUS' FIFTH WORD FROM THE CROSS

When Jesus knew that all was now finished, he said, “I am thirsty” John 19:28

God of life, who delivered and journeyed with the people of Israelites from slavery; in brokenness we beseech you. We pray for those people who are longing to live a life in fullness. Empower us Jesus, to be a disturbing presence in the midst of unjust structures and practices. Amen

Thirst for life is the outcry of the society we live in. Be it in India or elsewhere, the society is traumatized with violence, anger, struggle, fear, pain and agony. The very reason behind this display is that, our society is determined by awful acts of injustice, discrimination, conflicts and immense violence.

Jesus' cry, “I AM THIRSTY,” is the reminder of the gruesome physical suffering. When blood is drained from the body, it is natural for a crucified person to feel thirsty. The Gospels do not deny the fact that Jesus lived, suffered and died as a human. Can this be the one who, standing in Jerusalem not long before, surrounded with a great multitude, lifted up his voice and cried, 'If any man thirsts, let him come unto me and drink'?

He identified himself with our physical suffering and this is the basis of our hope. He saw the crowd which was thirsty, hungry, longing to be healed, craving for love and acceptance and on the other hand, he saw the crowd who condemned him for his just act. After hours of mocking, causing physical and mental pain, walking in scorching heat towards Golgotha, carrying the cross to the point of crucifixion, Jesus responds to a human need of his body, I am thirsty.

Thirst has a much more boarder meaning. The Johannine writer differs from the synoptic writers. The Johannine style is often symbolic, with different layers of meaning embedded into it. We might as well wonder what was offered to Jesus when He said “I am thirsty,” as there are different versions of this event in the Gospels.

Was it wine mixed with gall/myrrh (Matthew 27:34, Mark 15:23) or sour wine (Luke 23:36) or sour wine on a hyssop branch that quenched Jesus' thirst? Jesus refuses to drink in Matthew and Mark.

Luke captures this feeling when he says, “the soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering sour wine.” (23:36) But Jesus refused. The drink offered was a drug to make him immune to his suffering. But, interestingly, John brings in an additional metaphor that quenches Jesus' thirst. It is said, Jesus was offered wine in a branch of hyssop and he drank it. In creating a deeper significance to the cross, the author uses symbolism and irony. One of these is the stalk of hyssop used by the soldiers to raise the drugged sponge to the lips of Jesus. Since the people of Israel used hyssop (Exodus 12:22), it has often been proposed that there is a Passover symbolism intended here

The hyssop branch is a further aspect of this Passover symbolism and functions as a reminder to the paradigmatic reader that there is much more to this death than the execution of a religious subversive. We can draw a link between the crucifixion and the Passover sacrifice. A Passover lamb was not generally regarded as a sacrifice for sin, but was more closely associated with deliverance from death. According to Exodus, Passover was not an event to atone for sin, but to prevent the destroyer from entering their home and slaying their firstborn

Notes

1. Hyssop is a small bushy plant much like an herb. (Gail R. O'Day and Susan E. Hylen, John, USA: Westminster John Knox Press, 2006, p.188); Hyssop is 'a small wall growing plant' well adapted for sprinkling. (C.K. Barrett, The Gospel According to St. John: An Introduction with Commentary, London: SPCK, 1962, p.460).
2. It seems John's purpose is to set forth Jesus as the true paschal lamb, slaughtered for the deliverance of his people (John 1:29, 36; 19:14) and it could be recalled that hyssop played an important part in Passover observance. Jesus' cry is a subversive cry which stands in solidarity as a paschal lamb not only to deliver the people from the clutches of oppression and exploitation but also to enhance and empower the life which thirsts to live a life in fullness.

Rev. G. S. Shalini

JESUS' SIXTH WORD FROM THE CROSS

When Jesus had received the vinegar, he said, "it is finished"; and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit. John 19: 30

Jesus began his ministry of proclaiming the gospel of God by saying in St. Mark 1:15, "the time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel." The fulfilled time of God is the beginning of the ministry of Jesus on the earth. Fulfillment leading to a new beginning is a unique combination. Also the context where Jesus began was the time when John the Baptist was arrested and later beheaded. John the Baptist came to prepare the way for Jesus and fulfilled his purpose of God in his life. Fulfilling God's purpose in our life should lead to a new beginning. This we see in the lives of John the Baptist and Jesus.

