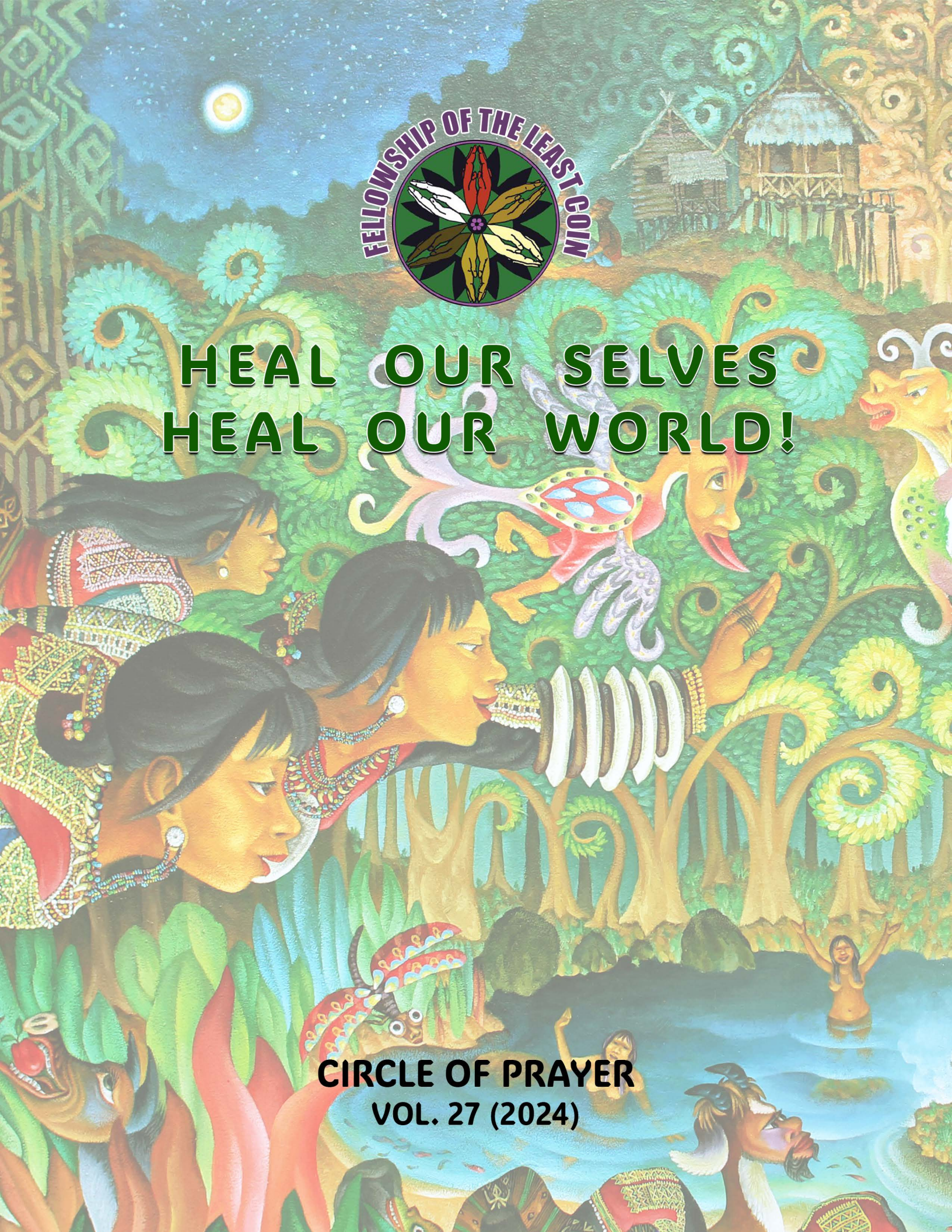




HEAL OUR SELVES HEAL OUR WORLD!

**CIRCLE OF PRAYER
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INTRODUCTION

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. (Genesis 1:27-28, NRSV)

The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to till it and keep it. (Genesis 2:15, NRSV)

In what ways are we made in God 's image? God obviously did not create us exactly like God because God has no physical body. Instead, we are reflections of God's glory. Some feel that our reason, creativity, speech, or self-determination is the image of God. More likely it is our entire self that reflects the image of God. We will never be totally like God because God is our supreme creator. But we do have the ability to reflect God's character in our love, patience, forgiveness, kindness, and faithfulness.

Knowing that we are made in God 's image and thus share many of God's characteristics provides a solid basis for self-worth. Human worth is not based on possessions, achievements, physical attractiveness, or even acclaim. Instead, it is based on being made in God 's image. Because we bear God's image, we can feel positive about ourselves. Criticizing or downgrading ourselves is criticizing what God has made and the abilities God has given us. Knowing that we are persons of worth helps us love God, know God personally, and make a valuable contribution to those around us.

To 'subdue' something is to have absolute authority over it. God has ultimate rule over the earth; yet God exercises authority with loving care. When God delegated that authority to humanity, God expected us to take responsibility for the environment and for the other creatures that share our planet. We must not be careless and wasteful as we fulfill God's charge. God was full of care in creating this earth. We too must be full of care in caring for this earth.

God saw that all God had created was very good. We are part of God 's creation and God is pleased with how we were created. If at times

we feel worthless or of little or no value, remember that God made us for a good reason. Each and every one of us is valuable to God!

I end this reflection with a few questions. Let us pause and look around us: Is God's world still very good as pronounced in Genesis 1:31?

- Look at the pollution of the world caused by the uncontrolled desire and hunger for more economic growth and profits used mainly for the betterment of the rich ones and not for the betterment of the many who are poor...
- Look at climate change caused by human activities resulting in rising temperatures and change in global current flows that affect multiple marine ecosystems and creatures, and also displace millions of people in developing countries...
- Look at violence happening around us - in homes, communities and societies...
- Look at people dying from non-communicable disease due to unhealthy lifestyles...

We pray that amid all the above God will help us heal ourselves and our world and make us a channel of divine healing.

We praise and thank God for making us precious and enabling us to take up the challenge to reflect God's image through our person and our lives. All is possible with God's powerful love!

Elder Supaporn YARNASARN, ACWC President (2019-2023)
Convenor, CoP v. 27 Committee

CoP v. 27 Committee Members:
Mary Nordick, WICC
Siera Tion Bird, PCC
Lydia M Mwaniki, AACC
Judit Vincze, EFECW
Liza Lamis, Executive Secretary



A NECESSARY HEALING OF OURSELVES

Philippians 2:3-8

Margaret KER, Australia

This text speaks to my heart because it was the one that I read in October 1979 when I was received into the Catholic Church. I was raised in the UK as an Anglican and through my studies in Church history began my ecumenical journey as a Christian woman.

Even for Christians in general and particularly for Christian women, I'm guessing this text could politely be termed 'countercultural'.

Within our chosen theme, it sounds almost unhealthy to exalt humility and obedience, and to cultivate the habit of thinking others better than ourselves.

For far too long these were concepts that kept women very much in a place of subservience and disempowerment. Perhaps this was even more true of the Church than of the secular world. It is an attitude that has sometimes demeaned women and put them in real physical, emotional, and spiritual danger.

Now times have changed.

For women to strive to take our place in the 21st century Church and world is surely not a matter of selfishness or conceit or putting our own interests above those of others. Rather, it could be seen as a necessary healing of ourselves, so that we may participate more fully in the life of the Church and the wider community.

So, can we conveniently dismiss Paul's words as not 'really' meant for us?

No, we cannot. Whether we like it or not, Paul's words reflect the life of our Saviour Jesus.

Importantly, as Paul reminds us, Jesus did not 'grasp' equality with God. Instead, having recognised it, he 'emptied himself' and became 'obedient unto death'.

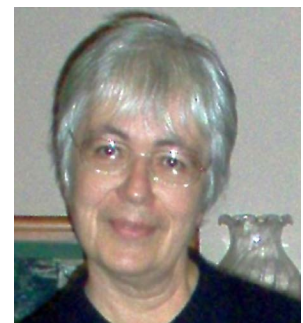
We too are called to empty ourselves so that God can work with us to bring health to our world.

PRAYER:

God, we are your servants. Emptying ourselves is our calling as followers of Jesus and can never diminish our worth in your eyes.

By letting go of our own interests may we become the people you have called us to be and bring health to a broken world. Amen.

Dr. Margaret Ker is currently serving, for the second time, as National Secretary of Australian Church Women. She has a doctorate in Medieval History from Monash University in Melbourne and contributed a chapter on the position of women in medieval Europe to *Exploring Women's Past: Essays in Social History* (ed. Patricia Crawford, 1985).



WELL-BEING IN BODY AND SOUL

3 John 1: 2

Comfort Ruth QUARTEY-PAPAFIO, Ghana

This verse is a prayer from John to his friend Gaius. It is a prayer for good health and prosperity in all aspects of life. John was concerned for both the physical and the spiritual health of Gaius. Like Jesus, he never forgot that humans have bodies as well as souls and that they matter, too. (Mark 2: 1-12) This was the opposite of the popular heresy that taught the separation of spirit and matter and despised the physical side of life. This non-Christian attitude logically leads to one of two responses: neglect of the body and physical health, or indulgence of the body's harmful desires. Today, many people still fall into this way of thinking.

John prays that Gaius' physical health would be as good as his spiritual health. This verse emphasizes the importance of taking care of our physical bodies as well as our spiritual lives. It is about the interconnectedness of body, mind, and spirit, and how they contribute to overall well-being. God cares about our total well-being, not just our spiritual well-being.

In Ghana, ignorance, poverty, religious belief and stigma prevent girls and women from seeking medical attention when the need arises. In terms of access to sexual and reproductive health services, Ghana has made progress towards achieving universal health coverage. However, there are still gaps in the provision of these services, particularly for girls and women living in rural areas. The result is that more women visit prayer camps than men. Unfortunately, many of them are taken through practices which are inhumane and degrading and violate their human rights.

This verse emphasizes the importance of holistic well-being. It encourages individuals to thrive in all aspects of life, including physical health and spiritual growth. As a responsible Christian, you should neither neglect nor indulge yourself

but care for your physical needs and discipline your body so that you are at your best for God's service. You need to stay strong and healthy in body, mind, and spirit. You should be mindful of the food you eat, the exercise you do, and the rest you take. You should be mindful of your thoughts and emotions and take care of your mental health. You should be mindful of your relationships with others and take care of your spiritual health. It equally calls on governments to ensure that adequate provision is made in the healthcare system, for the physical well-being of citizens especially girls and women.

PRAYER:

God, you have created us in your image after your likeness, and you are concerned for our bodies and souls. We know that we need to be in good health to be able to do the work that you have for us to do. Give us the wisdom and motivation to live a balanced life that honours you in every way. Amen.

The Very Rev. Comfort Ruth Quartey-Papafio is the Director of Gender, Family and Social Intervention Directorate of The Methodist Church Ghana. She is the National President of The Girls' Brigade Ghana Council, a ministry passionate about empowering girls and young women so that their lives would be transformed, and God's world enriched.



