



THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

Monday, 17 February 2020

Dear Friends

This letter is a little later than usual since I wanted to pay tribute to the life of the late Lenny Maart, whose funeral was on Thursday, 13<sup>th</sup> February 2020. It was a profound privilege and honour to be able to preach at the funeral of this great servant of Christ, and Christ's people.

In 2002, I was invited by Len and the leadership of the Elsie's River congregation to do a weekday series with them. At the end of that week, in the Thursday evening, they said a thank you to me and gave me an envelope and I slipped that envelope into my Bible. Later, on the Friday I picked up my Bible and the envelope slipped out. I opened that envelope and inside, to my very great surprise, was a very generous money gift. I was quite overwhelmed. I had not expected anything, and I could see in the time that I was here that money was a very real challenge to many of the people who came that week.

I was very emotional when I received that particular gift; it was an amazing blessing. I felt a bit like David in that story in 2 Sam 23 who mentions that he was longing for a drink of water from the well in Bethlehem which, at that time, was held by the Philistines. Three of David's men broke through the Philistine lines and drew water from the well for David to drink, but he would not drink it, since the water was too precious. Instead, David poured it out as an offering to the Lord. Sally and I did the same with that very generous gift we received. It was too precious for us to use for ourselves and so we prayed about it and gave it to a missionary that we supported whom we knew needed the money.

I was reminded about that event 18 years ago when I visited Len and Beatrice in December last year. He was very weak, but he had had a good day and Len, Beatrice and I had a great conversation before I was able to pray with them both. He was so happy to see me and thanked me for the blessing that spending time had been to them. Driving away from that precious time, I reflected that far from blessing them, I had been blessed to spend time with them, I began to think about the nature of blessing. I thought about the blessing Len had been to his family, the community of Elsie's, the denomination and the Church as a whole.

I referenced the idea of being blessed in the funeral sermon – what does it mean to be “blessed” and to “be a blessing”? When Jesus speaks about the blessed life in the sermon we now know as the Sermon on the Mount, he wants his disciples to understand the nature of blessing. The Greek word used here is “Makarios”, which is in an intensive form – “truly happy / fortunate / favoured”. And it's not what they assumed. In their day, much as in our own, those who were sure of themselves; those who went about laughing all the time; those who asserted themselves; those who were prepared to cut corners to get ahead; those who step on others on their way to the top; those who are well versed in the ways of the world; those who know how to work the system to their advantage; those who seemed to be able to get away with murder and those who knew how to fight dirty all seemed to do really well.

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**PBO 18/11/13/1612**  
Moderator: Rt Rev Dr P Langerman BCom LLB BTh MTh DMin  
General Secretary: The Rev L Mpetsheni PGDSS MTh  
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General Treasurer: Mr R Johnson MCom (UP) MIRMSA

In some way, they seemed to be blessed: they walked with swagger; they always seemed happy, often at the expense of others; they knew how to make it to the top and stay there and they never seemed to be called to account for their actions and to be the ones who were "fortunate" or "blessed".

Jesus tells us disciples that the way of the kingdom is totally opposite to the way of the world. The truly blessed are those who don't push to the front; the devastated; those who are not sure of themselves; those who seek for authentic relationships; those who treat others with kindness; those who refuse to allow the world to force them to become cynical; those who seek to bring together those who are estranged and those who suffer because of their commitment to these values. These are the ones truly blessed by God. And, as I read through this list again, I could just see Len's character shining through.

Jesus is also not giving us a list of things we must do if we want to be blessed, he is telling us that the ones who are already blessed are not the ones we expect because God works in ways that are completely different to us.

The funeral took place in the Elsie's River VGK (Uniting Reformed Church) and I commented on how appropriate it was to be in a church which is the home of the Belhar Confession and that Len was laid to rest in the very place where that Confession was crafted - Belhar. The challenge of that Confession to all those things that keep people apart from one another, that separate people, was so true of Len's life. He was a man who brought people together, he was a unifier and a reconciler, dedicated to a free and liberated humanity, with a heart for those who were on the margins, on the fringes of society.

I thought, in closing, to quote from sections of Article 4 of that Confession to remind us of what a prophetic statement the Confession was in its time and how it continues to challenge us today:

We believe

- that God has revealed [Godself] as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among people;
- that God, in a world full of injustice and enmity, is in a special way the God of the destitute, the poor and the wronged;
- that God calls the church to follow [God] in this, for God brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;

...

- that the church must therefore stand by people in any form of suffering and need, which implies, among other things, that the church must witness against and strive against any form of injustice, so that justice may roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream;
- that the church belonging to God, should stand where the Lord stands, namely against injustice and with the wronged; that in following Christ the Church must witness against all the powerful and privileged who selfishly seek their own interests and thus control and harm others.

Therefore, we reject any ideology which would legitimate forms of injustice and any doctrine which is unwilling to resist such an ideology in the name of the gospel.

Your partner in the gospel



Peter

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