



THE UNITING
PRESBYTERIAN
CHURCH
IN SOUTHERN
AFRICA

15th April 2019

Let's Journey Together (LJT) (2/2019)

TO ALL IN THE UPCSA

Dear Fellow Presbyterians,

But now, this is what the LORD says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. (Isaiah 43: 1 NIV)

As we approach Good Friday and Easter, we restate our commitment to build a community and to work towards a People's Church. We do so in a context where so many people in our church and in our societies are engulfed with FEAR. We continue to give an assurance of God's redemption and liberation.

In Isaiah 42: 22, it is recorded:

But this is a people plundered and looted, all of them trapped in pits or hidden away in prisons. They have become plunder, with no one to rescue them; they have been made loot, with no one to say, “Send them back.”

Isaiah writes to the people of Israel as they were captives under the Babylonian empire. They suffered the evils of that captivity. The empire dehumanised and degraded the people of God. It instilled fear and demanded undue worship. The people had all the reasons to FEAR. The Accra Confession presents a contemporary understanding of EMPIRE in the following words:

Empire – The convergence of economic, political, cultural, geographic, and military imperial interests, systems, and networks for the purpose of amassing political power and economic wealth. Empire typically forces and facilitates the flow of wealth and power from vulnerable persons, communities, and countries to the more powerful. The Bible is full of stories of empires rising, over-extending, and falling. Empire today crosses all boundaries, strips and reconstructs identities, subverts cultures, subordinates nation states, and can marginalize or co-opt religious communities.

Empire thrives on divisions, inequalities and injustices, which keep people under constant FEAR. The UPCSA adopted a plan to address inequalities and inequities where it is stated:

The consequences of these inequalities are varied and far reaching, and they include the following:

-) Damage to the witness of the church, its ministers, their families, sessions and congregations.
-) Neglected congregations continue under the burden of guilt and this may divide sessions.
-) Bringing disrepute to the name of our Lord.
-) Inter congregational disunity between the “haves” and “have nots”.
-) Alienation of families and dependants of the ministers and congregants in dire need.
-) Burnout of the minister and/or their spouse and family.
-) Distraction from the work of ministry
-) Relinquishing the call due to the need to adequately provide for the family

Isaiah gives comfort and hope, as he advises the people to fear not as they have been redeemed. The Albert Barnes' Notes on the Whole Bible state that the Hebrew word used is *gā'al* and it means "to redeem". The Notes express that to redeem is "to ransom by means of a price, or a valuable consideration, as of captives taken in war; or to redeem a farm that was sold, by paying back the price. It is sometimes used, however, to denote deliverance from danger or bondage without specifying any price that was paid as a ransom." The Notes avow that the death of Jesus Christ was a redemptive act of God as "God destroyed the life of the great Redeemer, or caused him to be put to death, in order that his chosen people might be saved."

Isaiah puts this in the past tense, "I have redeemed you", while the people were still in captivity. This is taken to connote that God's redemptive act is an accomplished fate. The people would have to refer to the liberation motif of the Exodus, among others, to realise that the redemption of God was not limited. God who sees the miseries, hears the cries, becomes concerned and comes down would continue with the liberation act by conquering the might of the Babylonian Empire and the subsequent forces that would want to rise against the people of God.

Let us, therefore, approach this Good Friday and Easter with confidence, as God has redeemed us and our environment. Our worship and our sermons should attest to and witness about the redeeming God. Let the people be filled with hope for restoration. But we should go beyond hope and work for the people of God to witness God's redemption and liberation. Let us be able to identify and challenge the machinations and shenanigans of the empire that constantly leads us to miss the mark (to sin) and not live according to God's ordinances. God has paid the price, the ransom for the people to be set free, free from all forms of sin.

The UPCSA recently held a consultation to establish gender desk and youth desk. In the discussions, it came out that patriarchy is still rampant in our church and in our societies. People, women in particular, continue to suffer under the hands of the powerful. The powerful continue to pull other people down, especially if they (the powerful) do not get the worship that they (the powerful) demand. It came out clear that people still continue to discriminate against each other on the bases of race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexuality, age and otherwise. We continue to witness spates of xenophobic attacks. The youth and women still feel ignored and side-lined from the decision making processes of the church. That means that, inside the church, there are people who do not experience the liberation that is brought about by God's redemptive act. We therefore need to remove all the un-freedoms and work for an environment that is conducive for all to worship freely and enjoy their being before God.

The UPCSA responded to the tragedy of Cyclone Idai by receiving donations from many benefactors. The goods were transported to Zimbabwe for distribution to the victims and survivors of the Cyclone. The Rev Everisto Musedza is commended for the tireless efforts to ameliorate the plight of the people. He, among other things, came down to Kempton Park to receive and go with the goods to Zimbabwe. The Presbyterian Churches in the area became the beacon of hope. Through their act of kindness the people experienced, practically, the redemptive work of God.

We wish all a blessed Good Friday and Easter. We pray for all the ministers and their families, as they will be ministering to the community in various ways over the weekend. We pray for the ministers and all the preachers, as they will be preaching the seven sayings of Jesus Christ on the cross and preaching in other services from the Maundy Thursday until Easter Sunday. We pray that the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts will be acceptable to God, our Redeemer. We pray for all the congregations that they will receive courage to press on and overcome FEAR with God's assurance of redemption. Let us see the miseries of the people, hear their cries and listen to their voices, and go down to lift the people up. Let us continue to pray and work for the landless to have access to land. Let us pray for the commissions of enquiry that have been set up in South Africa, especially on state capture, to bring the outcome that will ensure lasting peace, prosperity and justice that rolls like a river.

"Do not fear, for I have redeemed you." *Let's Journey Together* "To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ". We are building a community and we are A People's Church.

Yours in Christ.



Lungile Mpetsheni
GENERAL SECRETARY

Tiyo Soga House
Plot 18 Dann Road, Glen Marais, Kempton Park 1629
PO Box 96188, Brixton 2019
Tel: +27 11 727 3500
Fax: +27 11 727 3506
Email: gensec@presbyterian.org.za

PBO 18/11/13/1612
Moderator: Rt Rev Dr PD Langerman BCom, LLB BTh, MTh, DMin
General Secretary: The Rev L Mpetsheni PGDSS MTh
Clerk of Assembly: The Rev WV Mkhungo DipTh
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