

CIRCLE OF PRAYER

FELLOWSHIP OF
THE LEAST COIN



Touch Our Lives,
Heal Our World!

Volume 26 (2022)

CIRCLE OF PRAYER CoP Vol. 26 (2022)

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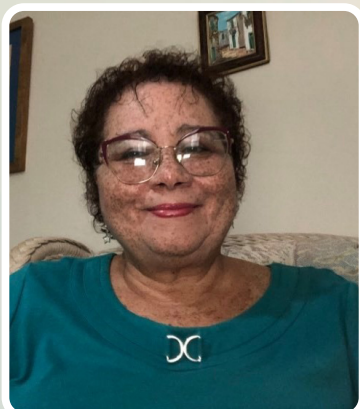
INTRODUCTION

As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. Now Simon's mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. Mark 1: 29-31, NRSV

From Mark's narrative, the first woman to appear in Jesus' ministry is an older woman who is at home. It is, according to concepts of the time, where she should be, even more so because she was ill. She was in her room. Jesus did not need to go to a place as intimate as the room to do the miracle. As a matter of fact, he was not supposed to do that. But he approaches her bed, approaches her pain, her illness, her life circumstance, her vulnerability, not to harm but to heal.

The next thing the text tells us is that Jesus takes the woman by the hand. Another barrier that Jesus overcomes. In their day, men did not address women and avoided physical contact - unless they were from their family, and still in limited ways as women were considered impure. Again, and again, we meet the Jesus who is not afraid of prejudice, who is not afraid of becoming "infected". He always approaches. He does not stay at a distance. He always extends his hand that always offers a touch of respect, grace and love. Notice the important thing about this gesture: for the one who touches is in turn touched. In other words, whoever gets involved is involved. I mean, we can't touch someone and not get involved; not get involved with whatever that person is going through. Because a touch without involvement is abuse. It is a utilitarian and selfish use of our approach to another human being. Jesus' touch always brings healing, because it is always forgiving and transforming, because it is a touch of grace.

The text goes on to affirm that Jesus not only entered her room and touched her, but also helped her to get up. Jesus lifted that woman from the place of sickness and pain, from the place of darkness. Also, from invisibility and marginalization, prejudice and dehumanization. Jesus used the strength of love, compassion, transformative and sustaining grace to give that woman a new opportunity to dignify herself. This expression means that he did not lift her regardless of her will, but that he enhanced her desire and capability, so that she could stand up and participate as a subject and a protagonist of the ministry.



We who have experienced God's loving touch continue to pray, as we stand and extend our hands of service and compassion, and as we become instruments of grace to heal a suffering world.

Let us lift our voices, continue to pray and stand up for healing, peace and reconciliation wherever we are!

REV. YAMINA APOLINARIS

Convenor, CoP 26 Committee
ICFLC Chairperson, 2020-2022

Touch Our Lives, Heal Our World!

FOREWORD

How can we ask God to touch our lives and heal our world if we remain impervious to the many little voices, or perhaps to the muted-ness in the pain and despair around us? And even to the messages that our own bodies tell us?

As I facilitate the production of this volume, I am thinking of and feeling for women and those whose bodies are exhausted of caregiving and earning a living; or are battered in abuse – domestic and otherwise, in the past years under a pandemic. The body – whether of Mother Earth or ours – is said to be eloquent. It also bears the memories of pain and pleasure; and of suffering and deliverance we have encountered in our existence. How are we receptive of these messages?

Our prayer is that God would touch our lives and our bodies and heal our world. We pray this because deep in us we believe that our bodies matter. That all bodies matter, including that of the Earth, our only home right now. Praying is opening up ourselves to the healing touch and presence of God. That opening up includes acute perceptiveness and the exposure of our vulnerabilities in fear, but also in great faith and in thanksgiving that nothing could separate us from the love of God.

This Circle of Prayer volume 26 carries topics that speak to our world today. The writers grappled with the theme from their own contexts and discernment. Women are also the most readers of this booklet. I am sure you will find resonance and can easily relate with the reflections and prayers here. As you engage the messages in this volume, I hope and pray you will be deeply touched, and eventually would move to healing and wellness if you need them, and to passion and commitment to be God's healing presence and touch to our bodies and our world in pain.

May I invite you to share your own reflections and prayers that came out of your personal and group engagement of this volume. May you also be inspired to contribute in the next volume! Do let me know. As you may have known already, the FLC as an ecumenical movement is comprised of a host of volunteers from all over the world. This is how the miracle of the fellowship in our name FLC manifests!

To all the writers who shared their reflections and prayers for this volume, thank you very much for your generosity and talents! Special thanks and much appreciation also goes to Engr. Trelly Marigza for her beautiful and eloquent artworks in this volume.

May you have a profoundly meaningful meditation always!

LIZA B. LAMIS

ICFLC Executive Secretary
27 May 2022



Creation Waits

Margaret Neate, Aoteroa New Zealand
Romans 8: 18-23

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God... This passage expresses the fervent expectation that at the end of history, the results of the Fall will be redeemed. The damage caused to humanity and the whole of creation will be reversed. In this passage Paul describes the natural world as being in 'bondage to decay' – the result of human actions. The whole of creation has been groaning in birth pains until now but, like us, it can now look forward to a glorious new world.

Verse 20 describes the present condition of creation, unwillingly subject to vanity; but God has wise and just reasons. And so, creation waits in eager expectation - it can hardly wait for God's restoration through Jesus Christ. We will be released from the hard times we are having – not just us as individuals, suffering women, our collective humanity, but all creation. Paul tells us how ignorant the world is of its privileges yet God's plan for redemption will reconcile all things to God. What was destroyed will be repaired. But until then creation groans while our sins diminish the ability of creation to glorify God. All creatures were intended for this, but we are limited by our disobedience. Instead the storms and seas rage and the earth shakes, seemingly inconsistently with God's wishes for us.

God made everything perfect for us in the first place; that perfection is not lost. We have lost sight of what God wants for us. When God gave humanity dominion over nature, we were given responsibility for the care of creation also. Made in God's image means we must act in a God-like manner. As we must imitate Christ in our human relationships, so must we imitate God in relationship with creation. God's concern for all creation intends that nature can also share in that freedom of the glory of the children of God. It is not a question of just waiting until the return of Christ; we need to be acting now, following the pattern for how we will behave in the future glory times. God's spirit is already working within us to prepare us and so we too, suffer the birth pangs (v. 22-25).



As Christian women we need to take a positive role and lead change: we can do this in both small and big ways. We can be more conscious of purchase choices we are making: whether household goods or more personally, food choices and so on. We can act as the leaders of the environmental change movement. This is not about self-interest for our own quality of life, but our responsibility as stewards of God's creation. As God has granted us the first fruits of the Spirit, we can look forward with hope to the new creation, while patiently

Breaking Barriers, Seeking Wholeness

Barbara Lloyd, Canada

Mark 5:21-34

Breaking taboos, breaking social norms, breaking the boundaries of life and death. In this miracle story that interrupts another healing by Jesus, we learn of a woman who has suffered 12 years with hemorrhages. Her shocking presence and actions, in the midst of a large crowd, are so noteworthy that the writer of Mark felt it important to include her story.

This woman is remarkable because she follows a deep conviction that Jesus can heal her. She approaches him despite purity taboos against menstruating women, against women appearing without a male chaperone, against women speaking out or touching a man. This woman flouts all these taboos because of the desperation of her situation. She is bleeding to death. She seeks healing. She seeks wholeness. She seeks an end to her social marginalization.

Instead of following the rules and accepting her sad predicament, she acts with courage to break barriers and cross boundaries of purity, gender, and social norms. She reaches out to Jesus, only touching his garment, but recognizing that in Jesus, God's spirit of love and life flows freely; that Jesus embodies a kin-dom connection she so dearly seeks.

Jesus seems to instinctively know that he has been touched. He interrupts his journey, looks around and asks, "Who touched me?". The disciples, often lacking perception, answer that it must be the crowd, but Jesus knows that his own spirit power has connected with another. Facing this intimidating challenge to identify herself, the woman approaches and kneels before him, then tells Jesus the whole truth - her ill-health, her marginalization, her pain pours out.

Jesus, ignoring cultic barriers, turns to the woman, faces her, and speaks directly to her. He makes a connection by visually, conversationally, and spiritually touching her. He sees her neediness but also her strong faith, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your disease." Affectionately, he reintegrates her into God's kin-dom of family and society.



How many of us are seeking wholeness of body, of spirit, of social situation? How many of us just by being women, bearers of new life, are stigmatized, belittled and traumatized in our societies today - women in politics, women in low paying domestic work, women caring for the sick and elderly?

Scandalously, in Canada today, Indigenous women and girls are abused, marginalized, and even murdered. After decades of colonial efforts by governments and churches to extinguish their people, their land and their culture, they seek healing, respect and wholeness.

What can we do to touch the garments of Jesus – to connect with the life-giving spirit of God? How can we act in solidarity with those on the margins of our societies to bring about restoration, reconciliation, and wholeness?

Prayer:

Dear God, may we find the strength and courage to break boundaries and barriers that inhibit the fullness of our lives, and the lives of all those who face systemic injustice in our world. Amen.

Barbara Lloyd is a retired minister and national program executive of The United Church of Canada. She works with other human rights activists to secure a just peace in Palestine/Israel. Barbara lives in Toronto, Canada where she enjoys facilitating workshops, choral singing, acrylic painting, reading, and nurturing relationships with family and friends. barblloyd@rogers.com



Vision of Hope: Reign of God

Janette Alejandro, The Philippines

Isaiah 11:6-9

Being exposed in the wild during the exile, Isaiah may have been very familiar with the animals of the desert and forest alike and yet he depicted them contrary to their nature. Upon reading this beautiful passage, one can initially say, "Not in a thousand years!" but like with all great poems, one cannot help but feel nostalgic and say, "Why not?" Just reading this promising text brings us hope, peace and security. A metaphor of peace that is manifested through the renewal of humanity and its positive impact with the most vulnerable especially women, children and those other than humans. This is the promise of the root of Jesse, the fulfillment of the reign of God through Jesus Christ with all of Creation.

Where are we in fulfilling the reign of God with the war in Ukraine, environmental degradation and exploitation of women and children? Are these the reign of God in the world?

Mindanao, Philippines, for most Filipinos, is not a place to be because of the age-long conflict between Christians and Muslims. Being missioned here is both a challenge and longtime dream. When I was in the university, I was touched by the stories of our Muslim Professor of the discrimination with his tribe not only among Christians but among other Muslim tribes as well. We all admired him for opening our eyes to the reality that we haven't known and the beauty of Muslim art, music and its people. His compassionate witnessing shifted our perspective with Muslims in general.

Cotabato, the once feared city where majority are Muslims is now a place of harmony and development except for the occasional political bombings. Our woman Muslim City Mayor believes in unity and inclusivity. She maintains good relations with all religion and courageously fights those who oppress the system. The balance of her leadership is manifested in the balance of the ecosystem where birds are heard singing, and schools of fish swimming



in the river and green old trees adorning the city landscape. Hearing Church bells ringing, song of the birds and the Muslim prayers every day, I am filled with the sacredness of Creation praising our one God. I believe this is the prophecy of Isaiah being fulfilled in a small city called Cotabato: a light of hope flickering amidst the darkness of our times. Mary Ann McGillis once said, "If our image of the future is negative then it will be self-fulfilling." But if we choose to hope because hope is a choice, we then have a future of hope that the transformation of the people of God will

Listen to the Nobodies

Anna Artin, Lebanon

2 Kings 5:1-14

This is the story of a young girl, a “captive from the land of Israel”; basically a nobody who owns nothing. However, this young girl, the least in a society is able to make a great influence in Naaman’s life. “Naaman, a commander of the army of the king of Aram,” a powerful, and wealthy man who yet suffers an incurable sickness, leprosy. The young girl seeing Naaman’s agony, dares to speak. She tells his wife what he, the great commander, has to do.

There is an old saying in Armenian, “Water is for the young, and speech is for the old”. It means that kids get priority only to get their basic needs, but when it comes to speaking or to be heard, priority goes to the eldest in the society. The eldest means the wisest, but the same does not apply to faith. The young captive girl surely did not have the chance to speak up or to be heard, but she speaks words of hope, that have the power to change and restore Naaman’s life. Naaman, who was desperate to be cured, obeys the young girl; however, as he is used to give orders, he goes with a letter of command to receive treatment. Finally, he ends up at the entrance of Elisha’s house. Elisha sends a simple command to the great commander, who stands alone outside with a mixture of feelings of great pride and vulnerability that turns to anger. Elisha speaks words of hope and life, but Naaman has difficulty to obey. Finally, he puts his faith on Elisha’s words and obeys to experience restoration.

Naaman’s standing by Elisha’s threshold frustrated, waiting to be greeted or to be touched by a curing hand, reminds us of thousands of people around the world who were afflicted with Covid 19 in the past two years, whose bodies and souls were exhausted by the virus, and needed to be surrounded by or to be touched by people dear to them but were forbidden.



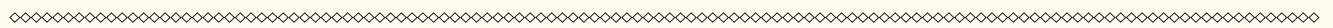
In Lebanon Covid came along with a great political and economic crisis. The tremendous inflation devalued the Lebanese Lira and the incomes lost about 80% of their purchasing power. Many people have lost their jobs, or are unpaid. Today lots of people have become nobodies. Furthermore in the midst of this mess, kids and women have become victims of violence, abuse, and a great despair, especially during the lockdown.

This story empowers those who have become nobodies and are silenced to speak out and be a source of hope and life. This story empowers us

to have hope as we experience frustration and despair. It challenges us to hear God's words of hope spoken to us even by the least in society and to obey those words with faith, so that we can experience restoration to the newness of life.