A HEALTHY SELF LOVES DOING JUSTICE FOR THE SUFFERING

Micah 6:8, Hebrews 12:14, 6:10, Luke 14:1-6

Arceli PEPITO-BILE, Philippines

I am deeply in awe of how Jesus dealt with the Pharisees in Luke 14:1-6, especially when he asked them some questions and the Pharisees could not utter any answers. I also wonder what was in the Pharisees' thoughts hearing the questions Jesus asked them and why they kept mum and did not argue.

One of the characters in the story, aside from Jesus and the Pharisees, was a man who suffered from abnormal swelling in his body. He, too, was only mentioned in the story, but we did not hear anything from him. Nevertheless, Jesus healed the man and sent him on his way. (I hope he managed to eat some meals before he left.)

In this story, we only hear Jesus and his act of healing the man. Even though the Pharisees were looking for reasons to accuse Jesus and were watching if he would heal on a Sabbath, Jesus still chose to heal the man. Jesus' compassion and mercy towards the suffering man was all that mattered at that moment. The man may be suffering for a long time, not only with his physical disease but even from isolation and discrimination. But when Jesus saw him, Jesus took hold of him and healed him.

After the man was healed, Jesus asked the Pharisees: 'If one of you has a child or an ox that falls into a well on the Sabbath day, will you not immediately pull it out?' What I am hearing from this question is the sense of urgency for healing to happen even on a Sabbath day. Jesus did not take the Sabbath as something that could hinder his mission to bring healing to the sick.

I believe that the healing of the man is a 'sabbath' for him; it is his rest from suffering and discrimination and pain and isolation. And like the man in the story who was suffering from an abnormal swelling of his body, many are suffering across the globe that need healing today. The earth is

suffering from massive destruction and extinction, and many are suffering from hunger, discrimination, and indifference.

We should always be mindful that where there is suffering, there is injustice. We must not normalize the suffering of all creation. We need to seek justice for and with those who suffer. And like Jesus, compelled by our compassion and mercy, our witness must have a sense of urgency - so that those who suffer from injustices may live fully with integrity and dignity.

What hinders us from hearing the cries of the suffering and act boldly and with urgency so that they, too, will experience healing and the fullness of life?

PRAYER:

Gracious God, we pray for healing - for ourselves, our loved ones, our communities, and the world. Show us how to live together in harmony with one another and make us vessels of Your healing mercy.

Lead us in ushering healthy communities and a healthy world. Stir us to be angry at injustices committed against Your creation. Give us courage and boldness to do Your will and commit ourselves to doing justice, loving mercy, and walking humbly with You. In Jesus' name, we pray, Amen.

Arceli Pepito-Bile is a deaconess from the United Methodist Church in the Philippines currently serving with the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) as program staff. She represents CCA to the ICFLC beginning in 2023.



LOVING THIS WORLD WITH GOD'S LOVE

Psalms 77

Ann WREN, Scotland

Today many people cry out, from situations of war, conflict, deprivation, and adversity. I minister in Southwest Scotland and in partnership with many skilled and gifted people I reach out to people trapped behind closed doors experiencing domestic abuse, all self-confidence gone. In that space of hope I stand.

The incidence of domestic abuse is now so high, following Covid and the severe restrictions created by Government cuts to social assistance, that the Refuge Staff's possibilities to create a safe space are chained by restrictions. So, like the psalmist we cry out, both the victim and the those fighting to begin the rescue. It is our hope we can offer a safe space to talk, to plan, to reassure but most importantly, to listen, and be a beacon of hope. We speak in the name of God, reassuring them of their worth; encouraging them to reach out for support; and embrace them with God's love. We are, what the Iona Community (a religious community in Celtic tradition) call, "a touching place" to make the promises of God real and tangible.

Time passes...

I am a member and volunteer for the worldwide charity, the Mothers' Union, and we support a project called Away From It All (AFIA). This project provides short holidays for survivors of domestic Abuse. We take women and their children to a beautiful part of God's creation to give rest and to let them experience freedom, joy, and happiness out in the open air. Alongside the Refuge Staff who go with us, we nurture relationships and networks for the future bringing confidence and hope. We dream dreams and speak of

a new life, with new possibilities, no longer alone but with friends who understand the journey.

When they ask, "Why are you here?"; "Why are you doing this?" We tell them simply of God's story, of Jesus' story being bound up in our own life story and our continuing journey of faith. We share our inspiration that God understands our every need and that now together we can be part of that story in a world that longs for LOVE. Following AFIA many women, in time, become volunteers or professional staff working with victims of domestic abuse.

PRAYER:

God, we ask your blessing on all places of refuge; may they be havens of peace and safety for the bruised and broken to find comfort and a friendly face, time to recover and plan for the future. God, we thank you for all who work and support refugees across the world. Amen.

Rev. Deacon Ann Wren is a retired minister in the Scottish Episcopal Church, a part of the Anglican Communion, and a Diocesan Leader in Mothers' Union supporting local projects relating to families suffering adversity.



HEALING JUSTICE

Jeremiah 22:3a; Luke 13: 10-13
Bukelwa HANS, South Africa

What does healing justice mean? Healing justice means recognising the adverse environment or situation that a person is in, that violates their lives and dignity, where action needs to be taken to restore or transform the situation. All humans are created in the image of God and their inherent dignity must be preserved.

Many women in South Africa experience hunger, poverty, and gender-based violence perpetrated by their intimate partners. A tragedy happened in the last two months when two women committed suicide and killed their children because of poverty. One left a suicide note saying she cannot go on with such hunger, rather she takes her life and her three children. The sad part is that the South African government has a Social Distress Relief grant and a Child Support grant for each child under 18 years. The challenge is corruption as these grants do not reach their intended beneficiaries.

Gender-based violence, femicide and rape has reached levels that are unacceptable especially committed by intimate partners and people that survivors know and trust.

The nameless woman in our text walks past Jesus as he was busy teaching in the synagogue on a Sabbath. Jesus took notice of her situation which has been going on for 18 years and stops what he was doing. Let us remember we have a God who sees us and acts accordingly because of God's loving kindness. There was great resistance from those who were wearing a mask of being religious pretending to observe religious laws, but Jesus despite their protests restores her dignity and self-worth as a child of God.

That's the forefront of Jeremiah's cries as he emphasizes the word,

'anyone'. Anyone. Not everyone, but anyone. This word reminds me that while we have very little power, we each have the power to do what we can, where we are, with what we have.

PRAYER:

God of Justice and our Healer, we come before you with broken and wounded hearts for what we see taking place around us. Help us to be your eyes to see the plight of the children you love, ears to hear their cries, hands to touch them with your compassionate love and minds to see what we can do to change the world that was created by you for our own good. Disturb us and take us out of our comfort zones so that we can be uncomfortable until your justice is done. Bless every one of us and guide us further through Jesus Christ our Savior. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Bukelwa Hans is a Medical Doctor and a retired minister of the Uniting Presbyterian Church in South Africa (UPCSA). Passionate about gender and social justice issues, she is currently involved with the Gender Desk in drafting the Sexual Harassment Policy and planning a Widows Ministry for UPCSA, while being a peace ambassador for the International Peace Federation.



LIFE-GIVING MINISTRY FOR OTHERS, OURSELVES AND OUR WORLD

Acts 9:36-42

Barbara LLOYD, Canada

Tabitha/Dorcas was a strong woman of the early Christian church who saw and reached out to vulnerable widows in her port city of Jaffa. Sailors and fishers lost at sea meant that their poor widows were condemned to a precarious life. Dorcas employed her gifts and resources to support these widows in very practical ways. She used her talent for sewing to make tunics to wear and mats to sleep on, the very minimum for survival. She was well loved for her generosity and kind-heartedness.

Perhaps you know someone in your community who seems to exemplify this kind of Christian charity, hospitality, and generosity. Perhaps you yourself might be seen by others as modelling this kind of giving spirit. Women in my congregation offer pastoral care to the ill and grieving, provide support to those living on the edge, and take in new immigrants and refugees. I am inspired and grateful. Many of these women work tirelessly well into their senior years. Others spend time working with advocacy and solidarity groups lobbying governments for racial and climate justice, for indigenous rights, or for a just peace in our world. These are not easy struggles and require persistence and strong commitment.

We don't know the circumstances of Dorcas' death. Did she give too much of herself and become ill in the effort? How did the early Christian community recognize her contributions? Who was supporting her? We do know that

Dorcas' reputation was enough to bring Peter, the leader of the Church in Jaffa, quickly to her aid. Following the example of Jesus' resurrection of Jairius' daughter, Peter raises Dorcas from the dead to the relief of the gathered widows.

In times of exhaustion, we may need to consider what brings us new life. God calls us to the work of love and justice in our families, our communities, and our world. Sometimes, the load seems overwhelming. But God does not ask us to give up our lives in the process. God calls us to abundance of life. We may feel the need for a fresh view on the world, a healing conversation, a new vantage point. We may yearn to enjoy the beauty of nature, places, and people where laughter and joy can renew us.

Being good to ourselves, working in solidarity with others, saying "No" at times to multiple demands, are all strategies for composing our lives in a healthy way – a life strong and resilient enough to bear the pain and burdens of living in this broken world. Only then can we help to build a healthy community and a healthy world. This is the work of ministry to which Dorcas was called and responded. Seeing our own "good works" as ministry is essential to change in our societies. We believe that God's new heaven and earth are emerging even in the midst of suffering and oppression. Like Dorcas, working with others for social change helps us all find joy, energy, and new life!

PRAYER:

*God of healing love,
Forgive us when we take on too
much in our attempts to mend our
communities and our world.*

*Help us to ask for help
when needed. Show us the way of
collaboration and solidarity.*

*Bless our efforts to heal our
world, one person, one project, one
dream at a time. In the name of Jesus,
our brother, whose loving humanity
is gift and hope for us all.*

Amen.

Dr. Barbara Lloyd is a retired minister and national justice education program executive of The United Church of Canada. She continues to educate and advocate for a just peace in Palestine/Israel after an initial visit in 2001. Her other activities involve singing in two choirs, acrylic painting, reading, supporting family and friends, and leading worship and educational events in her Toronto congregation.



INJUSTICE IN THE FAMILY

1 Thessalonians 5: 15 – 23
Ayibongwinkosi DUBE, Zimbabwe

A widow in her early 30s left with two intelligent boys, and a contractual employee, unfortunately developed an eye problem and got ill for four months. Her illness made her leave her work and as a result, her brother invited her along with her two boys to stay in his house as they are just renting a house elsewhere. The widow accepted the kind offer. However, she and her boys were mistreated by her brother's wife and children. They were denied food, and at times when she could buy groceries to feed her two children her brother's children would steal these. Pots were hidden so the widow is unable to cook for her hungry children. The widow's sister-in-law and children always threatened them so that they would leave the house.