To have a new beginning, we must always analyze the context. Seven words on the cross signify the final call of Jesus to humanity for the same message for which he became incarnate: Forgiveness, invitation to paradise, uniting the human bonds, assurance of God's presence, thirst for life, sense of accomplishment and surrendering to God's will. Taking the sixth worth, "it is finished"- a sense of accomplishment is revealed. We will analyze the following contexts supported by the gospel writers.

Bitterness:

In Matthew 27: 34, 'they offered him wine to drink, mixed with gall, but when he tasted it, he would not drink it.' Matthew brings out the bitter situation where wine is mixed with gall (Gall means bitter); this combination of mixing wine with gall becomes a pain killer to ease the suffering and agony. We read that Jesus tasted, but would not drink. Jesus was willing to go through the pain and agony; there was no easy way out to end what he began some time ago. Let us not be in a hurry to escape our suffering and pain, but endure the pain, just as Jesus did.

Mockery:

In Mark and Luke's passion narratives, we analyze a context of mockery. Mark 15:36, 'And someone ran and filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on a reed, and gave it him to drink, saying, "wait, let us see whether Elijah will come to take him down." (Luke 23:36-37) The soldiers also mocked him, coming up and offering him sour wine and

saying, “If you are the king of the Jews, save yourself.” Jesus could withhold all the mockery and this shows his ultimate faith in God, even in worst times. Let us learn to withstand the mockery in our life to depend on God alone, just as Jesus did.

Brokenness:

'When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It Is Finished”, and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit'. In the context of suffering and pain, Jesus gave up the spirit with his head bowed down; it is a grand finale to the work that he began, strived hard to build and now, it stands finished. To begin a work with all courage and strength is well appreciated but to accomplish and finish the work in the midst of brokenness deserves confidence in God alone, just as Jesus did.

'It is finished' should be the beginning motif of a work that has a new start. With all enthusiasm it is a common attitude to have a new beginning, but it takes the attitude of Jesus Christ, even on the cross with all bitterness, mockery, brokenness to accomplish and finish the will of God. Let us build an attitude of Jesus Christ in our life context. AMEN.

Rev. Hemalatha. J

JESUS' SEVENTH WORD FROM THE CROSS

“Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” Luke 23:46

Call to struggle & solidarity: From Nazareth to Jerusalem

The road from Nazareth to Jerusalem was strewn with incidents of glory and pain, both of which, Jesus, assisted by the twelve had to deftly handle. The incidents leading to the death of Jesus on the cross were not sudden or abrupt. Jesus predicted several times, as recorded in the four gospels that he was to certainly be rejected by the authorities in the capital, and finally face physical and mental torture. Jesus saw clearly the path that would lead him to the cross, and right from the beginning of his ministry, did not succumb to any earthly (or worldly) forms of glorification, either when he was tempted or almost worshipped for a miracle. The call to struggle and express solidarity with the commoners demanded that Jesus earn the wrath of the political and religious authorities in Galilee and Judea.

Having taken the painful route to Golgotha via the cross, Jesus faces his ultimate test of pain and patience while hanging between heaven and earth, counted as a criminal, and nagged by the passers-by. “Was this the meaning of struggle and solidarity?” he would have wondered groaningly while hanging on the tree. Amidst all the suffering, he asks for forgiveness in his first word, promises paradise in the second, creates a new family in the third, conveys abandonment in the fourth, expresses thirst in the fifth, and almost hangs his boots in the sixth.

