

# WEEK OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2018

## Sermon Notes



*These sermon notes are based on the biblical text from the primary text Exodus 15.1-21 as well as Romans 8.12-27 and Mark 5.21-43*

*The following dot points are presented in the hope that the preacher may find something to spark the imagination. Only the local preacher will know the local situation well enough to take these universal ideas and allow them to be interrogated by the experience of the congregation and then in turn to allow the texts to interrogate the local congregation.*

- The material this year has been produced by the churches of the West Indies, a group of small counties based on the northern mainland of South America and the islands of the Caribbean.
- People in Australia may be more familiar with the Caribbean as the place of swash-buckling pirates of old popularized in the Pirates of the Caribbean movies, adventurous cricketers, private island getaways of the rich and famous and the TV series Death in Paradise. These romantic images however belie the sad history and present poverty of the region.
- The colonising of the region by Spain and Portugal in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the privateering efforts of the English, French and Dutch in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries brought social instability as well as slavery to the region. This issue alone has had a huge ongoing effect on the economic and social development of the nations of the West Indies. A stark example of this has been the decades-long dictatorship of the Duvalier family in Haiti and the enforced isolation of Cuba for the past half century that has resulted in political desperation, radicalism, poverty and under-development.
- More recently, the delicate social and economic balance of some of the nations in the region has been upset by the Haitian earthquake of 2010 and the seemingly regular severe hurricanes generated by the warm tropical waters.
- Sadly, this human suffering from Europeans colonizers, 'pirates', modern dictators, politically directed economic embargos and natural disasters has too often been exacerbated by western churches who have been complicit in human exploitation. Scripture and theology have often been employed to justify the unjustifiable.

**What do the Bible readings for the week of prayer for Christian unity say to us about all of this?**

All three lengthy readings identify situations of human bondage and God's desire and power to liberate. They also identify and celebrate the joy that is apparent when God's liberating power is experienced.

The Exodus reading focuses not so much on the centuries of human misery that was the life of Hebrew people in Egypt but on the moment of realization that God has intervened powerfully to liberate.

Moses, Miriam and the people sang joyfully of their amazing reversal from slavery to freedom . . . *Exodus 15:11 "Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, majestic in holiness, awesome in splendor, doing wonders? 12 You stretched out your right hand, the earth swallowed them. 13 "In your steadfast love you led the people whom you redeemed"*

In Mark chapter 5 there are similar experiences of reversal, from various bondages to freedom and all through the intervention of God in the ministry of Jesus.

Firstly a man who is demon-possessed and doubly bound by both spiritual and human powers, by mental/spiritual torment as well as chains. The result of Jesus' liberating command is a man in his right mind and clothed. He is given freedom and the dignity that befits a human being. In his joy he wishes only to remain close to his liberator.

Secondly a woman who for many years has been bound by a physical ailment. The direct personal intervention of Jesus brings liberation to the woman. The personal imprisonment of both the man and the woman had also alienated them from their communities and denied them access to the fullness of social and spiritual life enjoyed by others in their community. They have everything to be thankful for because they have been saved, restored to the wholeness that God desires for all his people.

Finally in chapter 5 is the story of the little girl who is liberated in two ways. The child is called "little girl" by Jesus although in the eyes of the people she was regarded as marriageable. In the words and action of Jesus she is freed from the unreasonable expectations of adulthood as Jesus subtly 'redefines the boundaries between childhood and adulthood. And of course the little girl is liberated from the stark and final grip of physical death. Her liberation is a foretaste of the liberation of Jesus from the power of the tomb and the promise of liberation into wholeness for all who put their faith in Jesus.

The reading from Romans 8 puts the liberation-activity of God into a wider context. There is the promise of redemption for all creation, so that God's purpose for everything and everyone that was derailed by human rebellion, will be achieved.

God's Spirit leads and works faithfully in every aspect of human life and through the entire cosmos to liberate and reconcile. The horizon of God's liberating activity is hope.

In summary, these readings remind us of God's power and desire to liberate all creation, from every kind of bondage. These readings call us to fall into line with God's liberating spirit and to support local Churches in the particular contexts of the Caribbean where hope and liberation is required.