Many people often think of themselves alone and forget others. If all is well with them and their immediate family, they don't bother about others. God reminds us not to think of ourselves alone but to be our sibling's keeper with love and for the glory of God. We are all under obligation to be like Christ. Jesus knows no grudges and bad habits; he has no heart to treat anyone badly. With the little we have, we ought to share with those in need, and not to complain when we have helped others. We must love one another as Christ has loved us. Believers should always remember we are one family in Jesus Christ.

Let us all let the love of Christ lead us. In this way, we practice being just to others so that we heal from our separation from each other and lack of compassion for those in need and who are suffering. Justice is a powerful medicine in this life. Indeed, there is no healing for our world without Justice.

PRAYER:

God of all creatures, God of mercy, and peace, Creator of the universe, Alpha and Omega - we come before your throne of grace, seeking your attention to our prayers. You created us all - animals and nature - with love and kindness forming one beauty of this World. You love all your creatures without discrimination, and you invite us to love each other. In hope, we lift to you for healing the tensions, violence and injustices that plague our world. We pray for increasing harmony and peace in the entire World. Dear God, lead us to justice and peace. With your protective hand, grant safety and dignity for this world. Forgive us for turning a blind eye. Forgive us our sins and let us work with you for justice for those who are being preyed upon, for the poor and distressed people. Amen.

Ayibongwinkosi Dube is a Gender Justice and Climate Justice advocate and Faith Activist from California Lutheran University. The Founder and Executive Director of a nonprofit philanthropy organization, Urim Shalom Trust, he also writes Christian books. ayibongwinkosid@gmail.com



A DARING TOUCH, A COMPASSIONATE RESPONSE

Matthew 9: 21-22

Comfort Ruth QUARTEY-PAPAFIO, Ghana

The woman described in Matthew 9: 20-22 had suffered for twelve years with what may be described as a menstrual disorder. From the Jewish point of view this was a terrible or humiliating disease. When Mark tells this story, he makes it clear that this woman had tried everything, and had gone to every available doctor, and was worse instead of better. (Mk.5:26) The horror of the disease was that it rendered the sufferer unclean. (Lev.15:25-27) Everything and everyone she touched was infected with that uncleanness. She was absolutely shut off from the worship of God and from the fellowship of other men and women. It is not surprising that she was desperately eager to try anything which might rescue her from her life of isolation and humiliation. So, she slipped up behind Jesus and touched the hem of his cloak and was instantly healed.

Similarly, among the Akan of Ghana menstruation is surrounded by various taboos and restrictions that affect the lives of women and girls in different ways. Some of these taboos which have serious implications for the health, education, and social status of women and girls are:

- Staying away from certain places during menstruation, such as shrines, temples, farms, or rivers, as this can anger the gods or spirits.
- Avoiding contact with sacred objects or men during menstruation, as this can cause impurity or harm.
- Not participating in certain activities during menstruation, such as trading or farming, as this can reduce the productivity or success of the work.
- Not cooking or eating certain foods during menstruation, such as fish, meat, eggs, or palm oil, as this can affect the quality or taste of the food.

In the story of the woman with the issue of blood we see the demonstration of faith, compassion, and healing. We see that Jesus was willing to heal the woman regardless of her condition or social status. The woman was an outcast in society because of her condition, but Jesus welcomed her and healed her, restoring her to health and dignity.

How do we treat others, especially those society considers as outcasts? Following the example of Jesus, we are called to show compassion and love to those who are suffering. We are also called to seek justice for those who are oppressed, the vulnerable, or marginalized in society. We are challenged to work towards a more just and compassionate world.

PRAYER:

O God, you are the source of life, love, hope, healing, justice, mercy, and compassion. Rekindle in us our faith in your love and mercy and inspire us to work towards a more just and compassionate world. Amen.

The Very Rev. Comfort Ruth Quartey-Papafio is the Director of Gender, Family and Social Intervention Directorate of The Methodist Church Ghana. She is the National President of The Girls' Brigade Ghana Council, a ministry passionate about empowering girls and young women so that their lives would be transformed, and God's world enriched.



SELF CARE

Eva Kyeni ABEL, Kenya

During COVID-19, a friend was getting married. As ladies' mutual friends from a student ministry where we served together, we organised an online bridal shower before her wedding. Topics were listed and ladies were asked to share on their chosen topic. At that time my marriage was struggling, and I felt like I did not have the moral authority to speak about other aspects of marriage like communication, handling finances, in-laws, and conflict management. So, I chose the self-care topic. It was also the first time I attended a bridal shower where this topic was addressed. I felt more comfortable speaking about self-care because I had just realised its importance.

Self-care is not just when women face hard times but something we should consider in our daily lives. Challenges that women face like gender-based violence affect their wellbeing in most societies where women have been socialised to take care of everyone except themselves.

I will focus not on physical self-care (although it is important) but on emotional and soul self-care which I find important in making sure we are deeply rooted in Christ and hence able to withstand storms that we face.

One of the aspects of self-care I have found very helpful is a personal devotion to God where one spends time with God to honestly talk about everything that bothers. Just like Hannah in 1 Samuel 1, when she faced childlessness and was mocked by her co-wife even the priest Eli did not understand her. She found her strength in seeking God who removed her reproach and gave her a son. Notice that Hannah has a very supportive husband Elkana who loves and comforts her despite her childless

state. When she decided to give back Samuel to God, Elkana does not question. Hannah finds comfort in God in v. 27: "...For this child I prayed, and the Lord granted the petition that I made to him." It's not always that God answers prayers as we want, but we can always go to God when overwhelmed and I find that a safe self-care space.

PRAYER:

Dear God, teach us as women to prioritise taking care of ourselves amid all responsibilities to care for those you have placed under our stewardship. May we always draw strength and find joy and peace in knowing that you care for us. We pray for those who are overwhelmed and carry the heavy burdens of taking care of children and are living abusive relationships that they may find rest in You. Amen.

Eva Kyeni Abel is from Kenya who works with young people from different churches as a teacher and an active associate with the International Fellowship of Evangelical Students- FOCUS Kenya. Graduated from Bossey with Master in Ecumenism in 2023, she hopes to begin her PhD studies this year on engaging churches to prevent obstetric fistula in Kenya.



LET THE EARTH AND ITS PEOPLE REST

Leviticus 25:1-7

Joy KINGSBURY-AITKEN, Aotearoa New Zealand

I grew up on a small dairy farm near the top of the South Island of Aotearoa New Zealand. My father milked about fifty cows on about forty acres of arable land. Father's approach to farming was to work with nature rather than attempt to bend nature to his will. The wisdom of this is now well recognised by the "organic farming" movement, but back in the 1960s my father's way of farming was considered both eccentric and uneconomic.

One consequence of my upbringing is that I cannot remember when I was not an environmentalist. Caring for the earth and its lifeforms was fundamental to my father's philosophy of life and from an early age his way of thinking became my way of thinking.

My father's farming practices involved setting aside part of his land every year on a rotational basis to allow it to "rest", free from being cropped and grazed. The importance of periodically resting both ourselves and our land is stressed in scripture, which begins with God's example of finishing the work of creation by "resting" (Genesis 2:2). The Sabbath rest becomes a sign of the covenant relationship between God and Israel (Exodus 31:12-17) and is to be egalitarian. Everyone must be given the opportunity to rest – daughters as well as sons, slaves as well as masters, aliens as well as citizens – and this resting on one day in seven is even to include farm animals (Exodus 20:8-11). Then in Leviticus 25:1-7 we encounter the command that the Israelites must allow their land to rest one year in seven.

The principle of the Land Sabbath is particularly pertinent today. The whole earth needs a rest from human activity. We need to produce less, consume less and travel less, and we need to end the exploitation of cheap labour in developing nations to produce cheap goods we soon throw away. As Jesus' Sabbath miracles demonstrate,

the purpose of the Sabbath is healing. The earth needs healing, but this healing must not be at the expense of the most vulnerable. We must pay craftspeople, especially women, in poor nations more to produce less – i.e. pay them generously to make high quality items that will be treasured. Not only would that improve their economic circumstances but would reduce the creation of mountains of waste that are polluting the earth.

The earth will not be rested from the ravages of human exploitation of its resources unless and until we act justly towards all its inhabitants, beginning with the most oppressed of our own species. Jesus promised rest for the weary and heavily burdened (Matthew 11:28). The question is, will we allow the earth and its many lifeforms to rest?

PRAYER:

Creator God, when you entrusted humanity with dominion over the earth, you gave us the responsibility of taking care of your creation, but you did not give us the right to exploit it. Guide us in restoring what we have damaged, and in granting justice to those we have harmed. Amen.

Joy Kingsbury-Aitken is a retired officer of the Christchurch City Council, having had a career in road safety education. She is a member of The Village Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand, a lay preacher with a Bachelor of Theology degree from the University of Otago, and the author of two books of liturgical poetry, *Prayers for Southern Seasons* and *Prayers for Southern People*. jmk-dsa@hotmail.com



BECOMING A SAFE SPACE FOR WOMEN

Isaiah 61:1

Lydia MUGAMBI, Kenya

In the recent past, here in Kenya and in Africa at-large, we have witnessed alarmingly rising cases of femicide and gender-based violence, with women receiving the blunt edge of the vice. From the Amhara people of Ethiopia, the killings in Egypt, to the countless girls suffering at the mercy of Boko-Haram in Nigeria, and even here in Kenya where recently the courts handed a death sentence to a man convicted of femicide, with many similar cases under investigation the situation is dire. We need to rise and become safe spaces for women and the girl-child. We ought to facilitate forums through which we can talk about healthy sexual choices while being aware and sensitive to the fact that there are those in the audience who have walked the road of abuse. With countless left to suffer through pregnancy crises, rape, abortion, suicide and sexual abuse and in unfortunate cases, death at the hands of their assailants.

We usually say that we ought to, yet it is high time we shift gears to 'we need to' and 'we have to' make a stand and be counted as safe spaces for women. God's desire and will during creation were that man and woman may live on earth in peaceful co-existence with the entire creation. The shedding of innocent blood was a blot on that magnificent design of creation.

PRAYER:

Beloved God Almighty, we thank you for women and the blessing that they are to your entire creation, fulfilling your divine plan for the continuation of life. Having brought her as a helper/partner for man, we implore you to restore the dignity originally destined for women. The inclination of man to sin brought death, and this death has not spared

woman. Man has turned his wrath on your precious gift. We ask for forgiveness and healing.

We pray for healing and restoration of women who have been violated; renew them in your divine providence. Help and guide us in your mercy to show them your love and care.

Transform the hearts of men and their attitude towards women. Help us raise men and leaders who are after your own heart and who will step-up for the gift of woman you so graciously gave. Grant them courage and fortitude to stop violations, encourage and give them the strength to be safe spaces for young girls and the womenfolk of our nations. Restore the love of man for woman for the glory of your Mighty Name. For this we sincerely pray and believe, in your Holy Name. Amen.

Lydia Gatwiri Mugambi, a pious member of the Greek Orthodox Church in Kenya, works in the Office of the Archbishop in Nairobi Metropolis as Women Coordinator, Gender Desk. As a member of Africa Faith Actors Network for Climate Justice (AFAN-CJ) under the umbrella of the All Africa Conference of Churches, her special area of interest is effective adaptation mechanisms to effects of Climate change by planting fruit trees in available spaces.