Theology of Luke - last words of Jesus

Luke has placed the rending of the temple curtain 'before' the death of Jesus (23:45). Most scholars read this verse as a sequence to the sun's light failing, thus reading the rending of the temple curtain as an eschatological sign accompanying the death of Jesus. According to the prophecy of Joel, “The sun shall be turned to darkness, and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes.” (Joel 2:31) The rending of the temple curtain indicates an opening

of access to the inner presence of God. It can be interpreted in close conjunction with the celestial signs predicted by Jesus earlier in Luke 21:5-11. Luke, through the torn veil, has demonstrated symbolically that the holiness-purity matrix embodied in, and emanating from the temple has been undermined. This message was affirmed through Peter's vision in Acts 10:9-23.

The call to struggle and solidarity: Possible application for today

The episode describing the death and burial of Jesus is recorded in all the four gospels, though, with a few variations. The confession of the centurion, who was in-charge of executing the punishment, is recorded by Matthew, Mark, and Luke. His confession is significant because he witnesses the entire drama beginning from the scourging of Jesus to the nailing on the cross. The mother's tears, the wailing of other women, the jeering by the crowd, the allegations of the Council members, the murmurs of the thief next to Jesus- all of these were certainly observed by the centurion, who had to carry out the task of crucifying Jesus. This was certainly not the first crucifixion he supervised; yet, the events that followed the death of Jesus leads the centurion to praise God (Lk 23:47). Matthew and Mark report the centurion's words as “this man was the son of God,” while Luke records it as “surely, this was a righteous man.” Since the centurion was a Roman official, his testimony of the one who “struggled,” is highly significant. According to Mark, the centurion is summoned by Pilate before the body of Jesus is handed over to Joseph of Arimathea, to confirm the death of Jesus. So, here again, the commander of a hundred marks an important point in salvation history. It can be surmised conveniently that the centurion would have gathered more information about the path taken by Jesus from the people who were very much present in Jerusalem. He, like Pilate could clearly see the intention of the authorities behind their decision to nail Jesus on the cross.

The description of the burial of Jesus would fall short of completion, if it does not mention the name of Joseph of Arimathea, who “had not consented to the decision and action” of the Council, in spite of being its member. According to the gospel of John, Nicodemus, another

Council member, along with the Arimathean, took voluntary charge of embalming and burying the body of Jesus. Under normal circumstances, this act could be viewed as both unusual and simultaneously, praiseworthy. Joseph and Nicodemus must have tried to prevent the crucifixion and felt such anguish at what must have seemed like total failure. Joseph could not prevent Jesus' death, so he offered two things: a tomb and a shroud to wrap the body in, little knowing that what he was offering was actually going to bear witness to the resurrection, not only for the disciples but for the rest of time. Joseph is a lesson to all of us in doing what we can, in offering what we have.

Conclusion

This Friday, about 2000 years later, we, as followers of the hung Messiah face an uphill, but possible task of taking up struggles in our own situations, and expressing solidarity with what is just and right in the eyes of God. Let us remember, that the end of a painful story marks the beginning of hope to an otherwise dim world...!

(Reproduced from an earlier KCD publication)

Hope for the New Life

Daniel 12: 1 4 1 Peter 4: 12 - 19
Psalm 4 John 19: 38 -42

Introduction

The observance of Holy Saturday is ignored largely. Very few churches have worship services on Holy Saturday. In fact, many people and churches observe Holy Saturday as a day of preparation for the celebration. Even the Pharisees hurriedly lowered Jesus and other crucified bodies not because they intend to give proper burial, but to prepare for the Sabbath. Similarly, in our context, for many of us, Holy Saturday is the day of preparation for the Easter Celebration and less of the invitation to the tomb. We engage ourselves in preparing for the time yet to come; not in the time that has come. The theology of Easter tends to hijack the theology of Holy Saturday.

In other words, the hope of salvation blinds the pathos experienced today. We wish we were informed about our future just as we are informed about Easter. And therefore, Holy Saturday reminds us of the "in between time." It is neither past nor future, a strange present reality; neither suffering nor glory; a time of "hopelessness"; nothing more to suffer or nothing more to celebrate. A time of silence without questions or any answers. What was is no more and what will be is not clear.