Prayer:

Dear God, as we pass thorough a difficult time, help us to hear and to speak words of hope and obey in faith. Amen.



Anna Artin, an Armenian Syrian currently living in Lebanon is a Christian educator in the National Evangelical Synod of Syria and Lebanon. She is an administrator in the National Evangelical school of Tripoli-Miniara, a pastor's wife and mother of two young kids.



Another Truth

Awit Marcelino, Canada

Mark 5:21-34

Sometimes we read a biblical passage and think that it is outdated and irrelevant. Sometimes we read a biblical passage and realize that it is speaking directly to us.

Jesus and his disciples cross the sea and are met by a great crowd of people who have heard about him and are waiting for him. They want to be healed. But even in a crowd there is an order to be maintained. The first person to approach Jesus is Jairus, a leader of the synagogue. He falls at Jesus' feet and begs him to heal his daughter. Jesus says nothing and follows him.

However, on the way, Jesus is interrupted. Someone in the crowd touches him. Unlike Jairus, this woman is nameless. Unlike Jairus, she has no connections to the synagogue. Unlike Jairus' daughter, she has no one willing to stand and wait by the seashore for a healer. So, bleeding and in pain, she pushes her way into the crowd and gets close enough to Jesus that she can stretch out her hand and touch the hem of his clothes. Immediately, the bleeding stops and she feels it in her body that she is healed. Jesus feels it too.

When Jesus asks, "Who touched me?" she quickly considers her options. She can disappear back into the crowd, feign ignorance, or face him even though she is afraid. She must have some courage leftover from when she pushed her way into the crowd because she falls before Jesus and tells him the "whole truth." After listening to her, Jesus calls her daughter and tells her that her faith has made her well.

This unnamed woman had hemorrhaged for 12 years and she must have been alone that whole time. Her constant bleeding would have made it difficult, if not impossible, to bear children. Her condition would have made her unmarriageable. If she was married, her condition would have been cause for divorce. So, this woman was in pain and she was alone. But in one word, Jesus told her another truth: she was a daughter. She was a beloved child of God.



The good news of this Gospel is that we are not alone. God knows the truth of who we really are and God, who is Love, responds to us with love. God calls us daughter and beloved child and we are made well. Maybe this woman was nameless not because she was unimportant or powerless but because her story is my sister's story. Her story is mine.

Prayer:

God of Love, when we are hurting, you feel our pain and our shame.

When we feel alone, you call us by name. When we think we are unlovable, you love us anyway. Heal our minds and touch our hearts.

Help us to love like you. Amen.

Awit Marcelino is the pastor of an open and affirming Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) congregation in Guelph, Ontario, Canada, and she co-leads an online dinner church and Bible study for young people of colour. Awit is a recently-retired member of the Board of Directors of the Women's InterChurch Council of Canada, and served as Chair of the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin from 2018 to 2020.



Mary Was Her Name

Mathilde Michael Sabbagh, Syria

Luke 1:39-56

Stories are always connected to names, to make a story realistic and comprehensible. I always focus on names, especially that I serve within a very patriarchal community where women forget their names and introduce themselves as “the mother of...”. I always find myself asking them: but what is your name, what is your story?

Most of the women in the Middle East feel connected to one Biblical name, a name that has a story which is different from the world stories. Maybe women feel connected because the Biblical figures are Middle Eastern, maybe because of the tradition. However, I always mention this Biblical figure not because she is like us from the Middle East, or because she speaks a sister-language, or because she is adored by the tradition. No. I mention her and I admire her because her story is revolutionary. Mary was her name.

In Luke 1: 39- 56, after the announcement of the angel to Mary and after hearing the blessing, Mary then chanted the Magnificat. A very well-known passage in church, it reached the level of being known by heart and recited especially during Christmas season. However, like other passages that are recited, this passage reached the level of being known but not really understood or meditated upon.

In addition to its poetic beauty and its high theological confession, it still has a very perplexing terminology and, if it is understood in its historical background, then this is a revolutionary announcement. It was dangerous to be said.

This terminology of the “rich, proud, rulers, humble’ make us ask “who are the poor according to the biblical understanding?” That is to say, are we talking about those who are economically poor? So, we can feel connected as poor communities living under the destruction of different wars. Or is the Bible introducing a different understanding of the poor and the rich?

According to the biblical understanding, the poor are the people who are forced to live and suffer violence and the acts of darkness without being able to defend themselves. The poor are those who live physically and psychologically at the edge of the abyss. They are those who live under the mercy of others. They stand before them with open and empty hands. In this context then the rich are not those who have more money. The rich are the violent ones who oppress people and make them be poor so the rich can become richer. They are those who take advantage and never care about the rights of other human beings. On the contrary, they step on those rights.



When I look closely at this song of Mary, I can see that most of the people in the Middle East especially my fellow Syrians live under the poverty line. Not only there is the economic poverty line; the truth is this: there is oppression, killings, siege, violation of human rights, freedom taken away...

But like Mary, we HOPE for God's Salvation only.

Prayer:

Gracious God, we come before you in prayer, and we pray for ourselves and all women who are serving your kingdom with open hearts and merciful hands.

Give us and them opportunities to serve with justice, mercy and faith. Give us and them, listening hearts so that your words flow through us as we talk, teach, serve and lead. And that we may be open gospels for others as they see your love and care in our lives.

Give us and them, the courage to step outside of our plans and programs and discipline us for your glory, as we walk every valley with you and as we witness to many. We pray for the capacity to welcome all people who are in need for a word, advice, and for daily life needs. Therefore, give us endurance and patience to face our troubles in society that spawns all types of poverty. Keep us all well and restore us always to your love and Grace. Amen.

Preacher Mathilde Sabbagh is a Pastor of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Al-Hassakeh North East Syria. She holds a Master in Divinity from Near East School of Theology and started her ministry in 2016. Mathilde is married to Issa Matli, and they have twin daughters, Michelle and Gretel.



All Shall Be Well

Bettie J. Durrah, U.S.A.

Malachi 4:2

How can we “heal the world” when we have not been able to physically touch each other, and that sometimes includes close family members during the pandemic? Perhaps by the time you are reading this meditation, the pandemic will have abated, and we will go back to near normal! Or will we? If these months (years) have taught us anything, it is that we need to do more to heal ourselves and help to ameliorate the social and economic challenges facing the entire world. The symbolism of the least coin moves us in the right direction as we offer prayer for the healing of the many divisions in our world. We need to heed the message of the prophet, Malachi: “Touch Our Lives, Heal Our World.”

We have had time to think about our inner selves, our family, and our connections to the global family and the Earth. Will we now “touch our lives and heal the world,” according to our theme? An African proverb says it best, “Eyes that have met, establish relationships.” We also have had time to think about the meaning of church as we recall and sing the words of Avery and Marsh: “The church is not a building, the church is a people.” Yes, we have to expand our reach for the world is waiting, but not so patiently. The fires in the Northwest United States are raging; Christian nationalism is before us; floods and tornadic activity are ever present; children are suffering; our borders are seething; elections are upon us; structural racism continues to raise its ugly head, and the list goes on ad infinitum.

The sun rises each day as a reminder for us to do our part to heal ourselves and subsequently our world of hunger, strife, enmity among people and nations, and challenges affecting devastation of physical earth. Malachi and the African American writer, James Baldwin, predicted “the fire next time.” What a metaphor for us to examine!

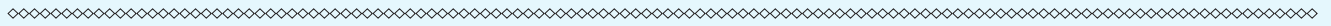


We can prevent the “fire,” as James Weldon Johnson and his brother musically prepared us: “Facing the rising sun of the new day begun, let us march on, till victory is won.”

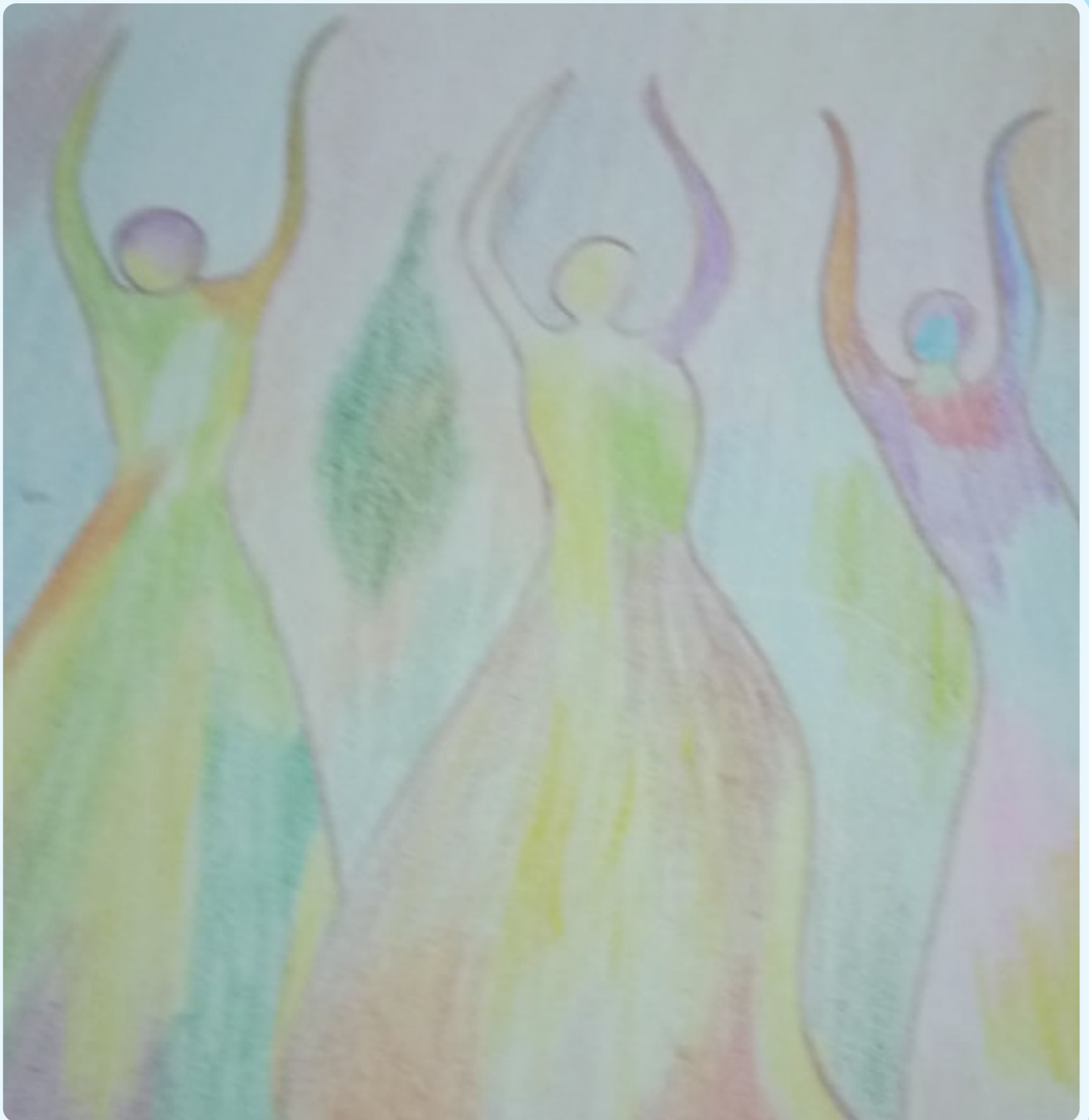
“All shall be well, and all
shall be well and all
manner of thing shall be well.”
--Julian of Norwich

Prayer:

Compassionate God, grant us the courage to face many challenges as we do your will in these special days ahead. Amen.



Bettie J. Durrah is a ruling elder/lay leader in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.). She lives in Atlanta, Georgia. She counts it as a blessing to have met Shanti Solomon, and thus she frequently shares the meaning of the Fellowship of the Least Coin. bjdurrah@aol.com



Cycles

Cheyll H. Barnes, Malawi/USA

Romans 8:19-23

There are divine secrets of creation that are only known to the triune God. These special revelations will remain hidden until the time known only by God. Theologians have a particular word that fully describes this all-knowing God. God is called omniscient. The word omniscient means that God knows the intricate details of our lives along with everything that happens in the universe; because God governs the entire world. Every part of creation is under God's observation and influence. Everything that happens, from planet warming to the destruction of the rain forests was foreseen and known by God before the world began.

While it appears that we are destroying our earth and each other, we may find some comfort in the fact that the world and creation moves in cycles. The seasons change according to pre-determined cycles, the recurring phases of the moons is cyclical, as is the earth's constant rotation around the sun. Even our bodily functions operate in a cyclical manner to ensure our sustenance. Cycles give us an indication of what will happen next; and we understand that when one thing ends, a new thing will begin. It is the circle of life.

We are living in a century and in a society that has ignored its devastating impact on the earth. Nations are obsessed with increasing their wealth and power. We are being constantly inundated with a 24-hour news cycle that continues to tally up the rising deaths from the Covid pandemic. Corporations have selfishly focused on profit margins at the expense of destroying the earth. And creation groans. Who will deliver us? The writer of this text reminds us to wait for the new cycle to appear. "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God." This text tells us that the children of God are the ones who will address the corruption that has led to the battering of the earth.

But who are the 'children of God?' I believe that the Holy Spirit is revealing something that cannot be ignored. The children of God are not just the believers, they are literally the young generation who lead in the effort to save our planet. Young climate activists all over the globe are raising their voices and demanding change to combat this climate crisis. What is increasingly noticeable about this new movement is the fact that the most globally recognized climate activists are overwhelmingly female. Yes, young women have taken the lead on the burden to save 'Mother Earth' in order to set her free from this bondage of decay.