THEIR FAITH CARRIED THEM THROUGH

1 Thessalonians 5: 16–24

Cathy REID, Canada

I don't know about you, but I have always struggled with what Paul wrote to the Christians in Thessalonika about giving thanks in all circumstances. How can anyone be reasonably expected to give thanks in ALL circumstances? When life is good, yes. When things are going well, no problem. When we have all we want and nothing much to worry about, of course.

But when life is hard; when things are falling apart; when we are hungry, or homeless, or unemployed, and we don't know how we are going to pay the bills or where our next meal is coming from: can we really give thanks in those circumstances?

Then I visited Chipagala, a remote little village in the south of Malawi, and saw the faith of the people there.

Our trip had been postponed from 2020 because of Covid. During our planning for this visit, Cyclone Freddy struck southern Malawi and in particular Chipagala, Chuluchosema, Mulanje and Blantyre. The area was devastated. It was so bad that we wondered whether it was right to go when they were still recovering from the cyclone. We had been able to send emergency grants from both the National Women's Missionary Society and the Women's Inter Church Council of Canada. These grants helped with immediate food and other essential supplies. And we were able to help them start to rebuild.

That is when I saw people giving thanks in all circumstances. The villagers were so thankful to us and to God for help given and prayers sent. On arriving at Chipagala we were welcomed with open arms and joyful hearts by families who had had little and who had lost their little all. My sister, Janis commented that they were still smiling even, although

they had lost so much and could still give thanks.

This is the message I want to convey. Their faith is so strong that even after the destruction of their homes, belongings and property, they are able to pick up the pieces and rebuild. Their faith carried them through, and they rejoiced always, prayed without ceasing, gave thanks in all circumstances.

And I came away deeply humbled by the faith of my sisters and brothers in Malawi.

PRAYER:

Gracious God,

Thank you for being with us everyday as we face the struggles of climate change.

Thank you for your Spirit's guidance in everything we do.

Thank you for your continued love even when we find it hard to believe. Thank you, dear God! Amen.

Cathy Reid is President of the Women's Missionary Society of the Presbyterian Church in Canada, President of the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada, and Vice chair of ICFLC. A retired high school teacher in Scotland and Canada, she is married to Andrew, a retired Presbyterian Minister. They have one son, Iain, married to Shauna.



COMPASSION AND CARE FOR THE MODERN OUTCASTS

Mary Grace Selosa Jamin and Onesiforo Balunan Berina, Jr., Philippines
Luke 17:11-19

In our world today, it seems impossible to have never known someone who suffered from any sickness or had a health issue. Healthcare is a necessity and a right that every human must enjoy. However, many people nowadays do not have access to healthcare. Sadly, healthcare becomes a privilege that only those who have enough resources can enjoy, while the only option for those who cannot afford it is to suffer. People who agonize over any sickness or disease and cannot afford treatment are the outcasts of today. They are the hidden exiles of our society – disregarded and marginalized.

One of the many accounts that Jesus showed compassion to the sick can be found in Luke 17:11-19. In this passage, Jesus was seen healing ten people with leprosy. In the time of Jesus, leprosy was dreaded by many because it not only inflicts pain but also carries social stigma. Hoping that Jesus could cure them, they cried for his mercy. Just as they cried for mercy, many people in our communities are crying for healing mercies too – healing mercies that may only be granted to them if we all have equitable access to healthcare.

Jesus responded with compassion. He instructed the lepers to show themselves to the priests, and they were healed. Only one out of ten returned to Jesus with gratitude, a Samaritan, who is also an outcast in the Jewish culture. Many preachers present this story as an illustration of ungratefulness,

but we believe that the actions of the other lepers must not be the center or the focus of the story, but Jesus' act of compassion. Jesus never villainized those who did not return to give him thanks. He offered them healing without conditions. He freely gave them mercy. Nowadays, acts of kindness and compassion seem to come with a price and every good deed accompanied by terms and conditions. This is not what Jesus exemplified.

As we ponder on this passage, may we realize that as Christians we have an integral part to play in promoting healthcare in our communities. Upon seeing the situation of the lepers, Jesus responded by healing all of them. He was never selective. He healed them all. The nine lepers may have walked away without expressing their gratitude to Jesus, but Jesus did not denounce them or take back his works of healing. Perhaps, Jesus was just happy knowing that upon their healing they excitedly go back to their communities and return to their normal lives. The fact that they go back to their lives and return to participate in the works of their community is already an expression of gratitude. Just like Jesus, may we respond to the cries of the modern outcasts with compassion and caring action that is not selective but inclusive. May we recognize that every act of healing is a gift that calls us to hear the cries of the sick and join in the work of compassion, care and restoration.

PRAYER:

Dear God, we remember all those who are sick and those who are struggling to provide healing to their sick loved ones. We pray that you grant healing upon them. Just as Jesus proclaimed healing to the lepers, make us vessels of healing. Touch the hearts of those in authority to provide the poor an easy access to their healthcare needs and that all those who are sick will be able to go back to their community to live life to the full. In the name of Jesus, we pray. Amen.

Mary Grace Selosa Jamin and Onesiforo Balunan Berina, Jr. are young full-time pastors in separate local churches of the Convention of Philippine Baptist Churches.



GOD, HEAL US!

Genesis 1:26; 28-31; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Matthew 6:25-32
Dominica LAGAT-FAURILLO, the Philippines

Everything was in perfect shape. Our text assures us that we and everything around us are created by God. We are special in many aspects as we are created in God's image though not physically, but in the spirit that made us a living soul. God assigned us, humans - to take care of every living creature that God created. God provided everything we need: food, clothing, and shelter. The trees and plants were created for our provision. Fish have water, plants have good soil, birds have place to stay, and all other animals are in their own habitat. There was a perfect give-and-take relationship for all.

The earth was a perfect place, in perfect balance. But sin entered the garden of perfect balance and well-being. Eve wanted to taste the fruit offered by the serpent. She disobeyed God and became conscious of what to wear. The garden became a place of imbalance. Adam and Eve's relationship changed. They blamed each other. Caring was turned into blaming, trust into doubting. Need became greed. People amassed wealth at the expense of the weak. They claim to be the fittest to survive.

The privilege to care for God's creation turned into a time to rule over, manipulate and trample over. Wealthy nations spend dollars to produce arms rather than provide food for the hungry. Typhoons, tornadoes, earthquakes, and wars cause global destruction. The garden of Eden became devastated. Needs healing.

I was a devastated person and got cheated by the person I love. My pastor husband had another woman. I compared myself with her, hated everyone like her. I downgraded my being, blamed myself as lesser than I should be. I suffered alone. Could not divulge to anyone.

I attended empowering, healing sessions. Then I was commissioned to empower underprivileged women in the grassroots. I cried with them, walked with them until I discovered I

was healed.

Today, I cry not for myself. I cried watching a tamarind tree fall. My anonas tree was cut down by my neighbor. I cried. Landslides along the highways...mountain tops and ridges turned into summer resorts. I cry.

PRAYER:

Dear heavenly God, maker of heaven and earth and everything in it, help us to love this earth you gave us the responsibility to care for. Remind us that we are not our own. Free us from the hardness of hearts that chain us to narrow-mindedness. Give us courage to share our lives to redeem your beautiful creation back into its original beauty and bounty.

Heal our land, dear God. Heal us, suffering because of unhealthy lifestyles. Make us conscious of the sacred privilege to care for ourselves and your creation. Heal the brokenhearted, men and women and everyone in all walks of life. Let your image in us manifest in all the things that we do and say. Make us loving and caring towards one another. Inspire us to work and cooperate with others to help heal ourselves and our world. Amen.

Dominica Lagat-Faurillo is a retired Diaconal Minister (DM) of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. She worked with church women in Cambodia and East Timor as Women accompanier under the Christian Conference of Asia. At present, she is actively involved in the Senior Citizens Fellowship of the UCCP Crossroad Congregational Church in Davao City.



GOD'S PRESENCE EVEN HERE

Romans 8.35,37-39

Mary MARTIN, USA

This list of distressing situations has always seemed to me to be a "pick one" kind of list. If we are grieving, that can't separate us from God's love. If we are worried about the future, that can't separate us. It is also a bundled package, because it certainly seems these days that there is more than one of these things going on in each of our own lives, and in the world.

We see the hardship of destruction by severe weather, the distress of illness, the persecution of innocent refugees, the famine of physical and emotional hunger, the nakedness of those without jobs, the peril of an uncertain political future, the sword of war in so many places. The writer assures us that we are not separated from God's love, by one of these, or by ALL of them.

Composer Mark Miller, in his anthem, "Even Here," speaks a similar message:

"At the land's dark roots, in the farthest deep, where the daylight dims, where no one can reach, can the hand of God, can the voice of love find me even here?"

"I have turned away, I have set my fate, I have run too far, I repent too late. O to climb again where the eagle flies, where its nest is set in the sunlit skies! Will the hand of God, will the voice of love find me even here?"

"O forgive me, Lord, may I see your face, may I die in peace with a song of praise, may the hand of God, may the voice of love find me even here."

The hand of God, the voice of love does find us. Even amid all the perils and hardships of the world, we see glimpses of hope: signs on

buildings in Spain "refugees welcome," a politician going against prevailing party thought and making a decision for justice, church members hanging in through tough times, the hope in new treatments and positive results for friends who are ill, the care and concern of a community which grieves one of their own together. May we continue to seek and feel God's presence "Even Here."

PRAYER:

God of the whole world, we praise you for the hope we have in you. For your creation of each person in your image, for our baptism into your body, for the Church, which you formed to be your hands and feet in the world, and for the reconciliation of the cross. Draw us ever closer to you and help us show our faith in you to the world. O, Hand of God, O Voice of Love, meet us where we are, even here. In the name of Christ. Amen.

Mary Martin serves as Treasurer of the ICFLC. She lives in Atlanta, Georgia USA and is retired from the telecommunications industry. A lifelong Presbyterian, she is active in her church as the Finance Committee chair, playing handbells, and serving with ministries to children and families.



WHEN THE UNIMAGINABLE, HAPPENS

Luke 8:49-56

Sandra MANGUAL, USA

I have read the story of Jairus' daughter dozens of times and always rejoice in the fact that Jesus allows the mother of the child to witness the healing of her daughter. Yes! In this story, the mother of the dying daughter is present, although her name remains unknown to us. The nameless mother of this child shares the societal invisibility of women around the world and yet this story continues to be a profound inspirational encounter and one of the most compelling narratives to affirm new beginnings amid fatalities and despair. The name of the child is also unknown to us, but her age and her physical condition are not; the girl is 12 years old and her condition changes abruptly. Death brings so many unspoken emotions: numbness, denial, confusion, anxiety, fear, tears, among others.

In my years of ministry, I have witnessed the full repertory of expressions of grief from family members and friends. I have always tried to speak comforting words during times of emotional distress, without ignoring that words can sometimes fall short. In many instances, my choice has been to just listen actively to the depth of peoples' pain.