Holy Saturday comes to us in many ways, but always involves death for sure; the death of God, death of our dear ones, our relationships, our hopes, our aspirations, and sometimes our own identity. It is not a one-day event in a year. Those of us as individuals and as communities moving from suffering to glory know for sure that it doesn't happen in one day. Many continue to wait for glory (Easter) but in reality, the truth of Easter is far away. Amidst the realities of the tomb, what does Holy Saturday offer to us? What is so "Holy" about Holy Saturday? What holiness did the death of Jesus offer to the people around the tomb?

Holy Saturday an invitation to the tomb. The theology of Holy Saturday is affirmed in the Apostles' Creed: "(Jesus) was crucified, died, and was buried; he descended to the dead." The emphasis is on what happened to Jesus after his death? Where was his Spirit? The faithful affirmed that the spirit of Jesus descended to the dead to proclaim the good news and to redeem them from their sins. However, while his Spirit was away, his body invites us to witness to the reality of death. The gospels inform us that Joseph of Arimathea (Mt.27:57-60; Mk. 15:42-46; Lk: 23:50-53) and Nicodemus (Jn. 19:38-42) claimed the body of Jesus and buried it according to the Jewish custom, rolled a great stone to the entrance of the tomb and went away (Mt: 27:60). Joseph and Nicodemus dared to claim the body of Jesus.

Their act of "claiming Jesus' body" shows their reverence to Jesus, resulting in proper burial. The result of this great act leads to "roll a great stone" and return to their normalcy just like many others who went back either with disappointment or to prepare for the celebration of Sabbath. In contrast to these men, Matthew informs that "Mary Magdalene and the other Mary were there, sitting opposite the tomb." (Mt. 27:61) The act of these two women appears to be foolish. Their response to the death of Jesus (Cross) is groundbreaking. Unlike many who were unwilling to embrace the death of Jesus, women sitting opposite to the tomb embrace the reality of hopelessness." Their act leads them to witness a revolutionary vision of an angel descending from heaven "rolling away the stone" inviting them to see the tomb empty. Their witness was not mystical but rather praxis, praxis of possibilities against the structures that denies hope. This invitation to the tomb was no more to weep over the impossibilities that roll over the life to silence voices with fear. It is an invitation to experience and proclaim the good news against the constructed, sustained and maintained hope of the Roman Empire. Mary Magdalene and the other Mary become our models for Holy Saturday, who by embracing hopelessness, embrace reality recognizing their commitment to their Lord. Their lamentation before the tomb sets the stage for the dawn turning to be the proclamation of the resurrection.

Rev. Rueben Manohar

Resurrection: Celebrating Boundless Transformation

II Samuel 22: 1-20 1 Corinthians 15: 20-28
Psalm 16 Mark 16: 1-11

Introduction

Among the religions practiced in India, four major religions are formed having the life and witness of four great personalities. Judaism expresses its faith in YHWH and affirms Abraham as the father of faith, Islamism articulates its faith having the teaching of Prophet Muhammad, Buddhism claims to be a way of life laying emphasis on the eight noble truths of Buddha, and Christianity is grounded on the life and witness of Jesus. Among the four leaders, one leader though experienced death, was not bound by it, rather, he broke open the grave and rolled away the stone in order to affirm that stones of evil cannot conceal life.

This event of rolling away the stone is celebrated as Easter i.e. God's victory over the triumphant evils. According to Gustavo Gutierrez, pioneer of liberation Theology, “Easter affirms that life and not the death have its final word.” We are encouraged and empowered to celebrate the risen life of Jesus that transcended all the boundaries in transforming the structures of divisions, discrimination, hatred and humiliation.

Celebrate God's Restoration

As the women disciples were journeying towards Jesus' tomb, they were discussing about how to roll away the huge stone that has concealed Jesus' body. Their discussion with regard to the stone on their way disclosed the tradition of tombs being concealed by huge stones.