We read in verse 22 the description of creation groaning in "labor pains." The melting ice caps, and subsequent flooding, the landslides, drought, and violent wildfires, are all symptoms of a decaying

Loneliness and Connectedness

Marines Santiago Calderon, Puerto Rico

1 Kings 17: 17-24

“Oh my baby!” My mother shouted at the news of the death of my brother Pedro in 2010. Throughout my life of service, I had seen faces disfigured by pain but never one that broke my soul.

The account in 1 Kings 17:17-24 also deals with the acute pain of a woman from Zarephath at the sight of her son gasping for breath. This difficult tableau is one among a whole set of scenes that make up the story. Scenes of pain, brokenness, loneliness, and urgency of affection.

The case that I want to share from my lens as a single woman heading a family that includes our widowed father, is the story of the widow of Zarephath and the prophet Elisha. The story is set in a period of famine caused by a sign from God as punishment for the idolatry of a king and his wife. A re-reading centuries later allows us to understand that the worldview of the people of Israel is God as the originator of all things; both fortune and misfortune. This being the general thought, we can understand the claim of the widow of Zarephath before the prophet Elisha.

Let's examine the widow's case. This woman had already lost her husband, guarantor of affection and financial support. And now her only son was dying. The widow not only face social helplessness but also the crudest loneliness; the absence of a caress, of a passionate kiss, a strong hug in the hands of human warmth.

Before a breathless body and lacking in vital heat, the prophet does what my mother did when my brother was ill - fill him with maternal warmth. Mom blew in our faces when we were hot and made hot steam from her mouth if we were cold. From this perspective I understand that I am seeing a cardiopulmonary resuscitation, also called a miracle!



In this time of pandemic, all human relationships and expressions of affection have undergone a reconfiguration. Fearing a viral contagion, another virus invaded us; loneliness in the absence of expression of affection.

Giving breath of life is certainly an attribute of the God of life. However, God can also use other human beings when loneliness visits us. Will I be able to give encouragement to those in need? Will I allow others to breathe life into my moments of human loneliness?

Prayer:

Loving and mighty God, we beg you to allow us to experience your company in the midst of loneliness and helplessness, in times of loss in everyday life as we knew it. May we then be supportive and learn new ways to show your love to our fellow human beings. Amen.

Rev. Marines Santiago Calderon is an ordained Minister of the Church (Christian Disciples) of Christ in Puerto Rico.



Equally Precious in God's Eyes

Grace Terry, USA

Romans 12:2

Born in the mid-1950s, I grew up in a family, a school system, a community, a church and a larger culture that all taught me that being female, I am inherently less valuable, less important, less capable, and less worthy of God's favor than any male. The message was sometimes blatant, sometimes subtle, but always consistent. There was nothing I could ever become or do to make me as important or valuable as my brother, because he was male and I was female. By adolescence, I struggled with constant anxiety, clinical depression, and a full-blown eating disorder.

Thankfully, as a young adult I was introduced to some different ideas about women, including the idea that my Creator considers me equally valuable, loveable, and capable as any other divine child regardless of the child's gender. I was no greater than any other, but certainly no less.

Reading the gospels with new eyes, I saw for the first time that Jesus the Christ, in spite of being born and reared in a rigidly patriarchal culture, consistently treated women as equally valuable and worthy of being touched, being healed, and being instruments or channels of divine healing and peace. He did not conform to his culture. He transcended it.

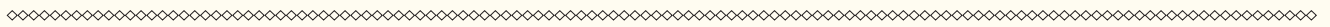
Over time, these new ideas about my equality in the eyes of my Creator completely transformed me by the renewal of my mind. I came to believe that I am equally lovable, valuable, and precious along with every other child of God. I also came to believe that God's good and acceptable and perfect will for me (as well as for others) is an abundance of every good blessing, including peace, love, wisdom, purpose, and joyful service using my unique gifts and talents.



During my lifetime, we as a human family have made noteworthy progress toward the goal of equality for all people regardless of gender, race, culture, ethnicity, abilities, or sexual orientation. However, we can readily find countless situations where there is need for continuing healing and enlightenment. I'm daily grateful for the renewal of my mind and for opportunities to be part of the solution to the problem of oppression of women and others. Church Women United or CWU is one organization which offers me those opportunities and I am grateful.

Prayer:

Holy Spirit within us, lead us to greater wisdom, so that we may be those who touch and heal with your transforming power. In the name of all that is Holy, Amen.



Grace Terry, MSW, is an ordained interfaith minister specializing in Grief Resolution Coaching and Companionship. She is the author of "The Spiral Pathway of Grief: A Traveler's Companion." She is the secretary for Georgia State CWU. grace@angelsabide.com



Care and Respect for Creation

James Bhagwan, Fiji

Micah 6:8

The climate emergency is the result of an ethical, moral and spiritual crisis, manifested in a fixation on profit. The extractive and, ultimately, unsustainable systems of production and consumption, by those complicit in this crisis, continue to ignore increasing scientific, and moral warnings. Those who have contributed to this crisis the least, suffer the most, physically, existentially, and ecologically.

This is an injustice that must end.

We affirm the Faith and Science Joint Appeal, calling us to respond, with the knowledge of science, and the wisdom of spirituality: to know more and to care more. Our interconnectedness to this common home forces us to a radical solidarity, across gender and generation, for climate justice for all. In this spirit, wealthier countries must lead in reducing their own emissions, and in financing emission reductions of poorer nations. Industrialised countries must support the vulnerable countries, and finance adaptation.

They must put into action a mechanism for loss and damage, with additional funds.

Love calls us to seek climate justice and restoration. It calls us to respect the rights of indigenous people, to protect our descendants and ancestors' domains from predator economic interest and to learn from their essential wisdom. Indigenous spirituality can restore our understanding of interdependence between land, ocean and life. Between generations before us and the once to come.

Love calls us to a transformation of systems and lifestyles. This transitional ways from fossil fuel base of economy must be just, securing livelihood for all and not just for some.

We ask our leaders to keep the promise alive but to keep the hope of a flourishing future. We have heard many commitments...Words have power, but only when they are manifested into action. We call the leaders of the developed world to act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with God and all creation. The fate of the planet depends on it.



Follow God's Law of Love for All

Juanita Miller, Australia

1 Peter 5:3

Having grown up in a Christian environment, her father a lay preacher and mother a Sunday school teacher, Maria grew up to be a caring and compassionate woman. She worked in an orphanage in the next town where she felt at home. She would stay overnight when need arose. Then she was given a special client to care for, a physically-challenged baby boy born with no legs, who was refused by his own mother.

It soon became very evident that the baby boy was very precious to Maria, and she loved him enough that after almost a year of care she applied to adopt the child to become her own, and even named him after John the Baptist. After some thought and planning one day she came home to let her parents enjoy their adopted grandson.

Maria's father was furious and was worried about what the church congregation and the little town where they lived would all think – that Maria had been an unmarried mother. Both father and mother emphatically said she was not to keep the baby, or she could move out of their lives.

After living some four years in the next town and having no family wanting to contact her, Maria was surprised to be called to come quickly to her parents' home. Her father was very ill and very close to passing. He was a different man in that he asked Maria to forgive him and to accept his love. He admitted to having been a law unto his family and not giving room in his heart to the way of God's leading. He saw it all now and so did Maria's mother. They were full of sadness for the years they had lost and for the beautiful child who was growing in God's direction.

Maria set aside the hurt and disappointment she had experienced and realised they had all learnt of this right way of life in a difficult but genuine way. God led the way. To God they all gave thanks and glory.



Prayer:

Loving Compassionate God, we are thankful for Your welcome to us at all times. We are aware we often move forward without Your answer thus making life so difficult for those looking for direction in their life. May we each take to heart Your word and the very giving of Your Son whose example was a sacrifice for us, to remember and in thanks treat our brothers and sisters in the very way You ask and show us to display. We thank You for never leaving us to decide or lead by ourselves. Amen.

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Juanita Miller, an active member of Uniting Church in Australia, is committed to discipleship and in encouraging others in their faith. Her sense of call has been lived out in leadership in Bible Study and Prayer ministry. She is married to David and they have two daughters.



# Personal Well-Being and Economic Needs

Tumaini Rutta, Tanzania  
Romans 12:2

Much like issues regarding human rights and gender equality, personal well-being and economic needs are also issues that the world seems to be very keen on. In simple terms, well-being refers to an individual's life satisfaction, whereas economic needs refer to a set of requirements that are deemed necessary for an individual to function, by worldly standards. The community in which I live tends to associate economic needs to an individual's personal well-being. Unfortunately, perhaps because of this association, classes/hierarchies have been established, based on the amount of economic needs one possesses. For many years, it has stereotypically seemed as though those that have sufficient economic needs are interpreted to be well-off and to have a more satisfactory personal well-being; that would be considered a class of its own, separate from the rest. The idea and the entire association between the two aforementioned terms seem to be interpreted rather materialistically.

The word of God according to Romans 12:2 instructs us to "not be conformed to this world." Being conformed to this world refers to adapting to the "system" or "tradition" viewed and practiced or lived out by most if not all human beings in the world, by default. The word further encourages us to be transformed by the renewal of our minds, that by testing, we may discern what the will of God is and what is good, acceptable and perfect. This word informs us that there is something better and higher than the mere worldly life pattern. When we accept not being conformed to the worldly patterns and accept having changed minds, we begin to understand the biblical perspective of personal well-being and our economic needs would include spiritual needs, imperative to the purpose that God wants us to fulfill on earth as well as success in our Christian lives.

## Prayer:

*Almighty God, parent and creator of all things in heaven and on earth, we thank you for the richness of your word. We are sorry and truly repent for being consumed by our worldly desires. May your Holy Spirit constantly remind us of your grace that is sufficient for us; grace that will enable us to continually think about our economic needs and personal well-being in a holistic sense. In the mighty name of Jesus Christ we pray, amen.*





# Have Faith in God!

Judith Vincze, Romania

Mark 5:21-34

Jesus is active as ever. Even when he stops moving, he is not idle; he prays. He is accompanied by God. This means perpetual activity. Jesus communicates with God. He asks God for strength he needs, and God gives it!

A priest from the synagogue reaches out to Jesus. He asks Jesus to heal his mortally sick daughter. In spite the forlornness of the situation, Jesus sets out with this trusting man - and something is happening in the meantime. One event generates another! Another woman struggling with utter despair seeks the possibility of deliverance and relief through Jesus. What do these people look for? Deliverance, flight, relief, solution - all of these with hope! We may also ask ourselves: who am I in this story? Let us put ourselves in this situation and not be afraid of responsibility. Only those who are brave can be freed from captivity, from the prison of their lives.

What would you have done in Jesus's position? Would you have listened to a person who serves at the synagogue who is your enemy out destroy your life and other Jewish servers? What would you do in Jairus's position? Would you be brave? Would you go? Would you hope? What would you do in the position of the seriously sick woman? Would you hope till the end? Would you take the opportunity "cunningly", but with brave faith?

Let us ponder these questions and choose. Let us take on the responsibility of changing the course of our lives in a way that we seek the God of life and death, and that we trust God fully with our lives!

This wonderful story teaches us three things: 1) We shall now not wonder about those times but discover how Jesus's presence is able to change our lives! 2) Jairus belongs to the enemies of Jesus, still he reaches out to him. How many conflicts would be solved and how many relationships would change if we were able to act in such manner? 3) Jesus is sought by people who live close to death but who still hope. Jesus represents the ultimate possible solution!



How does Jesus call on you? Can he tell you what he told this woman? "Go, because your faith kept you, be healthy!"?

People and the world need healing and a Healer. Let us reach out to Jesus, seek his presence and ask for strength, light and guidance to hope.



# The Good Shepherd Serves

Leinamau Seru Manrogoana, Vanuatu

1 Peter 5

Vanuatu in the South Pacific has many different languages within a population of about 350 thousand people, making it sometimes hard to find solutions to the diversity of customs and traditions. Yet Vanuatu has someone unique whom we look up to within the communities to help solve the problems or challenges that come our way – especially to do with cultural values, traditions, respect, natural disasters and so on – the Chief. The Chief is often the peace maker, the counsellor and often the hardest working person in the community – in reconciling couples, maintaining security and making sure that everyone lives in peace and harmony.

When the Christian missionaries came, it is understandable why there were mass conversions because of the Chief's decision for his people to become Christians alongside him. The Vanuatu culture being patriarchal, most of the chiefs are men and are often seen as instruments of peace and reconciliation. Yet in cases of domestic violence, the judgement is not always fair.

When we read through 1 Peter 5, we see special responsibility put on the leaders of the church as shepherds to look after the flock. Their job is to support and look after with care and love God's people. Peter writes not only to encourage them in words, but also commands them to act in leading well and to show good example for people to follow with faith and trust in Christ. Now this brings to mind the question of 'suffering for doing good' as mentioned in (1 Peter 3:13-22). Peter and Paul agree on our submitting to earthly authorities in order to keep the peace and harmony. When we put that authority inside the home where the man or father is head of the house and as a shepherd, with the expectation of submission from the wife and children, it is another matter to consider. The question is how do the community and the Church structures handle situations of domestic violence within the home?



Domestic violence has often been regarded as a matter to be sorted out within the home and families concerned. Many times that is where our Chiefs and the Church come in to 'solve' the problem with customs, fines and a prayer, and then all is well. The peace returns and all seem well, but the violence continues behind closed doors. How do we keep submitting to such authority which does not build security, love and empathy within a home? What example is being portrayed to the children within the home and community about this? How is the shepherd within the home taking care of the flock?



Jesus as the Head of the Church loved the church and laid down his life for it. The church as his, submits to his commands with faithfulness, obedience and humility. As he said in Mark 10:45, 'I did not come to be served, but I came to serve.' It is worthwhile to think carefully about positions that we have in life, or those who are in authority as 'servants' rather than the boss. To those suffering under an authority not worth submitting to, be strong and courageous to speak out. Be an example and seek help and care to help victims of violence, secure justice and peace and joy that we should have through Christ (John 10:10).