But Jesus models for us something different. In this story he is present and outspoken. His first words to the family; "fear not", may sound insensitive in response to the expected human reaction to fear death; but this could not be further from the truth. Jesus is asking them to believe that the unimaginable is possible because his ministry was always about bringing out life and making us whole.

The daughter recuperated her health and is given the command to get up; to hold on to a healthy life and to embrace life not death. The mother with the unknown name, heard Jesus's words and we can only speculate that she joined her

daughter in believing and proclaiming that females must not die but live abundant lives.

In the USA, too many girls and women face death every day. A significant number are murdered because they are female. It is inconceivable to think that women are killed because of their gender. Transwomen and women of color face a disproportionate femicide risk and rate. Undeniably, Jesus spoke out and up. His words and actions show us a path to take action to prevent and reduce gender-based violence. This path requires addressing gender inequality, and invisibility on the individual and societal levels. To speak up our names is necessary. To make ourselves visible in every room is essential. Getting up is imperative. Ending violence against women and girls might seem impossible, but it isn't. It is possible and it is urgent.

PRAYER:

Dear God, enlighten our minds to believe that a new world for women and girls is possible. Inspire our hearts to the purpose that we can bring health and life in a violent and deadly society. Amen.

Sandra Mangual is a retired Puerto Rican minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA), former teaching faculty at the Evangelical Seminary of Puerto Rico, and a social psychologist with a long career in the human services field. She lives in Boston, Massachusetts where she continues to support liberating and womanist-feminist discourses and practices.



HEALING IN GOD'S GOOD TIME

James 5, 7-8, 10-11

Mary NORDICK, Canada

When we are suffering and in need of healing, we long for relief and an immediate cure. We rejoice in the many healings present in Scripture - the lepers, Jairus's daughter, the woman with a hemorrhage to name a few, and long for the instant touch of Christ to heal. But while miraculous cures do occur even today, they are rare. Where then can we go for comfort in our pain? This passage from James offers some hope and remedy as he reminds us of the virtue of patience, repeating the word over and over. Jesus Christ's coming and healing takes time as James reminds us, using the examples of seasonal crop growth and Job's well-known patience. Significantly, James points out that the Christ WILL come just as the soil yields precious fruit and Job's story ends in mercy and compassion.

In my home city an organization led by former gang members works with people wanting to leave the illness of gang involvement. Their name, STR8-UP 10,000 Steps to Healing, reminds those struggling, and all of us, that healing can be a long process that takes time and many, many steps. Our compassionate God, however, is with us in every step.

PRAYER:

Dear God, my/our suffering is hard to endure and I/we long for the instant relief and healing that you brought to many sufferers as you walked the earth in Jesus. Help me/us to take the words of your servant James to heart and learn to cultivate patience. Help me/us to steady my/our heart(s) in you and to trust in your mercy and compassion and to believe

that all will be well in the end. Help me/us to live in your good time and not in my/our impatience. This I/we ask in Jesus's name. Amen.

Mary Nordick is a member of the Board of Directors for the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada (WICC) and serves as the WICC Liaison to the World Day of Prayer International Committee, and WICC representative to the International Committee for the Fellowship of the Least Coin starting 2022. A retired teacher from Saskatchewan, one of the prairie provinces, Mary is active with her church parish, refugee sponsorship and support, the Catholic Women's League of Canada, and the Board of the Prairie Centre for Ecumenism.



SILENCE – A WAY TO HEALING

Luke 8:47-48; 11:28

Outi PIIRONEN-BACKMAN, Finland

In my Finnish Orthodox Church, in February, we experience the Forgiveness Sunday. We enter the seven week-long Great Lent, the journey of repentance aiming at the Great Feast of Pascha, the Resurrection of our Lord. All the services in churches and at homes support our personal efforts. We get once again a chance to think how we live in relation to God and to the teachings of the church.

How do we relive our being baptized in God's name and how strong is our faith? Easter, the gift of life, is our new life in Christ. The theme, "Heal Our Selves, Heal Our World" inspires me to look at the Lenten journey as a path to repentance, forgiveness and healing to the great joy of salvation. A very much-loved prayer during this time is the Lenten Prayer of St. Ephrem (born around 306).

Has our faith been strong enough? Could we be cheerful in the present-day world while everything seems to fall in pieces? During Lent we are advised to concentrate in silence. Silence in my tradition is the way to healing. Silence (in meditation), means caring, conscious understanding, listening, and giving time for things to happen. Silence, a strength-giving remedy cleans the soul and mind.

Orthodox Church tradition holds that justice has its source in God. Justice calls all people to show compassion and loving kindness to others. This means giving help where needed, simply because it is needed. Christianity proclaims the equality of all people, but it is painful to realize the contrary in real life.

Faith in God makes us Christians. Faith as a therapeutic method leads people to heal. Healing means change and this change is achieved by love. With love we are healed.

In an ecumenical women's conference one participant said that she will not participate in the closing service, if there will be any prayers to Virgin Mary. I then had to tell her that with that demand the Orthodox

participants will emotionally be excluded from the prayers. We solved the dilemma and it reminded me of the difficulties we have in not understanding and accepting different traditions.

My model as a woman is the Mother of God, Mary, to whom I can relate. She gave birth to the Saviour of our souls, Jesus Christ. In the great week up to Easter morning I live in Mary's steps in following her son. I cry my sorrows with her, I cry aloud the agony of creation and leave my troubles by the Cross of Christ. Tears are healing for my soul – I know that God's grace gives me new joy and carries me through battles. In faith I believe in salvation and God's merciful love.

PRAYER: *Lenten prayer of St. Ephrem*

"O Lord and Master of my life, take from me the spirit of sloth, despair, lust of power and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to your servant.

Yea, O Lord and King, grant me to see my own transgressions, and not to judge my brother and sister, for blessed are you, unto ages of ages." Amen.

Outi Piironen-Backman, 73, have been actively involved in the Orthodox Church in Finland since her youth. In 2006 to 2019 she was Finnish coordinator of the FLC as part of the international work of YWCA. Outi is married to Jorma, and they have three daughters and five grandchildren.



WELCOMING THE STRANGER

Micah 6:8

Pamela CRESSEY, UK

This is one of the most profound statements of our relationship with God. Micah was a significant prophet in Judah at about the same time as Isaiah in around 700 BC. God has shown to us what is good. It is not sacrifices or expensive gifts. It is something we can all attempt, regardless of our circumstances. If we can follow these three things, "do justice", "love kindness" and "walk humbly" we shall lead a holy life. Each of the three is fundamental to God's will for the whole world but is very difficult to achieve. It is clear from all the many conflicts whether they be personal, national, or international that there is great injustice.

Do we personally "do justice" at all times amid a materialistic world which is so full of easier alternatives, of temptations to go along with selfish actions or those which fit in with the majority. We could all agree what is a given in principle, but do we always put it into practice? To "do justice" should be a universal requirement all over the world. It involves considering those who are different, even difficult, not lovable. How easy it is to welcome a neighbor if when they come to live next door, they play loud music in the night? If they use their garden as a rubbish dump? If they have noisy uncontrolled pets? At the present time wars are making displaced men, women and children from many countries seek asylum in safe, affluent countries. That would involve welcoming them in, which may be too costly. We are a wealthy nation in the United Kingdom but are resisting welcoming our neediest sisters and brothers even from war-torn countries. There is a special need

for those who are persecuted because of their orientation to be welcomed and understood as they seek refuge from a hostile government.

To "love kindness" implies commitment to always practice kindness and to everyone. There is a move at the present time to emphasize the personal benefits to our health to doing small acts of kindness in our daily lives. That would be a good starting place, and there is much opportunity, for instance a refugee from any country would certainly benefit from a befriender. There are many stories of a life-long friendships made, showing that reconciliation and healing follow the pursuit of justice.

One family who were torn apart by the persecution in Uganda provide a wonderful example for me. The young children fled from their home when their mother was dragged out of the house in Northern Uganda to be tortured and badly injured, as was her husband. She escaped by the bravery of a friend, to be arrested when she arrived in Britain and detained. Her husband was never found, but the children were reunited with her through the International Red Cross years later, and they were eventually settled in London.

Unlike most of us I never heard her complain but was thankful to God for her life. Years later, the mother, a trained teacher, now has a degree in public health, and supervises home care workers, while her adult children are graduates – an accountant, a podiatrist and a town planner and important citizens here. Unlike most of us I never hear them complain. May we all walk humbly with God. See also Hebrews 12: v14; Luke 14: v1-6.

PRAYER:

"Judge Eternal, throned in splendor, yet omnipresent and omniscient, we praise you for all that you are, and all that you give us in our daily lives. For those of us who have plenty, teach us to share. For those who are poor in circumstances, for whom there is no material justice, those who suffer war, destruction through natural disaster or illness, may there be neighbors to show kindness. Help us to see where there is need and become good neighbors. Teach us humility, that we may live our lives in Jesus's way for his is the truth and the life to guide us. We ask this in his name. Amen.

Dr. Pamela Cressey is a member of Downing Place United Reformed Church, Cambridge, and is a nationally accredited Lay Preacher. She retired from being a General Medical Practitioner in 1995, where she had her practice in rural Cambridgeshire. She spent the next ten years as a chaplain to Asylum Seekers at a Reception Centre nearby. She was married to the Principal of Westminster Theological College for 50 years and has four children and nine grandchildren to enjoy. She is the representative of the Fellowship of the Least Coin in England.



JUSTICE TO SELF BRINGS HEALING WITHIN, AND TO THE WORLD

Proverbs 16:32; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20; Matthew 6:25–32
Tebora TIBWERE, Solomon Islands

In the Old Testament, justice is salvation. To give someone justice is to vindicate them, to grant them salvation for injustice. Justice is not only giving others their rights, but dealing with an inner moral compass and it must first begin within us before imparting it to others.

Justice within can bring healing to our lives. The first text says a man who controls his temper is better than weapons of war, and he who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city. This is a call to live a life of self-control in which we control our tempers. The second text says to depend upon the Holy Spirit in order for us to live a life of holiness. In this case we must value our lives because God's spirit lives in us and God considers us more important than the birds of the air and all other creations.

We may experience troubles from challenges we face and this can create illnesses in our lives that need total healing. We need to make proper decisions to value our lives and to fully depend on the Holy Spirit for our healing.

To receive total healing, justice to the self must begin within us and we must live holy and righteous lives. Justice is important for our lives, and it must be acted out first personally. Sometimes we fail to give justice to ourselves because we judge ourselves as less important than whom we truly are, and therefore we struggle with life.

Christians today need justice within them to bring healing to others as well. Without justice within there will be no healing, but by trusting God

and depending upon the Holy Spirit we can receive total healing. God will guide us in our decision-making but if we just ignore and do not practice justice within us, this will end in the abuse of power and create bias towards self and towards others.