The death of Jesus has already shattered the hope of his disciples, thus we find disciples (male) disappearing from the situation. However,

the women disciples dared to walk towards Jesus' tomb, a political victim. Being identified with the political victim is a daring act, as the political authorities will conspire against those who identify with the political prisoner. But the women courageously strived to cross the political boundary. Although the women moved forward, they were worried about the large stone which could be a barrier for them to witness Jesus' body. The huge stone was bothering them and pushing them to a state of hopelessness.

The women continued their journey with hopelessness and to their surprise they saw that the huge stone was rolled away. The rolled away stone restores hope to the disciples. Jon Sobrino, liberation theologian opines that, “Hope arises precisely at the moment when it would seem obliged to disappear.” The metaphor of the dead bones being restored to life emphasizes the creative act of God in restoring hope which has come to nothing (Ezekiel 37).

The huge stone was not able to keep the disciples away from meeting Jesus. Further, the rolled away stone affirms that death cannot bind Jesus, as he is 'unbounded.' Therefore, the rolled away stone restores God's resilience against the evils of death on one hand, and on the other, it restores the hope and trust in the disciples, which was on the verge of death due to Jesus' death and empowers them to start their journey to meet the source of hope i.e. 'The Risen Lord'.

Celebrate God's Reversal

When the women disciples set out on their journey towards the tomb, their purpose was to perform a Jewish ritual to the dead body of Jesus. However, the dawn on the first day of the week had something very different in store for them. The place of death was reversed into a place of life. The ritual performers experience a radical reversal in which they were commissioned to proclaim the resurrection of their Lord. The stone rolled on the tomb symbolized the victory of evil forces over and against the source of life. Further, the stone emphasized the victory of darkness over light, and it also discloses the power of the Roman Empire over the powerlessness of God. But God's intervention in rolling way stone transforms the history of death and scripts a new history of life, which has conquered death.

II Samuel 22:5 and I Corinthians 15:21 affirm that evil structures created by human beings are engaged in destroying the very fabric of life envisioned by God. The Son of man was also not spared by these evil structures. Thus, God in raising up his Son, reverses the structures of death created by human beings, and affirms life through the resurrection of the Son of Man (Death came through a human, resurrection of the dead also came through a human). In the words of Walter Brueggemann, a Biblical theologian, “God will recruit as necessary from the human cast in order to reorder the human history.” Jesus is God recruited human cast, to reverse the human history through his life, death and resurrection.

Celebrate God's Renewed Partnership

As the women disciples entered the tomb, they saw a young man dressed in a white dazzling robe, seated on the right side. The resurrection of the Lord in Matthew's gospel is announced by an angel, and in the gospel of Luke it is announced by two persons in dazzling white, but Mark brings in a young man and proclaims Jesus' resurrection. Who is this young man? Is he a real character, or is Mark continuing his metaphorical approach? Symbols are potent and powerful pointers to realities beyond generations and across times. He, being seated on the right, reminds us of the disciples James and John asking Jesus to grant them the place to sit on the right and left side of Jesus. Mark 14:51 portrays a young man with a linen cloth following Jesus. It also says he left the cloth and fled away naked. The fleeing away of the man embodies the faithlessness of the community of disciples and their denial to walk the way of cross with Jesus. The Markan narrative records Jesus being wrapped with linen cloth. On Easter day, the young man was dressed in Jesus' grave cloth, a martyr’s robe for the disciples. The young man is symbolically portrayed as a disciple who refused to partner with Jesus on the way to cross. However, Jesus' robe transforms him into a dazzling light to confront the darkness. The young man also announces that Jesus is on his way to Galilee (his mission place), and asks the women disciples to inform their colleagues to meet the risen Jesus as foretold. Through the symbolic presentation of the young man, Mark brings out a renewed

discipleship to partner Jesus in announcing the good news of life in life-denying situations.

Conclusion

As we are engaged in varied journeys, let us be reminded that there are huge stones standing as stumbling block to our journey. However, let us be assured that the Risen Lord is at work. He has rolled way the stones and has assured his partnership with us in our missional journey. May the God Almighty who rolls away stones enliven us and empower us to roll away stones and celebrate God's restoration, reversal and renewed partnership.

Rt. Rev. Dr. P K Samuel
Bishop