*Prayer:*

*Loving God, You alone are our heavenly Father and Mother. Teach us to be good shepherds to follow in your footsteps of grace, love and humility all the time. As the sheep fill us with your grace and humility to hear your voice as the Good Shepherd who wills fullness of life for us. Touch our homes with your love and care, and allow your grace to be seen, heard and obeyed in each of our hearts. May you perfect us in your love and humility. Amen.*

Leinamau Seru Manrogoana is a Pastor of the Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu for 22 years. She has worked in different fields of ministry, produced and translated many resource materials for her Church, and currently is doing her doctoral studies at the Pacific Theological College.



# Transformed from the Inside Out

Lynn Mitchell, Canada

Romans 12:2

Paul is writing to the Christians living in Rome about new life in Christ; what it might look like, how it might feel, in a world inhospitable to the Good News. In this Letter to the Romans we find Paul the Lawyer, addressing a community that was probably well-educated and cerebral. So, like a good lawyer, Paul makes a statement and then goes on, point by point, to expand upon it, "making his case", as it were.

Paul talks about transformation of the mind, not for merely personal satisfaction, but in order to discern God's will, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. And because the Romans would undoubtedly come back with, "well, how do we know what is good and acceptable and perfect?", Paul proceeds to tell them, and the first thing he talks about is how they, though many, are one body in Christ; many members, one body.

Since early 2020, we have been, and continue to be, challenged to the very roots of our being – individually, as communities, as countries, globally – by COVID19. The accumulated and growing losses, of life, of economic stability, of gathering in community, feel too great to take in fully. In many places around the world the pandemic is yet another devastation borne by people who already shoulder unbearable burdens. The weight of the world feels too much, too heavy.

But Paul reminds us that we do not need to be conformed to this world, that the ways of the world do not have the last word. God, in Christ, has the last word, and in Christ we are changed, transformed from the inside out. In the midst of the deep challenges of these times, through Christ we are renewed so as to perceive the presence of God with us, to discern the will and the ways of God, the good, the acceptable, the perfect; to be given the grace to see the blessings and opportunities around us, even in pandemic times.

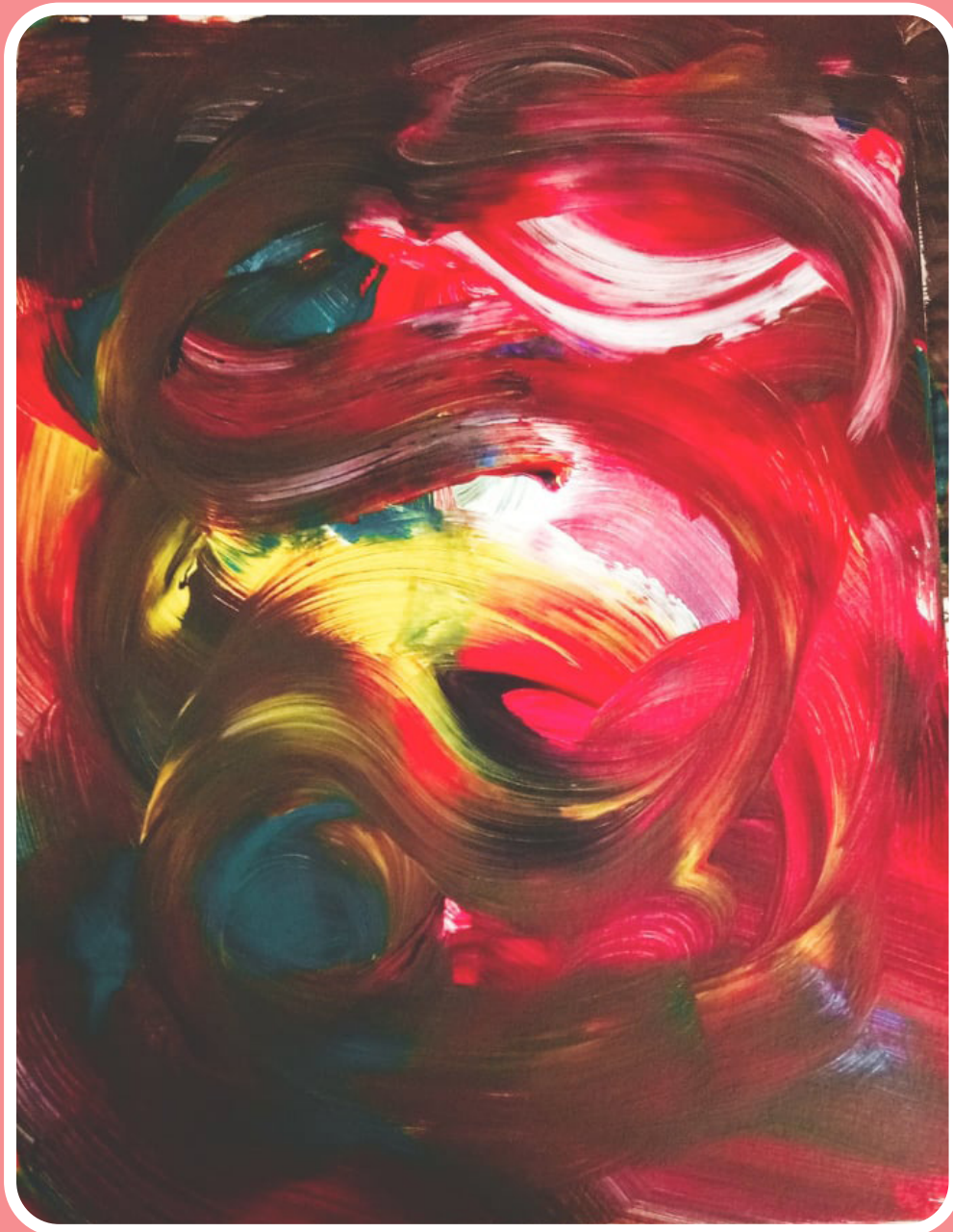


One of the blessings in the community I serve has been a renewed discovery of ourselves as one body in Christ. Thrust out of our church buildings and gathering spaces, we have discovered anew what it means to be the Church. One of the ironies is that, in this time of isolation, we have become more intentional about connecting with and caring for one another, and we have become more aware of the depth of our human interconnectedness in Christ Jesus. Our minds have been renewed. We are discerning differently. It is here I perceive signs of transformation, of grace, blessing, possibility, and hope for the future.

*Prayer:*

*Holy and loving God, through the death and resurrection of your Son Jesus you make possible the renewal of our hearts and minds. Transform our lives through the blessings of your grace, that even in dark places we may discern your presence and discover new ways to serve you through serving one another. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.*

Lynn Mitchell has been a priest of the Anglican Church of Canada for 33 years and presently serves three congregations in southeastern Ontario. She is a member of the Board of Directors of the Women's InterChurch Council of Canada, and the WICC liaison to the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin in 2021.



# Come and Be Blessed!

Margriet Gosker, The Netherlands

Acts 16:14

The Apostle Paul had a vision: a Macedonian man cried: "Come over and help us". Paul realised it was God who called him to cross the sea from Asia into Europe. This was the very beginning of Christianity in Europe. It is curious that we never hear another word of that Macedonian man again. The focus is on a woman called Lydia. She was originally from Asia but has now been living in Europe for a long time. She has her own business in the purple cloth industry. Purple was quite expensive, so we can imagine that she was a successful businesswoman. She owned a large house. She was rich not only materially, but also spiritually.

Though Lydia was doing well financially, life was not giving her real satisfaction. She was always looking for a deeper understanding and hoping to find answers for her questions. And Lydia loves rituals. On Sabbath, she takes time off work, and goes for a walk by the river. There is a place in the open air for ritual washing: a place to meet others, hang your feet in the water and be silent in prayer. She likes such places; they give her peace and inspiration.

On that day, Paul and his friends were looking for the local Jewish synagogue. They presumed it would be near the river, where ritual washings took place. And so it was. I wonder what Paul actually said to Lydia. What did they talk about? Should we know? I think it is important that God opened Lydia's heart. It occurs to me that all our speaking, writing, and preaching can never be fruitful, unless they are blessed by God. Lydia comes to faith; she is baptized and she opens the doors of her house wide to the whole community. "Come in," she says invitingly. "Take up residence in my house." And it is not just a saying. She really wants it. And so, the first Christian community of Europe is founded here. What a beautiful story!



If Christianity started like this in Europe, where are we now? Can we still speak of a Christian Europe? Or should we get used to the idea that Christianity has become a dwindling minority with little missionary power and persuasiveness? Can a fresh new wind blow through the churches?

Originally it started with a single woman. She was receptive and open-minded. Her house was open for the young European congregation of Philippi. Did she go back later to that one spot by the river? Did she pray there with others to strengthen her faith, hope, and love? Maybe we should do the same. Let us go back to that one

spot, the source of our belief, and pray together for a deepening of our faith, and a strengthening of our hope and love.

We pray for Europe, which is highly secularised, shields itself, is barely open to women and men wanting to enter Europe from other cultures, and is defined by a high degree of consumerism and self-love.

*Prayer:*

*O God, have mercy. We pray for women like Lydia, with open minds and open hearts, which receive strength from the gospel and give love to all those who cross their paths. Spirit of God, flow through, animate and bless Europe, so that this continent may be a blessing to the world, to Europeans and non-Europeans. May Europe take courage, support the weak, strengthen the afflicted and encourage the anxious joyfully, in the strength of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

Dr. Margriet Gosker is an ecumenical theologian with a feminist interest, and a fighter for women in the churchly ministries. She got her PhD in Budapest, the heart of Europe. A member of the Faith and Order board of the Council of Churches in the Netherlands, and organiser of 500 Years of Protestantism (2015-2017) for her church, Margriet is a reverend emeritus of the Protestant Churches in the Netherlands. [dr.m.gosker.venlo@hetnet.nl](mailto:dr.m.gosker.venlo@hetnet.nl)



# Care and Respect for Creation

Mary Isaac, Jordan

Romans 8:19–21; Genesis 3:17–19

In Romans 8, Paul is clearly saying that creation is still in pain, that this has been happening since sin entered into the world. Creation is groaning in pain, and it is waiting with eager expectation to be liberated from its bondage and decay. This expectation comes as a result of Christ's restoration of the purity and righteousness of fallen humanity, which was completed in the crucifixion and resurrection.

As creation awaits to experience the freedom and redemption of Christ, let us:

A. Understand our responsibility towards creation that God loves. God has shown a great love for creation by creating it in the most beautiful and perfect way. God's love was shown as well when stewards were assigned to care for and maintain it. These stewards were made in God's image, filled with God's love, and are able to care and reflect God's love for it. Unfortunately, these stewards ignored their responsibilities. They neglected creation and misunderstood their responsibility assigned by God, selfishly abusing God's creation instead of treating it in respectful and purposeful manner that God desires. And for so long, creation was exploited by human wrongdoing. It was misused greedily in order to increase human wealth and power. We are called to remember our stewardship, our responsibility to tend creation, connect with it, and help it to recover and heal. Recently, with all the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, there was a good opportunity for creation to recover partially when the ozone hole was minimized due to human economic inactivity last year.

B. Realize that we are not only responsible for creation but that we are part of it as well. What comes to it comes to us. What harms creation harms us, and what benefits creation benefits us. When creation suffers from pollution in air, soil, and water, that pollution eventually comes into our bodies, causing illness and pain. Therefore, we need to realize that taking care of creation is taking care of our human life now and for the generations to come.

C. We need to realize that experiencing God's reconciliation on the cross should cause us to be reconciled not only with each other but also with God's creation. Creation groans in the pain of childbirth. That means that it is looking to be newly born, to recover, and to experience God's redemption as we did through Jesus Christ.

Let us embrace God's reconciliation and reconcile with creation, taking up our responsibility to wait and work together in eager, hopeful expectation for the final freedom and redemption.



*Prayer:*

*Creator God of heaven and earth and all creation, when we consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, we praise your holy name! We pray in humility to grant us your peace, and place your love in our hearts. Replace our arrogance and hatred with humility and love, make us see your creation through your eyes and give us to remember our place in this wide world - to see ourselves as your faithful stewards who are entrusted to love, care for, and maintain the wellbeing of your creation. We humble our souls in your presence O God. Hear our prayers that we offer in your name. Amen.*

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Mary Isaac is a Syrian/Jordanian with an MA in Christian Education. Married to Rev George Al Kopti, they both serve at St. Paul's Anglican Church in Amman. Aside from doing the children, youth and women ministry in church, Mary also works as a Secondary Principal at Roy and Dora Whitman Academy in Amman.



The Healing Touch of Jesus

Martina Heinrichs, The Netherlands

Mark 5:21-34

We meet two women in this account, the little daughter of Jairus and the woman who suffers from discharge of blood. Unfortunately, we do not know their names which is not unusual in many biblical books. There is huge faith in the healing power of Jesus as Jairus who is a personality at the synagogue and the father of the little girl kneels in front of him to beg healing for his dying daughter.

And the adult woman has a strong belief too: by only touching his garment she trusts to become better. And yes, immediately the flowing of blood stops. The encounter is mutual. Jesus feels that his cloth had been touched and searches for the person who did it. The woman, like Jairus, kneels down before Jesus. She overcomes her fears and tells him what had happened to her. Jesus answers respectfully by naming her "daughter of God" - an honorable title often given to men, and Jesus himself is named "Son of God" - and by praising her faith and trust. The little girl, she is twelve years old, will be healed, as well, as we are told in the next paragraph. People can hardly believe it. They laugh at Jesus. But he says that she is only sleeping. After again a bodily contact, Jesus holds her hand, she will stand up and walk around.