PRAYER:

Gracious God, we need your touching hands to heal us within ourselves for our unjust ways, to create in us a clean heart and renew a right spirit within us. Help us to create justice within ourselves so that we will be the agent of change to heal those who are broken. Help us to bring justice to our brothers and sisters so they will receive salvation. Guide us through the power of your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name. Amen.

Rev. Tebora Bere Tibwere from the Solomon Islands is an ordained minister of the United Church in the Solomon Islands (UCSI) for 15 years. She worked in different fields as parish minister, and her passion is providing creative arts and worship for the children and young people.



YOUNG PEOPLE AND SUICIDE

Jeremiah 29:11; John 10:10

Rachel LATEJU, Nigeria

God has great plans for God's children, both young and old. However, recurrent cases of suicide among young people make one doubt whether God's plan to give hope and future is still standing. Suicide rates among young people today are very alarming. Promising young minds are wasted daily to suicide as a result of factors that could have been avoided. Today, suicide is fast becoming the second leading cause of death among young people, leaving family and friends wounded and hearts broken.

Many factors make young people vulnerable to suicide. These include personal, peer pressure, parental negligence, environment among others. A lot of young people today find themselves among bad gangs that introduce them to weird things: wayward lifestyle, cultism, kidnapping, money rituals, thuggery, political touts, injustice, poverty, hunger, unemployment, frustration, among others. Involvement in all these are pointers to suicide attempt. I Corinthians 15:33 says, "Don't be fooled by those who say such things, for "bad company corrupts good character."

Parents need to watch out for the friends of their wards, the company they keep and the groups and associations they belong to. The Church as well should not be tired in supporting, encouraging and reminding parents to take up their responsibilities as expected. The Church is a safe place for young people to hide themselves and experience the peace, protection and preservation of their future. The Church should approach the issue of suicide with a high level of compassion, understanding, and

empathy such as having:

- Sponsor: The Church should prioritize sponsoring mental health awareness programmes and education. Young people often face various stressors, such as academic pressure, social challenges, and family issues, which can contribute to feelings of hopelessness or depression. Organising open conversations about mental health within the Church and providing resources for support is crucial.
- Supply: Churches need to supply the basic things young people need for their stability. These include food bank, poverty alleviation, empowerment and support programmes, among others. The Church also needs to provide counsellors who can provide guidance and support to individuals struggling with suicidal thoughts. These counsellors should be available and approachable for individuals suffering with suicidal thoughts to express their minds and seek spiritual and emotional assistance.
- Supplicate: Prayer is essential for helping young minds with suicide thoughts. The Bible assures that God will answer our prayers whenever we call upon God. (Jeremiah 33:3) The Church needs to intensify prayer against factors distracting the mind of young people from God. Special prayer programmes can be organised for young

people, securing God's plan for them.

In the Church, there are right people, programmes, platforms and personnel that will help prepare the heart and mind of these young minds for the glorious future that awaits them. When there are pressures outside, they can come back to Church where they will receive the right counsel and prayer, and find meaning to their lives and hope for their future.

PRAYER:

Dear God, grant divine help and guidance for the youth having suicidal thoughts. Make me a help and support to someone in distress. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Mrs. Rachel Adepate Lateju is an ordained Baptist minister and presently serves as Executive Director of the Baptist Women's Missionary Union of Nigeria. She has contributed to several Christian journals and has some published books. Committed to the ministry of reconciliation, missions and evangelism, she also has a great passion and love for children, youth and women.



SELF-NURTURE AND KEEPING SAFE

1 Corinthians 9:26-27

Rosiana Indah PURNOMO, Indonesia

To be a woman at present is not easy. Challenges and struggles, including stigma, often accompany our journey through life.

A woman in her late twenties dedicates herself to promoting gender justice. A man along with his parents came to her house and explored the possibility of him and this woman into having a romantic relationship and eventually into marrying. Both families were already acquainted, so permission was granted by the parents. A few days later, this man came to pick her up to take her to her office.

Throughout the ride on a motorbike, the man kept whispering sweet words about how much he loved the woman, and how happy he was to have met her. Unexpectedly, instead of heading to the woman's office, they turned towards a hotel. The woman momentarily froze for she felt something was wrong and then fled and hailed a taxi.

The woman managed to escape from as she remembered various campaign materials she had worked on how to protect oneself, about gender justice and safety, especially for women. She was saved by the knowledge she possessed!

How many of us are like her? She has access to helpful information, equipped with survival and self-rescue skills, and have the courage to defend ourselves? Are we prepared to respond accordingly when confronted with a challenge like hers?

Our text is based on Paul's letter to the Corinthian church. Paul wrote the letter as a response to various problems and issues confronted by the church. This passage specifically

contains Paul's life principle in using his freedom. Clearly, Paul also acknowledged the church's tendency to falter in faith and let go of Christ.

Modern life, with various technological developments and easy access to information, can have negative impacts especially on young women and children. Threats of human trafficking through various social media channels and dating apps is always lurking. Therefore, we need to equip ourselves and others with the right knowledge and skills to protect ourselves.

Taking care is not just for the physical self but also about one's heart (spiritual), mind (cognitive), and emotions (emotional). Here are some suggestions:

a) Running and Striking Carefully

An athlete will systematically train with a specific goal and with careful calculations. Everything we do should be done with a purpose (mindful actions). Let us see the challenges and struggles people around us are facing, and challenge ourselves to do something, such as: educating our peers about gender justice, about how to protect oneself and the children, urging mothers to start paying attention to children's nutrition and safety, paying attention to the mental health of mothers, and so on. By setting clearer goals, every action and decision we make will be more precise.

b) Befriending and Equipping the Body

Day by day, information and skills become more accessible through

various learning channels. At any moment, we may feed our minds with various knowledge and information. Yet, we also teach our hearts with compassion. This is what makes us Christ-like: the love and compassion we emulate from Jesus himself. Knowledge without compassion will turn us into robots. Conversely, compassion without knowledge will make us easily deceived. Therefore, we need to befriend and equip ourselves holistically by nurturing our minds and hearts.

When we are stronger, we are called to support our fellow beings, especially those marginalised and in need. Let this Javanese proverb be our reminder:

"Dadiya lancip tanpa natoni, dadiya landep tanpa nglarani, dadiya obor tanpo mblerengi, dadiya duwur tanpa nganciki, dadiya bener tanpa keminter, dadiya unggul tanpa njegal, dadiya mulya tanpa ngina, dadiya cahya sinebar datan nyulapi, dadiya aguna mring sasama, welas asih lan tepa selira mring sapada-pada."

Be sharp without hurting, be light without dazzling. Be high without stepping on the low. Be smart without showing off your intelligence. Be excellent in the right way. Be noble without belittling others. Be a shining light, be someone useful to others. Be a person full of love and empathy towards others.

PRAYER:

Dear God, help us to befriend, equip ourselves, and utilize all our capacities which are gifts from God, to help ourselves and others. In Christ's name, we pray and ask. Amen.

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BERLATIH DAN MENGUASAI TUBUH

1 Corinthians 9:26-27

Rosiana Indah PURNOMO, Indonesia

Menjalani kehidupan sebagai seorang perempuan di masa kini tidaklah mudah. Berbagai tantangan, pergumulan, termasuk di dalamnya stigma, kerap hadir mengiringi perjalanan hidup kita.

Adalah seorang perempuan di usia akhir 20 tahun yang mengabdikan diri bekerja sebagai relawan mengampanyekan atau mempromosikan keadilan gender. Suatu kali, ada seorang pria dengan kedua orangtuanya datang berkunjung ke rumah perempuan ini, dengan maksud menjajaki kemungkinan kedua anak tersebut untuk menjalin hubungan pacaran dan menikah. Kedua keluarga sudah mengenal sebelumnya sehingga izin itu diberikan. Beberapa hari kemudian, laki-laki ini menjemput hendak mengantar si perempuan ke kantornya.

Sepanjang perjalanan, si pria terus membisikkan kata-kata manis, tentang bagaimana ia mencintai si perempuan, betapa bahagia ia bisa bertemu dengannya. Tak dinyana, bukannya menuju kantor si perempuan, motor si pria berbelok ke hotel. Si perempuan muda ini sempat freeze, sampai kemudian dia merasa ada yang tidak tepat lalu lari keluar dan memanggil taksi.

Si perempuan berhasil keluar dari situasi tersebut karena saat moment freeze itu dia teringat berbagai materi kampanye yang dia lakukan: bagaimana menjaga diri, tentang keadilan dan keamanan gender terutama perempuan. Dia diselamatkan oleh pengetahuan yang dia punya!

Seberapa banyak dari kita yang seperti perempuan itu? Ia memiliki akses terhadap informasi, membekali diri dengan keterampilan bertahan dan menyelamatkan diri, serta keberanian untuk membela diri? Apakah kita sanggup merespon secara tepat jika

dihadapkan pada tantangan seperti itu?

Nats kita ini didasarkan pada surat Paulus kepada jemaat di Korintus. Paulus menulis surat kepada jemaat pada waktu itu sebagai respon atau jawaban Paulus terhadap berbagai masalah dan perkara yang terjadi di jemaat. Perikop ini secara spesifik memuat prinsip hidup Paulus dalam menggunakan kemerdekaannya. Tidak disangkal, Paulus juga mengakui adanya kecenderungan jemaat untuk undur dalam iman jika jemaat terus terpaku pada perilaku yang tidak benar dan tidak berpegang pada Kristus.

Kehidupan masa kini, dengan berbagai perkembangan teknologi dan kemudahan mengakses informasi bisa memberi dampak yang tidak baik bagi perempuan, khususnya perempuan muda dan anak-anak. Ancaman grooming dan perdagangan manusia melalui berbagai kanal media sosial dan dating apps misalnya, mengintai setiap saat. Oleh karena itu, kita perlu membekali diri dan saudara-saudara kita dengan pengetahuan dan keterampilan yang tepat tentang menjaga diri.

Menjaga dan merawat diri bukan hanya soal fisik, melainkan juga hati (spiritual), pikiran (kognitif), dan emosi (emosional):

a) Tidak Sembarang Berlari dan Memukul

Seorang atlet akan berlatih dengan tujuan dan perhitungan yang cermat agar bisa mencapai target yang telah ditentukan. Setiap hal yang kita kerjakan pun sebaiknya kita kerjakan dengan penuh tujuan (mindful). Mari kita lihat apa yang menjadi tantangan dan pergumulan orang-orang di sekitar kita, dan tantang diri kita untuk melakukan sesuatu, seperti: edukasi perempuan

sebayanya kita tentang keadilan gender, bagaimana melindungi diri sendiri dan anak-anak, mengajak para ibu untuk mulai memperhatikan nutrisi anak-anak, untuk memperhatikan kesehatan mental kaum ibu, dan lain-lain. Dengan menentukan tujuan yang lebih jelas, setiap aksi dan Tindakan kita juga akan lebih tepat sasaran.

b) Melatih dan Menguasai Tubuh

Semakin hari, informasi dan keterampilan akan semakin mudah diakses melalui berbagai kanal pembelajaran. Setiap saat, mungkin kita mengisi dan beri makan pikiran kita dengan berbagai pengetahuan dan informasi, namun, kita juga tetap memberi makan hati kita dengan belas kasihan. Sesungguhnya, inilah yang membedakan kita dari orang-orang di luar sana: kasih dan belas kasihan yang kita teladani dari Yesus sendiri.