Healing by touching. In these times of the pandemic touching is not an uninhibited act. We are told to keep distance and not to touch the other to avoid the spreading of the virus. This can make us suspicious of other people. But it makes us also conscious about our responsibility to those who live together with us. We become aware of our interconnectedness as human beings, nearby and far away, worldwide. The situation appeals to our sense of solidarity. We become inventive by using new technologies like zoom meetings to keep seeing each other, but without touching. Though the digital encounter can never replace the physical one.

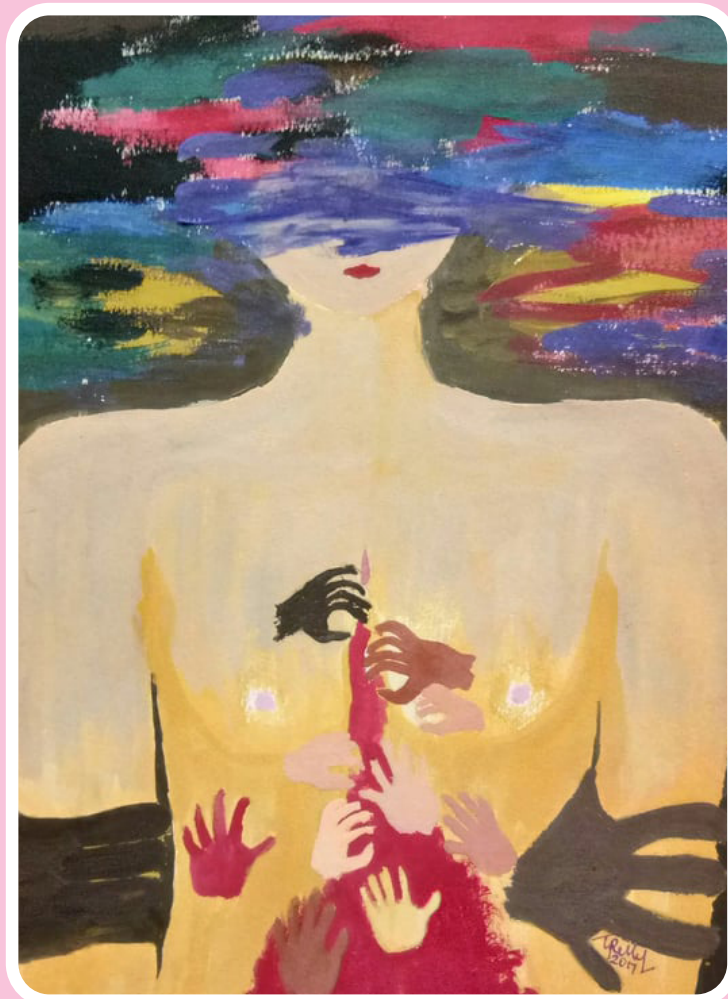
Many single-living people find it hard that they have to refuse any physical contact with others as they do not share a household with another person. A new word has been born for this situation: hunger of the skin. It is a longing for feeling the skin and the body of another person, which is essential for living and growing. Children who do not grow up with persons who touch them, who keep them in their arms and caress them, will not flourish but languish. We are bodily beings in the unity of spirit, mind and body. Our bodies are the temple of God, a gift which we should respect and cherish. So let us pray:



*Dear loving God,
Who has positively affirmed us as bodily
beings
By sending Jesus, an embodied human being
to our world
Who came to heal and bring peace*

*Instead of war and mental or physical violence
Make us aware how precious our bodies are
Which should not be harmed but healed and cherished
Like the bodies of women and children
Suffering from domestic violence
Like Mother Earth you created
To take care of her, not to destroy her
As we are all creatures of the same God.
Help us to find ways to overcome this pandemic
In worldwide solidarity
By honoring our bodies and those of others.
In the name of Jesus, your incarnated son, our brother.
Amen.*

Martina Heinrichs from Germany lives and works in the Netherlands in the past forty years. She is a mother of three adult children and very recently a grandmother to her first grandson. A Roman Catholic feminist theologian working as program director in a Dominican Priory and Retreat Center in the Netherlands, Martina is involved in interreligious and ecumenical women's networks throughout Europe and worldwide. She is currently the regional representative from Europe in the International Committee of the Fellowship of the Least Coin.





Hope in Time of Despair

Mary Nordick, Canada

Jeremiah 33: 6; Psalms 118:14

Jeremiah's prophecy was meant to give comfort to the people of Israel in a very dark time when the city of Jerusalem was being attacked and destroyed. These words thousands of years later still have the ability to bring comfort and hope. We are beginning to emerge from the long darkness of a pandemic that has radically changed life as we knew it. We are in desperate need of healing and peace. Our city, that is our world, is wounded. Countless lives have been lost and due to COVID restrictions, deaths were not witnessed actually in person and were without the usual ceremonies that can bring healing after such loss.

COVID has exposed deficiencies in our societies such as substandard care for the elderly, inadequate health care and access to it, employment inequities, food instability, marginalization of people, racist attitudes and retribution, and the list goes on. Isolation has led to an increase in domestic violence worldwide and mental health issues that cut across gender, age, and social class.

Into this despair come words of hope "I will treat and assuage; ... I will heal": Treat and heal but even more assuage. Assuage is an unusual but truly beautiful word that means to comfort, to soothe. Who among us does not need and yearn for comfort in these times? Note too, the personal nature of the message "I will". God spoke these words of promise through Jeremiah and God speaks these words to us today. Our God has walked with us through the pandemic and will walk with us beyond it - comforting, healing, soothing, bringing us to peace.

The psalmist assures us that God has been our saviour and that strength and courage are found in that saviour. As Christians we proclaim Jesus Christ as Saviour and place our trust in Him who died to save us and showed us the glory of the resurrection that overcomes all even death.



Prayer:

Dear and faithful God, we give thanks for your unceasing care in darkest times and cling to your promise of healing, hope, and peace. Help us to learn from this pandemic and strengthen us to work towards a just and caring society where all children, women, and men may live in your promised peace and share in the riches and beauty of our common home, the earth that You created and gave us to cherish. Amen.

Mary Nordick is a member of the Board of Directors for the Women's Inter-Church Council of Canada 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.



Care and Respect for Creation

Ruth JE Mbennan, Tanzania

Romans 8:19-23

Care is defined by Oxford dictionary as “the provision of what is necessary for the health, welfare, maintenance, and protection of someone or something.” Respect can be defined as “holding an attitude of appropriating worth to someone or something and treating them in line with the recognition of that worth.” Creation is all that exists, seen and unseen. Care and respect for God’s creation, therefore, refers to protecting, treating, maintaining, developing and using all that exists in ways that demonstrate appreciation of their worth, because they are God’s handiwork.

One main aspect of care and respect for creation pertains to the view and treatment of women. Unfortunately, there is much gender-based violence going on around the world and women everywhere seem to speak a universal language of suffering. According to the Global 2015 Human Development Report, about 35% of women globally have experienced physical or sexual violence. In Tanzania, the country I come from, nearly four in ten women experience physical violence annually, and one in five report experiencing sexual violence in their lifetime and many experience this trauma from the tender age of 15.

Working with women in Africa for more than 15 years, I came across numerous accounts of women who contemplated, even attempted, suicide, seeking to escape from the pain of endless violence against them. One woman said to me, “I was planning to kill my two daughters and then kill myself, for I did not see how I could continue to bear the pain from my abusive partner.” Indeed, as we read in Romans 8:19-23, creation is groaning in waiting for the day of deliverance and this is no less true for women. Gender-based violence is contrary to God’s command and principles in relation to God’s creation. The call to action with regard to gender-based violence must be heard. God’s instruction to “dress” and “keep” the garden (Genesis 2:15) implies that it is our responsibility to care and respect God’s creation, namely, human beings, other living things, and the environment in general. Women, regardless of race, education or social status, are part of God’s creation. Isaiah 11:6-9 gives a glimpse of God’s desire for creation. It is a peaceful, harmonious and safe co-existence, based on the prevalence of the knowledge of God.



We need to trust God that the tendencies to dominate and hurt women will change to a commitment to care and respect them instead. We know God is great and has no limits of time or place and among other gods there is no comparison to the God Almighty. Nothing can control God’s doing. God can control heaven, earth, sea and all deep places... (Psalms 135:5-6).

Prayer:

Almighty God, Creator of the Universe, please rescue your creation from pain and destruction. Please transform the hearts and minds of humanity so that they always care and respect women and the rest of your creation. Through the name of our brother and savior Jesus, Amen.

Ruth JE Mbennah is the former Programme Officer of the Women Development, Children and Gender at the Christian Council of Tanzania.



Smartphones and Violence Against Women

Tomoko Watanabe, Japan

2 Samuel 13: 1-21; 1 Peter 5

I recently learned that sexual violence is closely related to the smartphones that we use. Dr. Denis Mukwege of the Republic of the Congo, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 2018, is working to restore the health of victims of sexual violence in his country. He was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his efforts to eradicate sexual violence as a weapon of war and armed conflict. I became more interested in him and read his autobiography, "Everything for Salvation (Plaidoyer pour la vie)". Here's what I learned:

The Republic of the Congo is a very rich country with a variety of natural resources such as gold, diamonds, tin and coltan. In recent years, the demand for smartphones has increased, and their production is taking place at a rapid pace. The computers and mobile phones we usually use also contain a few grams of tantalum refined from coltan. Turtanu, which is extremely heat resistant, is used as a capacitor in small electronic devices. And 80% of the world's reserves of coltan, which can extract this turtanu, are in the Republic of the Congo. Mineral resources, especially coltan, played a decisive role in the Second Congo War, which began in 1998. Then, at the beginning of the 21st century, multinational companies in the field of electronic equipment fought for Coltan without paying attention to gold, creating a black market that allowed the spread of violence. The time when this coltan black trade began to go rampant coincides with the time when sexual violence against women began. In 2002, the Second Congo War was signed to end. However, the violence did not stop. That is because the militia continued to control the areas where mineral resources were buried. To secure mineral resources, vast forests and various arable lands must be carved out. However, if the local residents resist, such work will not be able to proceed. That's where rape comes in. Rape is used systematically as a means of subduing residents. Of course, the militia burns the villages and kills the inhabitants. But their greatest weapon is sexual violence. Violence against a woman is inevitably the same as hurting her family. Women are crushing their hearts so that their families can live comfortably every day. Attacking a woman is an act that attacks the entire family and impairs its safety. At the same time, it is also a way to deeply hurt a husband. All that has to be done is rape the women to destroy or overrun the villages.



Dr. Denis Mukwege has been working to help women victims of sexual violence in the conflict-prone eastern Congo since the last 20 years. More than 42,000 victims have been treated in hospitals. Moreover, many of them are said to have suffered not only rape but also terrible violence that completely injured female genitals. Women who give birth in remote villages in the

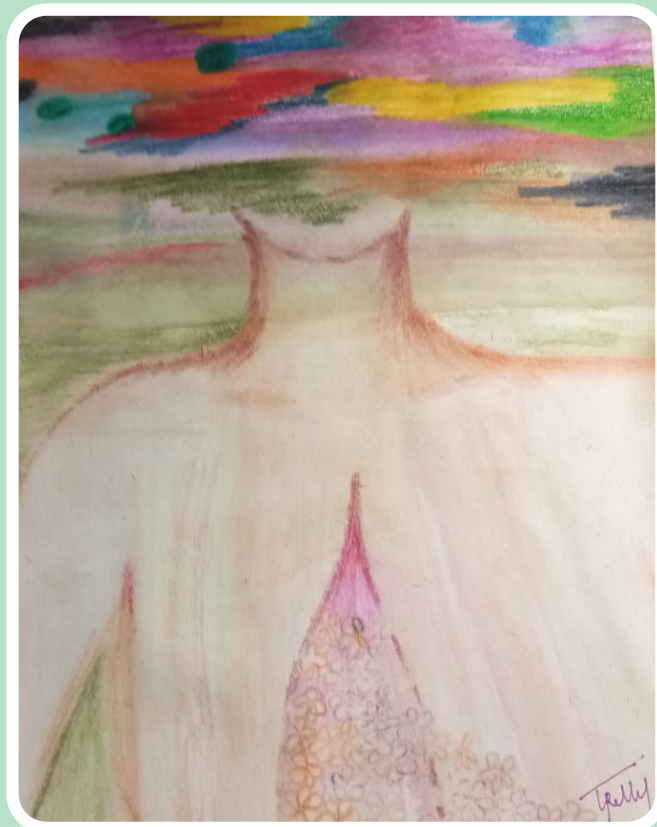
mountains often lack tissue in the birth canal during childbirth. It is more likely to occur in young pregnant women, especially when giving birth at a young age. As a result, it can be quite life-threatening during childbirth. This is all the result of sexual violence. There is a complex rivalry between ethnic groups unique to Congo, and sexual violence is systematically and extensively used as a cheap means of controlling villages around the mine with fear.

Are we unknowingly the perpetrators of rape? I want you to think about the suffering of Congolese women when you use your smartphone. Your smartphone may also have been built at the expense of Congolese women who were sexually violated.

Prayer:

We praise our name O God! Tamar was humiliated by David's firstborn son Amnon, but we remember that many women in the world are still humiliated and suffer every day today. We also know that women victims are deprived of good health and they are in loneliness and huge disappointment. Please take care of these women so that everyone can regain their pride as a woman and live in a society free of violence. Grant us peace. We offer this prayer to you in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Tomoko Watanabe is a member of the National Federation of Kyodan Women's Societies in Japan and its Ecumenical Relations Committee. She was Japan national representative to the Asian Church Women's Conference from 2010 to 2018.



My Family, My Home

Susan Estrada-Dillozon, Macao SAR/The Philippines

2 Samuel 13: 1-21

“There is no place like home” is a favorite saying to us Filipinos. Yes, because our home is the only safest place to stay that makes us feel safe and secure especially when we are with family.

I work with Overseas Filipino Workers here in Macao. I heard different painful stories that happened in their homes and that made some of them decide to leave their families. What makes me sad is that some of those stories are still happening until now.

The text is somewhat unbelievable, but it happens, and it is true. If anyone had reason to feel safe and secure, it was Tamar. She is the only daughter of David, the greatest king during his time, so it is expected that her entire life had been comfortable and that she enjoyed the privilege of being the King's only daughter. Growing up in the royal palace in Jerusalem Tamar has always the best of everything: food, clothing, jewelry, perfume. It's hard to imagine, given this life of wealth and leisure, that she could have needed or wanted anything. And yet if she had, she only had to ask David, her father and the king. Then, too, Tamar seemed to have been especially set apart because she is the only daughter that we know of among all of David's many children.

The story of Tamar is tragic. If this situation happens in a Royal family, how much more to poor Filipino families in rural areas. How would a mother feel, working away from her family when, when a daughter tells her Mom that she was raped by here father? A mother shared to me her fears when her daughter called over the phone, telling her that her father was maliciously and intentionally showing her his genitals in broad daylight. And every time she is inside the bathroom, she suspects and later discovered that the father is doing something indecent. The mother felt relief when her daughter went to her school's guidance counselor and this is what was told to her. “If you were abused in any way, you must know it was not your fault and what happened to you was not in any way okay.” The daughter got confused so she asked her mom to come home.



Every family lives differently. Parents have an important and crucial role in nurturing children. The story of Tamar shows what happens when bad advice is taken from friends, and that we should choose friends wisely. Jonadab perhaps acted that way because he lacked guidance from parents. Abuse does not just affect the victim; it impacts the family and community. It is difficult to imagine the pain, heartbreak, betrayal, isolation, and psychological trauma of anyone who encountered such violation like Tamar's. And it is important to remember that no one deserves abuse.

We can help prevent abuses within families by deepening family relationships. Bringing family members to church to attend Sunday schools, hear homilies, get involve in bible studies and participate in spiritual activities may help each one to be kinder, just and compassionate. Having faith in Christ helps build genuine and loving relationships among parents and siblings.

Prayer:

Dear God, we ask that You restore the dignity that was stolen from every victim and from families who are struggling and experiencing separation. We ask for the Holy Spirit to come and heal the hearts of those in pain and of the victims of violence and maltreatment. We pray this in the mighty name of Jesus Christ our brother and savior, Amen.

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Susan Estrada-Dillozon is a retired Deaconess of the United Methodist Church in the Philippines, and presently a Master of Divinity student at Union Theological Seminary (Philippines). A widow and mother of five grown up kids, she is presently on her fifth year appointment as in-bound missionary for Filipino Methodists in Macau, China.



# Creating Safe Spaces

Siera Tion Bird, Fiji

2 Samuel 13:1-21

Statistics show that many rape cases happen in the family, with the perpetrator being a family member or relative, friend or someone who knows the victim well. The above text narrates what happened in a family home. The story holds true to what many rape and incest victims experience in our societies. The rape of Tamar was premeditated and planned by her half-brother Amnon with the cunning advice of Jonadab, a cousin to both Amnon and Tamar. The evil scheme was successful because the king, who was also their father, gave permission for Tamar to cook for her brother and to serve him in his chamber. Being king and father, David was the one person who could have protected his daughter from being raped.

In the story, Amnon's lustful and sick mind drove him and their cousin Jonadab to deceive their father and uncle in order to allow their sister to get close to him. Like all fathers in that world would do, out of concern for his son's health and survival, David granted Amnon's request and allowed Tamar to cook and serve Amnon at his chamber. Watching her sister moved and worked elevated his sexual hunger. Even when their father and king found out that Amnon raped his sister, he did nothing to punish Amnon because David still loved him.

No doubt, Tamar obeyed her father because that was what was expected during those times from girls and women. The text tells us that Tamar reasoned with her brother, highlighted the societal perceptions and the likely consequences, for them both but especially for her. Yet Amnon did not listen to her and raped her. She protested and condemned the evil act that was done to her. Yet, she was silenced by her brother Absalom.

The story sounds familiar and resonates with many rape and incest stories that many of us know or deal with. So, we ask ourselves: How can we encourage and empower women like Tamar in our families, communities and churches to protest against rape and incest, and evil-doers? How can we encourage and empower women like Tamar to speak out and stand for gender justice?



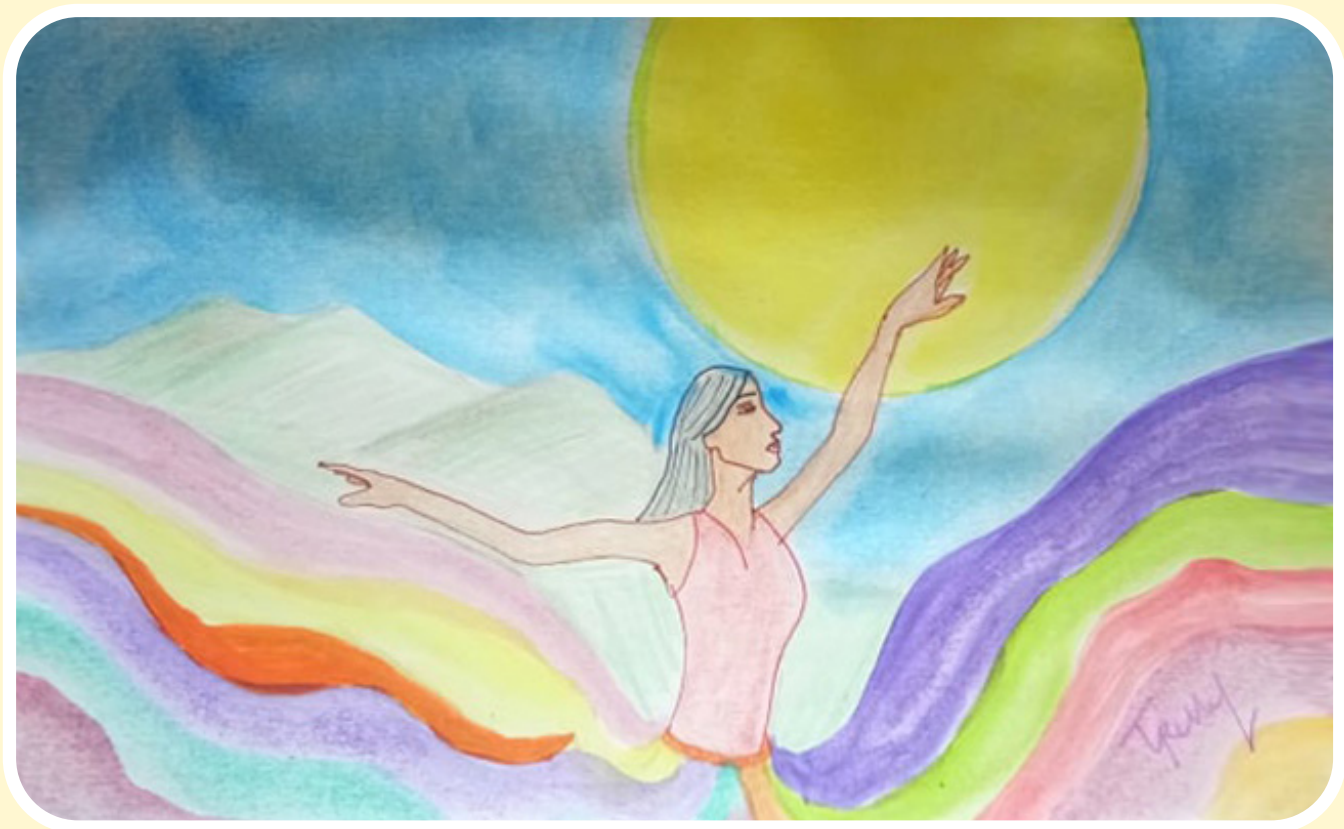
Let us work to change the mindsets of people, especially men and boys, to be more respectful and caring towards women and girls. Let us work to change people's attitude and behaviours to be more loving and kind towards others. Family is supposed to be the safest place for women

and girls, the first place and space where they should feel secure and protected and live to enjoy life in all its fullness that Christ Jesus offers (John 10:10). May God touch our lives, heal our world and help us create safe spaces especially in our homes.

*Prayer:*

*Almighty Creator, grant us the strength to stand up against all forms of violence happening to women and girls; the sharpness to recognize a silenced victim of violence and abuse; the courage to speak up against violence against women and girls; the resourcefulness to help victims; and the resolve to never commit any form of violence against any woman or girl. For all of these, we ask for Your guidance and wisdom, Amen.*

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The Rev. Siera Tion Bird is an ordained minister of the United Church in the Solomon Islands. She is the Ecumenical Animator for Women/Gender of the Pacific Conference of Churches (PCC), and also represents the PCC to the International Committee for the Fellowship of the East.



Healing for the Abused

Temsulemla Longkumer, India

1 Peter-5:10

Violence of various forms takes place even in the most enlightened of society. Gender-based violence in the family is the most widespread form of abuse in the world today. Nagaland in Northeast India is no exception. For most part of my life, I condoned and quietly observed domestic violence that was taking place right next door. In our neighbourhood it was considered a family matter and everyone just ignored it while the victims suffered grievous physical and mental injuries to a point where they lost their dignity even to live as a social being. It took me many years to realize that abuse of any sort, be it physical or mental should not be tolerated. It needs timely intervention. As sure as violence and abuse brings affliction to the physical body, we need to recognize that the soul, the essence of who we are often remains more battered and broken.

In India, a civil law was passed in 2005 called as "The Protection of Women from Domestic Violence Act". This law provides protection to women in a household against abuse. Nevertheless, after 15 years of passing this law, violence and abuse towards women are still rampant. Reports of dowry deaths, battery, rape, mental torture, etc. surface on a daily basis. It is happening in every strata of society and often times, it is the women and children who are victimized.

The Nagaland State Commission for Women on 3rd July 2021 stated that crimes against women, especially domestic violence, sexual harassment and mental violence were on the rise amid the pandemic. There have been numerous reports of domestic abuse towards women, but we have seen very little justice served to abusers. Who then should be responsible to bring change? My answer would be every rational human being needs to do their bit to abolish this menace. However, this is easier said than done. As 1 Peter 5:10 clearly states, Christ himself will bring restoration to the ones who have suffered. Restoration begins when healing takes place. In the absence of healing there cannot be restoration and rebuilding in any context. So healing is the key as well as the foundation for restoring a broken heart, mind, body and the soul. It begins with a personal experience of Christ's healing touch so that it can manifest practically in our lives.



Jesus Christ is the ultimate healer for by His wounds we are healed (Isaiah 53:5). Jesus as the exact manifestation and representation of God gives us a clear picture of our God (Jehovah Rophi - the Lord who Heals). His coming to this world is not simply to bring healing to our physical body, but to heal our eternal soul; the essence of who we are.

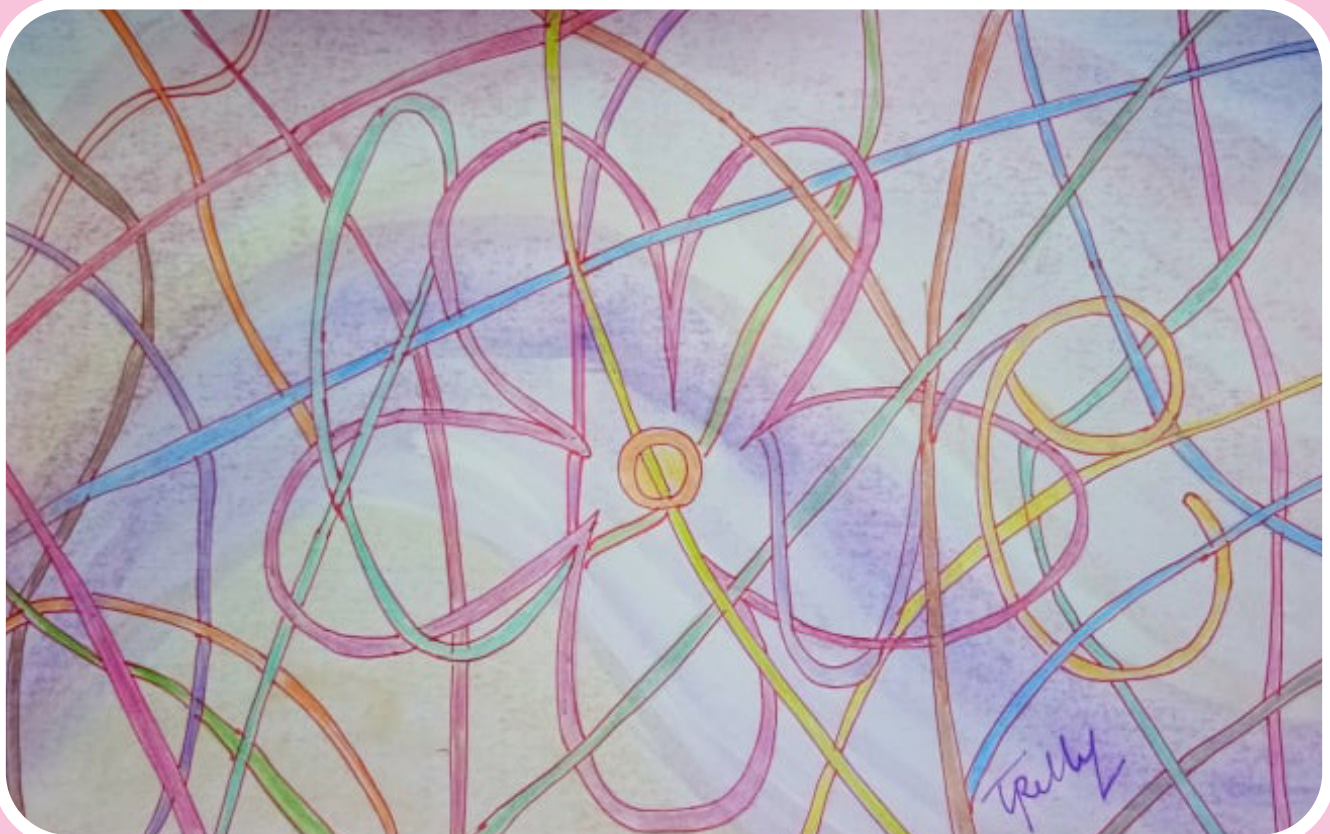
Saying just a simple prayer works wonders for the soul because it restores and rejuvenates the spirit. May our eyes be opened to the sufferings of our sisters who through no fault of their own, are forced to endure inhumane treatment and torture of the body and soul. May our prayers continuously lift the spirit of those who are afflicted. May we choose to play pivotal roles in bringing healing and restoration among abused women striving together to end gender-based violence in the family.