Pengetahuan tanpa belas kasih akan menjadikan kita robot, sebaliknya, belas kasih tanpa pengetahuan akan menjadikan kita mudah diperdayai. Oleh karena itu, kita perlu melatih dan menguasai tubuh kita secara holistic dengan mempertajam pikiran dan hati kita.

Di saat kita sudah lebih kuat, maka kita pun terpanggil untuk mendukung sesama kita, terutama mereka yang termaginalkan, dalam keterbatasan, serta berkekurangan.

Baiklah pepatah Jawa ini juga menjadi pengingat:

"Dadiya lancip tanpa natoni, dadiya landep tanpa nglarani, dadiya obor tanpo mblerengi, dadiya duwur tanpa nganciki, dadiya bener tanpa keminter, dadiya unggul tanpa njegal, dadiya mulya tanpa ngina, dadiya cahya sinebar datan nyulapi, dadiya aguna mring sasama, welas asih lan tepa selira mring sapada-pada."

(Jadilah runcing dan tajam tanpa harus melukai, jadilah cahaya tanpa harus membuat silau. Jadilah

tinggi tanpa harus menginjak yang bawah. Jadilah pintar tanpa harus menunjukkan kepandaianmu. Jadilah unggul dengan cara yang benar. Jadilah mulia tanpa harus merendahkan orang lain. Jadilah cahaya yang berkilau, jadilah orang yang berguna bagi sesama. Jadilah orang yang penuh kasih dan bertenggang rasa terhadap sesama).

DOA:

Ya Tuhan, tolong kami untuk bisa melatih, menguasai, dan menggunakan seluruh kapasitas diri kami, seluruh bagian tubuh kami yang merupakan anugerah Tuhan, untuk menolong diri kami dan sesama. Demi Kristus kami berdoa dan bermohon. Amin.

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RESTORED TO ORIGINAL

Luke 13:10-13

M. Shiamala BABY, India

Humans are created by God with God's own qualities and values. The posture of standing straight differentiates humans from the rest of the creations. As the sunflower blooms towards sun, humans bloom looking at their creator God.

While teaching in a synagogue on a sabbath, Jesus saw a bent-over woman, begging for alms. Jesus understood that she was bound for eighteen years, totally bent over and could not straighten up at all. She was pushed to lead a life of subjugation, humility, poverty and low self-esteem.

In India women in general are kept in physical and mental subjugation since patriarchal systems and values are active. In the name of tradition, culture and caste, woman's life is kept crippled. The struggles of a woman starts while she is in the womb and continues till her tomb. In each step she must face the thorns of patriarchy. Marriage is one institution where her individuality gets subjugated. In many cases, it ends in misery.

As per the National crimes report Bureau (NCRB) of India, in the year 2020, 7000 dowry killings were recorded, and 1700 women killed themselves over dowry issues. This is only recorded data. Actual unreported cases are many.

Jesus called the crippled woman and spoke words of empowerment. 'Woman you are free from your illness'. Out of deep compassion and love, Jesus placed his hands on her and healed her. She was healed not only physically, but her whole person was healed. She straightened up. Her attitude was changed – woman with low self-esteem transformed to one of high values. She looked up and glorified God. She was restored to the original.

Jesus liberated me from ten years of marital cruelties and sufferings.

My life was under constant threat as my body was physically assaulted. Pain and tears became my life. When hope of liberation was completely lost, Jesus touched my life, broke the chains of oppression, and liberated me miraculously. My sufferings sensitized and empowered me to work as a change agent - in my liberated life.

To resist patriarchal values and liberate humans is not easy work. In the fight between justice and injustice, Jesus has to lose his own life but have to get it back so that we get empowered through the Resurrected Jesus.

Jesus is inviting us to work as change agents. Can we respond to the call of Jesus?

PRAYER:

Triune God, thank you for this opportunity. All praise and glory be to you alone. Empower us as your change agents. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

M. Shiamala Baby is a theologian and gender justice activist who established FORWARD (Forum for Women's Rights and Development) in India in 1992, to address women's issues and human rights violation. Through women empowerment and education of first-generation children, she aims to bring an alternative world of peace and justice for all to life.



THE HEALING CLOAK

Matthew 9:20-22; Mark 5: 24-34; Luke 8: 43-48

Sarah GONZÁLEZ LÓPEZ, Puerto Rico

Matthew 6:20-34 and the parallel readings from the Synoptic Gospels present the story of a woman who had been suffering from an issue of blood for 12 years, who learns of "the great wonders that Jesus had done" and desperately seeks healing. She was a woman impoverished by an inadequate health system, which forced her to use all her possessions to heal. She was also marginalized by religious and structural violence from the laws related to the physical impurities of menstruation. (Lev.15:1-30) The account notes that she had "endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse." (Mark 5:26, NRSV)

Menstrual blood flow is the universal biological condition that binds us together as women. It is the hallmark of "the feminine" which transcends cultures and passing fashions. According to patriarchal social practices, the first menstruation is a rite of passage for every woman. In the collective imagination, it assigns us the status of "women" with all the historical and emotional baggage of both struggles as well as achievements. This new "condition" launches us into an accumulation of experiences that range from the joy of knowing that we can procreate a living being, to the long list of violence among which the structural and systemic violence suffered by this woman is one of them. From the patriarchal laws of purity mentioned above, due to her menstruating condition, this woman could not fully share herself with others. That is why she uses clandestinity to achieve her purpose. She approached "from behind", without anyone noticing.

This gesture opens to us a window to a new way of exercising faith in a creative way, which in a sense, is a product of the bleeding woman's desperation. "Just by touching the cloak, I will be healed. It is not even necessary for Jesus to be aware of my presence." No one would think that just by "touching the cloak" the miracle would

manifest itself as a healing reality. She also offers us a lesson in courage and faith that goes beyond conventional ritual canons. For many of us, touching an object to be healed sounds like idolatry. But it was not the cloak that generated the healing power, but the very body of Jesus. The cloak was only a mediating object. This woman, with superior mastery, managed to move Jesus and was instantly healed. So much faith! A spirituality nourished by creative resistance assisted her in her hour.

In today's world plagued by violence, which tragically also often ends the lives of women and girls, we ask ourselves about the role of faith communities. Will we be able to be like cloaks and mediate in the healing processes of our girls, women, and men as well?

PRAYER:

God who wraps us in your cloak and who, like the hen that covers and protects her chicks, tries to free us from the pain and suffering of this cruel and dangerous world which robs us of the ability to live full lives, just as that woman's flow of blood did, inspires in us through your Ruah, Holy Spirit who gives life - the courage to create communities that may be carriers of the healing cloak. Amen.

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EL MANTO SANADOR

Mateo 9:20-22; Marcos 5: 24-34; Lucas 8: 43-48
Sarah GONZÁLEZ LÓPEZ

Mateo 6: 20-34 y las lecturas paralelas de los evangelios sinópticos, presentan el relato de una mujer que sufría flujo de sangre hacía 12 años, quien se entera de “las grandes maravillas que había hecho Jesús” y desesperada va en busca de su sanación. Era una mujer empobrecida por un sistema de salud inadecuado, que la obligó a consumir todos sus bienes para sanar. También marginada por la violencia religiosa y estructural a partir de las leyes relacionadas con las impurezas físicas de menstruación (Lv.15:1-30). Señala el relato que había “sufrido mucho de muchos médicos, y gastado todo lo que tenía, y nada había aprovechado, antes le iba peor” (Mc.5:26, RV, 1960).

El flujo de sangre menstrual es la condición biológica universal que nos hermana como mujeres. Es la marca de identidad de “lo femenino”, que trasciende culturas y modas pasajeras. Según los roles sociales patriarcales la primera menstruación es un rito de pasaje para toda mujer. En el imaginario colectivo, nos adjudica el estatus de “mujeres”, con toda la carga histórica y emocional tanto de luchas como de logros. Esa nueva “condición”, nos lanza a un cúmulo de experiencias que van desde la alegría de saber que podemos procrear un ser viviente, hasta la larga lista de violencias entre las que la violencia estructural y sistémica que sufrió esta mujer es una de ellas. A partir de las leyes de pureza patriarcales antes mencionadas, por su condición menstruante, esta mujer, no podía compartir plenamente con sus congéneres. Es por ello, que se sirve de la clandestinidad para lograr su propósito. Fue “por detrás”, sin que nadie se percatara.

Este gesto, nos abre una ventana a una nueva manera de ejercitar la fe de forma creativa, que en cierto sentido, es producto de su desesperación. “Solamente con tocar el manto, seré sanada. No es necesario, ni tan siquiera, que Jesús se percate de mi presencia”. Nadie pensaría que tan solo “tocando el manto” el milagro se manifestaría como realidad sanadora. Ella también

nos ofrece una lección de valentía y de fe que va más allá de los cánones rituales convencionales. Para muchas de nosotras, tocar un objeto para ser sanas, suena a idolatría. Pero no fue el manto el que generó el poder sanador, sino el cuerpo mismo de Jesús. El manto fue solo un objeto mediador. Esta mujer, con superior maestría logró conmover a Jesús y al instante fue sanada. ¡Cuánta fe! Una espiritualidad alimentada por la resistencia creativa la asistió en su hora.

En el mundo de hoy, plagado de violencias, que trágicamente a menudo también ciegan la vida de mujeres y niñas, nos preguntamos por el rol de las comunidades de fe. ¿Seremos capaces de ser como mantos y mediar en los procesos de sanación de nuestras niñas, mujeres y de hombres también?

ORACIÓN:

Dios que nos arropas con tu manto y que como la gallina que cubre y protege sus polluelos, intentas sustraernos del dolor y el sufrimiento de este mundo cruel y peligroso, que nos roba la capacidad de vivir vidas plenas, igual que lo hacía el flujo de sangre de aquella mujer, inspira en nosotras mediante tu ruah, Espíritu Santo que vivifica, la valentía de crear comunidades portadoras del manto sanador. Amén

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CULTIVATING THE PRESENCE OF GOD

Vino SCHUBERT, Sri Lanka

When following a Counselling Course at a seminary in Sri Lanka, I was required to 'cultivate the Presence of God,' by sitting quietly and alone in God's presence.

'Quietly' included not talking to God as well! I must admit generally my prayer time is far from quiet, as my thoughts flit from one to another – never organized. It took a seemingly endless 2-3 minutes to quieten my soul and let God speak to me.

My attempt at cultivating the presence of God was more challenging than I anticipated. I boldly ventured on this pursuit around 4:30 a.m. one morning and, as usual, my thoughts took flight in different directions. Once focused, I 'woke' up to the sound of deafening silence! After a few minutes silence ceased, as I slowly became aware of the world waking up to another new day that God had blessed us. It began with the distant sound of a rooster crowing, followed by the chirping of birds happy to be alive. Finally, I became aware of the awakening of humanity around me – busy housewives scraping coconut and banging pots and pans as they began the daily cooking for their families, radios blaring, and children lazily waking with loud yawning. Soon I became aware of the sound of my husband softly snoring – indicating he was alive!