Prayer:

Almighty and loving God, you are a God of Justice and our Jehovah rophi. Let your favour rest upon your daughters who are suffering untold miseries because of violence and abuse. Let your precious blood flow over them, heal them and set them free.

Bind the cruelty and hatred of the abusers with your love. We pray and await for a day when every human heart will be filled with love and compassion for the abused, when every broken spirit will be healed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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Temsulemla Longkumer from Nagaland, India is an active member of the Ao Baptist Church and the FLC Nagaland. A mother of two and previously a social worker and now an entrepreneur, she works with her husband to create employment opportunities for their people.



# Passion for the Earth

Trelly A. Marigza, Philippines

Romans 8:19-23

Decades ago, Terry was informed by the local fishermen of incidents of harassments at sea by some foreign vessels. She investigated and found out that a foreign firm is doing offshore oil exploration in Tañon Strait. This was a declared seascape which means that such an activity is prohibited. Terry then went to the local government units to ask if they have given permits for such an activity. Apparently, the officials did not know that an oil exploration was ongoing.

Terry called on her environmental friends and lawyers and began campaigning to stop the oil exploration and harassment of the fisherfolks. They did massive education campaign, petitions and signature campaigns and lobbying at the local, regional and national levels of related government agencies. The group also filed a case for Writ of Kalikasan on behalf of the dolphins and other marine mammals of the area. After more than a year of campaigning, they won the case and the firm eventually called off the exploration.

After several years, Terry was again faced with another problem in her own city – a port reclamation project. This presented danger on marine life, ocean current that will eventually lead to massive flooding and loss of livelihood. All these destruction is at the forefront aside from the pristine waters of beaches that was the primary attraction of the city and nearby towns. This time the local presence of internationally acclaimed scientists was put to good use to win the battle.

Carrying on the advocacy work for the environment was not easy for Terry. She faced threats and was declared persona non grata at some point. It was hard when she is the one blowing the whistle on several projects that are intended to remain “hidden” from the populace. Despite all these, her passion and love for the environment keeps her going. She believes that her mandate as a Christian to take care of creation, as a part of creation, compels her to help protect and sustain our environment.

Today, she faces yet another challenge. A gargantuan 174 hectares, two-island reclamation project that will surely kill marine life, bring about soil erosion and flattening of mountains, massive flooding, loss of livelihood, traffic and the possibility of another POGO (Philippine Offshore Gaming Operators, usually owned and managed by Chinese nationals) island in the country is looming in her beloved city.



## Prayer:

*God of creation, you created night and day, separated the sea from the sky and gave life to all living creatures and saw that it was good. Sadly, our world is troubled and our*



*environment is constantly under threat by humanity. The harmony between humans and nature have eluded us, brought about by the greed of some, and the march to so-called progress. Awaken us to hear and feel the groaning earth in its quakes, storms and eruptions. Teach us that when we change time for our convenience, we change God's calendar, which brings the hatchling to the caterpillar, the bee to the nectar, the rains to the farmer, to the one which brings you to the cross. Move us into action for climate justice and to restore your creation.*

*Now the mountains and seas are calling, and we must answer. May God give us the vision and the means to reach them that we may give back all the glory to our Creator. Amen.*

Engr. Trely A. Marigza is the lead convenor of Women Working for Justice and Peace in the Cordilleras and co-convenor for the Climate Consciousness and Action Group. She is a visual artist and a freelance consultant specializing on gender, environment, and good governance.



# Self-Caring at the Last Quarter (of Life)

Jane Ella Montenegro, The Philippines  
John 16:24

My 90 year-old aunt keeps repeating herself, "Sigh, becoming old is burdensome. Even taking care of my own bathing is already a struggle."

Indeed, varied and complex challenges are being confronted by the ageing these days. The covid pandemic is taking its toll all over the world. The rich and the poor are affected by its onslaught. We see and hear the dying of the old, the in-betweens and the very young generations. The reality of dying is becoming more predictable and at the same time more complicated. The young asks, " ...will I ever graduate at all, pursue a career and be successful at it?" The oldies ask, "will I live to five years more, so I could watch my grandchildren grow and hug them till the last moment...?"

The constant threat of covid infection despite vaccination is upon us all. The limitation of movements due to health protocols in organizations, reunions, in community and church activities are drastically cancelled, reversed into the use of gadgets and technology. Deep in the thoughts of the silenced masses are questions that have no answers: "Will there be vigil services at my wake?" "Will I be buried with my favorite hymns and prayers by my loving faith community?"

The unpredictability of the times has also changed the values, lifestyles and perspectives of countless women and families. They are sustained by a faith centered on the Only One who can give healing and peace to this ailing Earth. They embrace the spiritualities of those who acknowledge the Mystical Power of the universe. They dwell on the past and present spiritual journeys of the Faithfuls; reclaiming the good, the sacred and the life-giving times when the people of Israel had become weary and faltering in their faithfulness to God as they struggled for their identity as captives of a powerful country.



Some self-caring nurturance may help us find our way gracefully, through these death-dealing times, as we pray together:

A. Having a sense of Self; listening to self, breathing in...

breathing out... my breath comes from God. I know myself. I know whose I am. God's Light is in my body-Self. I shine God's Light...

B. Preferring to take food, drinks, medicine as prescribed by westernized, updated, health practitioners. Yet, remaining faithful to the natural, ancient, health carers whose wisdom come from mystical, indigenous cultures.

C. Stepping gently, patiently through the 'new normal' while treasuring the precious past and the wisdom of the present exigencies, adjusting and being open to the Holy Spirit's guidance.

D. "Pushing one's limits"? Or, just lifting one foot more. Or, simply just "letting go without wanting or needing to say the last word anymore."

E. Opening our bodies, minds and spirits to the Loving One Who loves us unconditionally, whose joy makes us complete, whole and free.

Prayer:

O living and breathing God, have mercy on Your ailing Creation. Like eagles with wounded wings grant us, strength and healing. Mold us to be stronger for You so Your Other creation, other women, children and men may find peace and wholeness and joy in You. Amen and Amen.

Jane Ella P. Montenegro from the Philippines is a retired deaconess of the United Church of Christ in the Philippines who had been extensively involved in the Philippine ecumenical women's movement.



# Love by Action

Marianne Milde, CJ, Germany

Isaiah 11:6-9

Is this a text to make us happy? Or a text which makes us shake our heads in disbelief? A fantastic text? A text full of hope and promise!

The contradictions in this text are amazing. What do they want to tell us?

Let us do some research. Eating and being eaten – these are laws of nature where threats and danger are often very present. We do not get any satisfying answer to the questions why this is so. On the contrary: we get only new questions: is this the good creation? As we do not know anything else, we accept it. But, an animal only kills another because it needs food. Not just like this picture the text is telling us.

‘Civilised’ humankind has developed differently. In reports about conquering America it is written that the Indians were very shocked about the White Man who at random shot their big cattle flocks. It was not because of hunger or the need of meat for the next meal. Unfortunately, there are numerous examples of these forms of exploitation and destruction throughout the globe.

How can the text help us to fight against this violence and bloodshed? If we exchange the characters of the named animals by human manners of behaviour, we can mirror them and see possibilities to contribute to the healing of our world. As we can change our ways of behaviour, we can look seriously at our failures. How do we deal with the ‘wolf’ in ourselves? Can we keep in contact with this Wolf?

We need a lot of strength to deal with the destructive powers in us. Can our faith and our prayer help? Do we find like-minded people who can act with us, help us keep courage and stay full of fantasies? Do we support the young generation who fight for a better environment for generations to come like “Fridays For Future”? Are we getting involved with those writing petitions and initiating demonstrations? By approaching politicians and responsible persons in the business world we create opportunities. We must not and we do not want to keep silent anymore.



By being touched through these biblical verses, we show that our faith comes from a deep source: we believe in God’s promise. And we struggle in this world against all evil to stop these deadly acts.



# Liebe durch Handlung

Marianne Milde, CJ, Germany

Jesaja 11, 6-9

Ein Text zum sich freuen? Ein Text zum ungläubig den Kopf schütteln?

Ein phantastischer Text?

Ein Text der Hoffnung und Verheißung!

Die Verse stammen aus einem Zusammenhang, den wir hier nicht erörtern können.

Die Gegensätze, die uns aufgezählt werden, sind staunenswert, was wollen sie uns vermitteln? Gehen wir auf Spurensuche.

Fressen und gefressen werden sind von der Natur vorgegeben, Bedrohung und Gefahr – sind oft ganz nah. Auf die Frage, warum ist das so, erhalten wir keine befriedigende Antwort, eher entstehen neue Fragen: ist das die gute Schöpfung?

Wir kennen es nicht anders, wir nehmen es so hin. Jedoch tötet ein Tier nur, weil es Nahrung braucht oder aus ganz klaren Gründen, ganz selten „einfach so“.

In der „zivilisierten“ Menschheit hat sich das anders entwickelt. In Berichten über die Eroberung Amerikas heißt es, dass die Indianer sehr erschreckt über den Weißen Mann waren, der „einfach so“ in die großen Rinderherden schoss – und nicht, weil er Nahrung für die nächste Mahlzeit benötigte. Es gäbe sicherlich genug weitere Beispiele. Die Probleme Ausbeutung und Zerstörung der Natur sind auf dem ganzen Erdenrund zu finden – leider.

Wie kann uns der Text helfen, gegen Gewalt und Blutvergießen anzugehen?

Wenn wir die Charaktere der genannten Tiere gegen Verhaltensweisen von Menschen austauschen, dann erkennen wir Möglichkeiten, zur Heilung unserer Welt einen Beitrag zu leisten.

Denn unsere Verhaltensweisen können wir verändern, wir dürfen uns einen Spiegel vorhalten lassen und ehrlich hinschauen, wo wir versagen. Wie gehen wir mit dem „Wolf“ um, können wir mit ihm im Gespräch bleiben?



Um mit dem Zerstörerischen besser umgehen zu können, brauchen wir viel Kraft. Helfen uns Glaube und Gebet? Finden wir Gleichgesinnte, die mit uns, einem langen Atem und viel Phantasie Aktionen beginnen? Stützen wir die junge Generation z.B. „Fridays for future“, und engagieren wir uns mit denjenigen, die Petitionen schreiben, Demonstrationen anregen und mitgestalten. Im Zugehen auf unsere Politiker und Verantwortlichen in Industrie und Geschäftswelt liegt eine Chance. Wir dürfen und wollen nicht schweigen.

Wenn uns diese Verse berühren (sollen), zeigen wir, dass unser Glaube aus einer tiefen Quelle

gespeist wird: wir glauben der Verheißung, und wir setzen uns im Hier und Jetzt ein, Unheil zu verhindern, tödliche Vorgehensweisen zu stoppen. Im Vers 9 wird von der Erkenntnis Jahwes gesprochen, die uns verändert und zu Taten bringt, die uns unmöglich erscheinen. Liebe lebt aus der Tat! Geben wir einander Mut, Halt, Durchhaltevermögen, Motivation und mehr.

### *Gebet*

*Menschgewordener Gott in Jesus Christus,  
du zeigst uns, was wir uns nicht vorstellen können.*

*Du willst Frieden und Gewaltlosigkeit bringen –  
Der neue Himmel und die neue Erde verbinden wir mit dem Ende der  
Welt,*

*aber wir glauben, dass wir jetzt inspiriert durch die Geistkraft,  
ermutigt durch deine Botschaft*

*die Kraft haben, Schritte der Veränderung zu setzen und besonders den  
Kindern und Frauen am Rande, in den bedrohten Ländern der Erde oder  
in den Krisengebieten der Welt, Hoffnung zu geben.*

*Stärke uns in den Bemühungen, eine besseres und gerechteres  
Miteinander zu leben.*

### *Gebet um Heilung*

*Gott, wir bringen unser Versagen vor Dich: unser hohles und  
langweiliges Gerede, unsere Unzufriedenheit und Verzweiflung, unsere  
Gier und unsere Gleichgültigkeit und unser Verlorensein. Wir klammern  
uns an andere voller Verzweiflung oder wenden uns in Angst von ihnen  
ab. Mache uns stark in der Liebe. Lehre uns, Frauen (und Männer), mit  
unserer Fähigkeiten und mit unserer Macht behutsam umzugehen. Zu  
Dir kommen wir, Gott. Wir sagen uns von bösem Tun los. Wir sehnen  
uns nach Deiner Liebe. Wir wollen heil gemacht werden!*

*Monica Furlong, in: Women included, London 1991, S. 57*

*Segen der Abigail: „Wenn ein Mensch aufsteht, um dich zu verfolgen  
und dir nach dem Leben zu trachten, dann soll das Leben meines Herrn  
im Beutel der Lebendigen bei Gott, deiner Gottheit verschnürt sein, das  
Leben deiner Feinde aber wird sie wegschleudern mit der Schleuder.“ 1  
Sam 25, 29, 1100 v. Chr., Zeit der Richter (Bibel in gerechter Sprache)*

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Schwester Marianne Milde, CJ, Römisch-katholische Ordensfrau in der Congregatio Jesu (Gründerin Mary Ward 1585-1645) ist zur Zeit eine der Nationalkoordinatorinnen für den Bereich Deutschland, war eine Amtsperiode im internationalen Koordinierungsausschuss des Ökumenischen Forums Christlicher Frauen in Europa (EFECW) tätig. Sie ist Sozialpädagogin (im Ruhestand) und begleitet Exerzitien auch Online. Sie arbeitete auch als Referentin im Katholischen Deutschen Frauenbund und ist in verschiedenen katholischen Frauenvereinigungen involviert. Sie lebt in Augsburg/Deutschland.