It was then that God spoke to me reminding me to be thankful for the little things. I 'heard' God telling me, "Don't worry, despite the chaos caused by humans the world is still under my control, so begin your day by thanking me and enjoying my creation." God made me realize it is the little things that matter – the crowing of the rooster, the chirping of birds, and even the snoring of my husband.

My deep fear of the political and economic chaos in Sri Lanka seemed to disappear. God reassured me that no matter what happens around me, God is in control. God is faithful despite my selfishness and carelessness. Recently we have been made aware that the universe our God created (Genesis 1:28-29) is in danger of being destroyed. Our

world is crying out in anguish, pleading with EVERYONE to help restore it to what God originally intended it to be in Genesis 1:31 where it says, "God saw all that God had made, and it was very good."

Whilst God has kept God's part of the bargain, what about us? As Christian women, let us rise and shine and help save our world that God created and commanded us to care for. We have failed in our responsibilities. Let us unite and together make a difference, allowing God to speak to us through little things.

PRAYER:

Dear God, each time we read Genesis 1, we are reminded of humankind's irresponsibility, and we hang our heads in shame. You meticulously created the universe, and with love gifted it to humankind to nurture and protect. Sadly, our selfishness made us callously destroy creation. Help us realize our sin and may each of us make every effort to help heal our world, so that you will once again be able to say your creation was "good!" Amen.

Vino Schubert is currently the National Representative of the National Association of Church Women of Sri Lanka to the Asian Church Women's Conference and was elected as Vice President for the South Asian Region, and chairs the Women, Youth and Children's Commission of the NCC of Sri Lanka. She has also served on the World Day of Prayer International Committee as one of the Representatives for the Asian Region for 10 years.



Healthy Communities Healing the Earth

Jeremiah 33:6, Romans 14:19

Maricar DELFUN, Philippines

The Indigenous Peoples (IP) in the Cordillera region, Northern Philippines, started to unite as one people against the imposition of development aggression projects in the 1980s that benefitted the rich and foreign capitalists. It was not a development that would enhance the distinct cultural heritage of the indigenous peoples but the gradual destruction of their identity and ethnicity as a people. Like the 12 tribes of Israel, who claim to be the chosen people of God who are united in their beliefs in a promised land, the IPs in the Cordillera became united because of a common problem of national oppression where the state does not recognize the inherent right of the IPs to their ancestral land and resources.

I was born in the 80s at a time when the Cellophil Resources Corporation were logging the remaining rainforest in the province of Abra and the implementation of the series of dams along the Chico River. These projects united the warring tribes in the Cordillera against the destructive logging and dams that would destroy the natural habitat of wildlife and IP territories.

One of the best practices that IP women have shown in those times of crisis is the mobilization of people using their bodies against the machines and equipment of the World Bank-funded project and the harassment of the Police and the Army who are protecting the interest of foreign capital. We call it "FETAD", the mobilization of able-bodied people to confront the forces of evil for their destructive impact. It is also a call for mobilization during a disaster to help the victims and those affected by providing food supplies and manpower to locate and recover victims of typhoons and other calamities.

"AYYEW" is another value that we possess as IP women that forbids being wasteful and instead promotes sharing what we have to our neighbors and the community especially food and other goods. It encourages concerns

about limited resources and care for the natural environment that provides us with all our needs.

"UBBO" is another value which is a traditional support system of helping one another through labor to hasten the work especially during a crisis. These IP values are slowly being incorporated into the mainstream of society for our survival. Our IP values, the wisdom of our forebears and the indigenous knowledge and systems become our measuring rod like the values of the kin-dom of God as we live out our faith in this world.

PRAYER:

God of Peace, make us women your instruments in mending this broken world. Inspired by the values of your kin-dom, the wisdom of old and indigenous knowledge, may we continue to practice values that challenge existing norms, and to strengthen our resolve in building the reign of truth, love, justice and peace. Amen.

Maricar P. Delfun, an indigenous woman from the Tinguian tribe of Abra, and an advocate of the indigenous peoples' collective rights, environmental protection and integrity of creation, is a Pastor of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines. She is currently on special assignment as Program Coordinator of the Regional Ecumenical Council in the Cordillera, and the National Coordinator of the Association of Women in Theology.



JUSTICE, RECONCILIATION, AND HEALING

Leviticus 25:1-7

Daphney KIKI, Pacific

Leviticus 25:1-7 offers a timeless blueprint for justice and healing within God's creation, with significant relevance to our contemporary need for ecological harmony.

The Sabbath Year: This practice, occurring every seventh year, allows the land to rest from cultivation, recognizing its need for rejuvenation. It underscores the importance of respecting the Earth's natural cycles and limitations.

The Jubilee: After seven cycles of seven years, or every 50 years, the Jubilee calls for the equitable redistribution of land and resources among the community. It prevents the concentration of wealth and access to resources in the hands of a privileged few, emphasizing communal well-being.

Justice-making for the Earth and healing God's creation, as depicted in Leviticus 25:1-7, involves embracing these principles:

Rest for the Earth: Granting the land respite mitigates the harm caused by relentless exploitation and environmental degradation.

Equitable Resource Distribution: Re-evaluating resource allocation counters the inequities that often result from unbridled profit-seeking.

In meditation, we reflect on the wisdom embedded in these practices and their relevance today:

Leviticus 25:1-7 serves as a call to action—a plea to embrace justice-making for the Earth and the healing of God's creation. It urges us to prioritize the land's well-being

and justly share its blessings. As we meditate on these enduring principles, we discover inspiration to follow the path of ecological justice and restoration, embodying the wisdom contained in this ancient blueprint for a more harmonious world.

This underscores that justice-making for the Earth is a spiritual imperative, compelling us to reassess our relationship with the environment. To reconcile with God's creation and heal its wounds, our first step must be the pursuit of justice. This involves recognizing environmental injustices, often driven by consumerism and greed, taking responsibility for our actions, holding those in positions of power accountable, advocating for protective policies, and unwaveringly striving for fair resource access to rejuvenate the Earth.

PRAYER:

Compassionate God,

With humble hearts, we gather before you, recognizing the delicate beauty of your creation and the injustices burdening our Pacific communities.

Grant us the wisdom to see the interconnectedness of all living beings, knowing that justice for the Earth is justice for us all.

As stewards of your garden, empower us to heal the wounds we've inflicted upon it. Strengthen us to advocate for policies that restore balance to our ecosystems.

We uplift the voices often silenced—marginalized communities

disproportionately affected by environmental harm. May their calls for justice resound and lead to meaningful change.

Guide us toward reconciliation, where we seek harmony with the Earth and each other. Let the spirit of the Sabbath Year and Jubilee inspire us to give the land its needed rest and share resources fairly.

Grant us the strength to stand against exploitation and greed as champions of justice. May our actions align with your divine plan for creation. In our pursuit of justice, may it be the path that restores harmony with your creation. Amen.

Daphney Kiki is a Pacific ecumenical youth advocate with a profound dedication to advancing ecological justice, peace, and the preservation of human dignity. Her background in Law and theology fuels her passionate commitment to serving the Pacific Communities.



TOGETHER TOWARDS LIFE

Psalms 24:1-2; Philippians 4:13

Dakerlin MUKHIM, India

Self-care has gotten a lot of importance in the recent times especially after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic. The exact word self-care is not used in the Bible and can look a little different from what we may practice today, but nonetheless God's word is clear that we are to take time for ourselves to draw near to God for rest and strength (Matthew 11: 28; Philippians 4: 13) and to be able to love God, love our neighbours as ourselves (Luke 10:25-37), and care for the earth and all that are in it just as God does. (Genesis 2:15; Psalm 65: 9-13)

The concept of care as the Bible has it can be categorized as follows:

1. It is interdependent in nature - Humans are dependent on God (Matthew 6: 31-33; 11: 28; Philippians 4: 13) and the land is dependent on God (Job 12: 7-10; John 1:3; Psalms 24: 1-2; 65: 9-13) and humans are to care for the land (Leviticus 25: 2-5) and the land is given to humans. (Psalms 115: 16)

2. It is holistic in nature - Caring for ourselves is not limited to what we eat or drink but also to how we live our lives in 'goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit' in service of Christ, which pleases God. (Romans 14: 17-18; 12:1-2)

3. Care for creation and the earth is an act of discipleship and stewardship - summoned by God to "work it and take care of it" (Genesis 2:15), our uses of the earth must be designed to conserve and renew it rather than to deplete or destroy it.

Scripture describes the good, sustainable earth created to provide abundant physical life; but through our sin we have polluted and defiled it. (Isaiah 24:4-6) We have depleted and devastated many of creation's resources instead of working to conserve and live in balance within the created order. We have polluted the air, water and soil with thousands of harmful chemicals. This has led to a great loss of biodiversity, which threatens quality of life now and even more for

future generations. Climate change is a threat multiplier. It increases the harm from desertification, pollution, and other damage to creation. It especially impacts the most vulnerable communities and populations in the world.

Against this background, let us focus on the theme that invites us to practise care that is not limited to our 'self' but that encompasses care for others especially the oppressed and marginalized (Micah 6:8; Isaiah 1: 17) and the earth and all of creation. (Leviticus 25: 2-5)

PRAYER:

Creator God, we thank you for life and beauty of creation which sustains all living creatures to this day and time. We are immensely fortunate to enjoy the richness of your resources and be nurtured in ways we cannot comprehend. As we give you thanks for all these blessings, may we also remember that we have a responsibility to care for all of creation just as we are cared for. May the Holy Spirit invigorate us with newness of heart and commitment for eco-justice. Amen.

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ABOUT THE ARTWORK: **TALE OF SEVEN MAIDENS**
by Federico Dominguez

A tale of seven maidens is from Mandaya tribe of Mansaka at Davao Oriental province in the southern part of the Philippines. The tale was inspired from the star constellation Pleiades (seven sisters) named by Mandaya tribe as Sabaksabak.

Composed of several chapters, the tale is told to the young people of the tribe during the full moon story telling sessions before Christianity came to the Philippines.

As the tale of seven maidens goes, these seven sisters who reside in Gabawnon (heaven, upper world) flew down below (earth, terrestrial world) to enjoy gallivanting around and bathing at a lake. Without them being aware, a hunter hid to observe them. He so desired one of the maidens and pilfered her malong (a wrap-around cloth) of dagmay leaf (taro, of elephant's ears size), that was her magical contraption to be able to fly back home. Thus, left behind by her sisters, she was distraught and felt trapped. Without other options, she was forced to become the hunter's wife. And later, they come to have a naughty and playful son. But one time, this son playing his father's blow gun, his mother's long-kept magical malong was uncovered. Recovering her malong, the mother put this quickly on and flew home leaving behind the hunter and the son.

(Translated from Tagalog as told by the artist)

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