Whose Words?

Lydia Hernández Marcial, Puerto Rico
Proverbs 4:20-22

Words have always fascinated me. I love puns. Crossword puzzles are my kind of relaxation. As a professor, I work with words for a living. I returned to Puerto Rico after almost a decade. I live in the city, where life is noisy and full of empty words. Hurricanes, earthquakes, COVID-19, and the effects of corruption and impunity, among other issues, have left their marks on our people. The words I hear are sometimes heavy, filled with despair and defeat. Words can overwhelm me, making me long for silence.

In Proverbs 4, a father instructs his son to walk in the way of wisdom, committing with his whole body to it: ears listening to the words, eyes following the way, keeping the words in his heart to find healing and a long life. Words have power. My mother used to say, “Those who do not listen to advice will not grow old.” How can I find words of life amid my noisy and weary world? Whose words should I listen to?

The first nine chapters from Proverbs are addressed to a male audience, fashioned as a guide to prepare young men for adult life. However, I can read Proverbs 4:20–22 thinking about wonderful women who have walked by my side. Some are already with God. There are female mentors who taught me to navigate the waters of a racist and sexist society. I treasure the friendship of women who open the doors of their homes, offering me a haven to recover from the daily struggles. Fellow female pastors and professors have helped with my economic needs, and I’m grateful for this. I find words of wisdom embodied in the life of these international and intergenerational networks of wise female kin and mentors.

When I look at how my people have survived the last five years, I discover that there is more than hopelessness around me. I listen to words that show resilience and creativity. There is wisdom behind women and men who reinvent themselves in challenging times. They have learned to walk in the ways of wisdom.



Prayer:

God of wisdom and life, help us find in the words of our network of mothers and sisters, friends, and colleagues, the embodiment of your ways. Strengthen our bonds. Heal us through our mutual support. Help us to care for the world and one another with our creativity. Thank you for the gift of reinvention. Amen.

Rev. Dr. Lydia Hernández Marcial is an ordained minister from the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Puerto Rico, and Assistant Professor of Old Testament and Biblical Hebrew at the Seminario Evangélico de Puerto Rico.



¿Las Palabras De Quien?

Lydia Hernández Marcial, Puerto Rico

Proverbios 4:20-22

Siempre me ha fascinado jugar y trabajar con las palabras. Los crucigramas me divierten y me relajan. Las palabras son muy importantes en mi trabajo como profesora. Regresé a Puerto Rico luego de casi una década. Vivo en la ciudad, donde la vida es ruidosa y abundan las palabras vacías. Pero también escucho palabras llenas de desaliento y derrota, producto de las marcas que los huracanes, terremotos, COVID-19 y la corrupción con impunidad han dejado en mi gente. Todas estas palabras me abruman muchas veces y me hacen anhelar el silencio.

En Proverbios 4, un padre instruye a su hijo en el camino de la sabiduría, invitándole a comprometerse con todo su cuerpo: oídos para escuchar las palabras, ojos para no perder de vista el consejo, el corazón y la mente para guardarlas todas. De ese modo encontrará sanidad y vivirá una larga vida. Mi mamá suele repetir un refrán similar, “Quien no oye el consejo, no llega a viejo”. Ante esta enseñanza me pregunto, ¿cómo puedo encontrar palabras de vida en medio de mi entorno ruidoso y cansado? ¿A qué palabras debo prestar atención?

Los primeros nuevos capítulos de Proverbios se dirigen a una audiencia de varones jóvenes. Se escribieron como una guía para prepararlos para la vida adulta. Sin embargo, puedo leer Proverbios 4:20--22 pensando en las mujeres maravillosas que han caminado a mi lado. Algunas ya moran con el Señor. Están mis mentoras, quienes me han enseñado a navegar las aguas de una sociedad racista y sexista. Atesoro la Amistad de mujeres que han abierto las puertas de su casa para ofrecerme un lugar seguro para reponerme luego de las luchas cotidianas. Agradezco también por las compañeras pastoras y profesoras me han ayudado en momentos de necesidad económica. Encuentro palabras de sabiduría y sanidad encarnadas en la vida de estas redes de apoyo internacionales e intergeneracionales compuestas por todas estas mujeres.



De la misma manera, cuando miro cómo mi gente ha sobrevivido a los eventos de los pasados cinco años, descubro que me rodea mucho más que desesperanza. Escucho palabras que muestran resiliencia y creatividad. Hay sabiduría encarnada en mujeres y hombres que se reinventan en tiempos difíciles. Ellas y ellos han aprendido a caminar en la senda de la sabiduría.

Oración:

Dios de sabiduría y vida, ayúdanos a encontrar en las palabras de nuestras redes de apoyo—nuestras madres y hermanas, amigas y colegas—la encarnación de tus caminos. Fortalece nuestros lazos. Sánanos por medio de nuestro apoyo mutuo. Permítenos cuidar unas de otras y cuidar del mundo que nos has dado por medio de nuestra creatividad. Gracias por el regalo de la reinención. Amén.

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THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN (FLC)

WHAT IS THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN?

The Fellowship of the Least Coin is a global ecumenical women's movement of prayer for peace, justice and reconciliation. Through this movement women around the world seek fellowship with each other and are reminded to live a reconciled and forgiving life with others.

HOW AND WHEN IT BEGAN

The idea for the Fellowship of the Least Coin emerged as a vision from God to **Mrs. Shanti Solomon** of India. She was part of the Pacific Mission Team of seven women from different countries that traveled in Asian countries after World War II, in September 1956. The Pacific Mission Team was organized by Dr. Margaret Shannon on behalf of the women of the Presbyterian Church of the USA. Shanti Solomon, who was refused a visa to Korea, went to Manila in the Philippines while other members of the team proceeded to Korea. She reflected on the experiences of their travel in the war-torn countries of Asia and was inspired to promote justice, peace and reconciliation.

On the return of the team, Shanti suggested that prayer could transcend every national boundary. She challenged the Christian women of Asia and the women from the Presbyterian Church USA to combine their efforts and resources and launch a project of justice, peace and reconciliation on an international level. It was to be a project of Christian prayer and positive action in which every Christian woman could participate, no matter what her economic position was. Every time a woman prayed she was to set aside a "least coin" of her currency. It was an encouragement to the women of the team to demonstrate their unity in Christian faith, regardless of their country or economic circumstances. They all accepted it as their sincere desire to express their solidarity with suffering humanity and with women of every nation.

In 1958, at the first Assembly of the Asian Church Women's Conference (ACWC) held in Hong Kong, the ACWC agreed to launch the Fellowship of the Least Coin. The second ACWC Assembly in Thailand in 1962 voted to make the promotion of the FLC a basic outreach programme of the ACWC. Regarding funds allocation, it was decided that the World Council of Churches (WCC) would be better placed to disburse the monies that had to be credited around the world. The East Asia Christian Conference (EACC), now known as the Christian Conference of Asia (CCA) administered the FLC fund from 1958 to 1970. In 1970 Mrs. Shanti Solomon, the founder, was named the Executive Secretary of the FLC and of the ACWC. From then on ACWC took the responsibility to administer the FLC Fund.

THE FLC LOGO



The idea for the FLC logo came from the late Mrs. Rayann Ma from Hong Kong, the first Chairperson of the first Assembly of the ACWC. The actual design was the gift of her brother-in-law, James Ma, a commercial artist. It is folded hands in prayer, encircling a small plum flower, and which form a lotus flower. Lotus plant grows in the muddy pond but its flower rises above the murky water and opens beautifully and without blemish, fit as offering to God. As the movement has grown global, the praying hands are now in different colors of the races.

CIRCLE OF PRAYER

Feeling the need to reaffirm prayer as the vital element of the FLC, the ACWC asked the women of Hong Kong to prepare a booklet of prayer: "Circle of Prayer" to be used as prayer is offered and the least coin is set aside. Since then, the "Circle of Prayer" has become an important part of the FLC. Twenty to twenty-four meditations and prayers are written by women around the world and published by the International Committee for the FLC every two years.

IT'S GROWTH

The idea of the FLC quickly gained acceptance not only among the women of Asia to whom it was first presented, but among women of all the continents in the world. In 1966 when the FLC celebrated its 10th anniversary, women from 24 countries participated in the movement. By 1980, at the time of its Silver Jubilee, women from 75 countries had already joined the FLC. In 1986, women from over 80 countries around the world celebrated the 40th anniversary of the FLC; and in 2006, its Jubilee Anniversary.

THE INTERNATIONAL COMMITTEE FOR THE FLC (ICFLC)

Because the FLC prayer movement became truly worldwide and the grants were made to the programmes and projects all over the world, an International Committee for the FLC (ICFLC) was formed in 1979 to administer the promotion, the interpretation of the movement and the allocation of the FLC grants. The International Committee comprises representatives of worldwide ecumenical women's organization and of regional ecumenical Conferences/Councils of the Churches. The ICFLC decides what programmes and projects are to be funded each year. Year after year the ICFLC learns to trust God more and more and to work in faith. The Committee meets every year to share the miraculous work of the FLC around the world and to decide on FLC grants for the following year. Application forms for project grants are received four months prior to the meeting. The members of the Committee study the application forms, pray about them, and discuss and decide on each project without knowing how much FLC funding will be available for the grants they wish to allocate for each year. The least coin offerings from around the world come in with prayers, quietly and gradually, to meet the needs for each year. Our gentle, loving and compassionate God never fails us. God does great work through the humble, the least, the marginalized and the poor. That's the strength, the promise, the beauty, and the surprise upholding the FLC prayer movement.

Every year ICFLC is invited by different regions to hold its meeting in their country. An exposure and a visitation programme is added to the regular business meeting in order for the representatives to know more about the region and to be aware of the issues and the concerns of the people there. The ICFLC considers linking its meeting every 4th year with the Quadrennial Assembly of the ACWC.

FLC GRANTS

Each year about 20 to 25 projects are supported from around the world through the Project Grants. Regional ecumenical organizations women's programme, the World Council of Churches Just Community of Women and Men, and the World Day of Prayer International Committee (WDPIC) are given Block Grants to enhance their work and to strengthen ecumenical solidarity. Emergency Grants for disaster relief and rehabilitation are given to show loving concern to disaster-stricken countries. Two scholarship grants are given to women: the Scholarship Award for Young Women (SAYW), and the Bursary for Older Women (BOW).

THE UNIQUENESS OF THE FLC

The FLC Prayer Movement is simple, yet significant and unique.

1. It brings Christian women together in a fellowship of prayer without any discrimination of race, nationality, culture or denomination. The Christian women of the world are in solidarity with each other through their common concern and love for humankind and creation. Women throughout the world are bound together in both giving and receiving.
2. The offering is unique because all, whether rich or poor, educated or illiterate, urban or rural women, give only the smallest coin of their currency. All are within the same discipline and share the common concerns of women around the world.
3. It is stewardship, both of the idea as well as of the Fund. These least coins, when put together, become a large amount in the same way individual prayers offered by many members throughout the world become a strong force in bringing about reconciliation, peace and justice.

The uniqueness of the Fellowship in prayer, which binds us together in both giving and receiving, teaches us to appreciate differences; to understand and forgive one another; and to live and work together inter-dependently as equal partners. The Least Coin teaches us to be humble, to value the least and to trust that nothing is impossible for God who can do great things from out of the least and the unexpected.

Our concern and yearning for peace in a wounded and broken world, which moves us to spontaneously pray and give, becomes a powerful healing source for our own pain as well as for the pain of those whose lives have been touched by our prayers and gifts.

The inclusiveness of the Fellowship, which embraces us in a simple, yet profound act of prayer accompanied by a gift of love – the “least coin” - encourages wider participation and provides resources for making justice and peace and restoring broken relationships.

The God who promises to be with us always provides for our needs and never fails to love, to guide and protect us.

YOU ARE INVITED TO PARTICIPATE

with Christian Women, Men, Youth and Children
of every continent in the

FELLOWSHIP OF THE LEAST COIN

THE BASES OF BELONGING

are concern for justice, peace and reconciliation; and
intercession for those in special need of God's grace.

THE TOKEN OF PARTICIPATION

is a "*Least Coin*" offering set aside whenever prayer is offered and contributed annually to a common Fund which is given in the name of Christian women without identification of its original source.

This fund is used as "*gifts of love*" for ministries of mercy on every continent; for experiences which creates Christian community among those of different national, racial, cultural, economic and denominational backgrounds.

The least coins are tangible token of our prayers offered individually and collectively. Those contributions - Gifts of Love - however small or large, maybe sent in the name of the **Fellowship of the Least Coin**. For details in sending your FLC Offerings, kindly email: icflcph@gmail.com

You may visit:

<https://www.fellowshipoftheleastcoin.org/>

<https://www.facebook.com/icflc.FLC>

