PACIFIC DAY OF PRAYER 2020

(Prepared by the Kiribati Uniting Church)



THEME

Christ our Living Hope

(1.Peter 1: 3)

"Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope."

MAY 2020

WELCOME TO THE PACIFIC DAY OF PRAYER, 2020

Foreword

Kam na mauri and warm greetings to you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ; May the peace, love and grace of God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit rests and strengthen our bond of unity as families, communities and countries as we joined together in this year's Pacific Day of Prayer.

The theme for this year's Pacific Day of Prayer is, "Christ our Living Hope". The theme is based on 1 Peter 1: 3 – 12. Peter wrote his letter to strengthen the faith and hope of the Christians both Jews and Gentiles all over the world who suffered persecution at the hands of the Roman emperors. The suffering and pain experienced by the Christians was an issue the Church encountered during Nero's reign in 64 AD. The word persecution does not only mean suffering from cruel political and injustice system. It also applies to the sufferings that we encountered in our daily lives.

As we prepared this liturgy, we were conscious of the spread of the pandemic nobel coronavirus (COVID 19) in countries around the world including some of the Pacific Islands, and also the aftermath of severe tropical Cyclone Harold that struck Vanuatu, Solomon Is, Fiji and Tonga. The calamity of the unpredictable phenomenon of the coronavirus is overwhelming and life threatening, not only to those countries affected but to the world at large. Similarly, the aftermath of cyclone Harold is devastating and destructive to the life of those affected in the Pacific Islands.

We in the Pacific have our own stories to tell in relation to the different issues that we encountered in our daily life; in homes, workplaces, communities, churches, our environment, our social and political relations with one another and the world at large and so forth. The saddest depressing stories are still persistent in our midst with impacts comparable to coronavirus and other natural disasters; or in other words, both had put more pressure on the existing impacts of our issues in our various contexts. As coronavirus and natural disasters bring fear, pain, chaos, anxiety, despair, hopelessness, homelessness, hunger, pain and loss of life, the same experience reverberate in our stories of today.

The message of Easter expresses God's love and salvation for us sinners to be cleansed from our sins and to live a righteous life according to His Will. Our Risen Lord Jesus on the Dawn of the First Day says, "Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me" (Matthew 28: 10). The dawn of a new day brings forth good news for new beginnings and new creation to take place. The return to Galilee or to our hometown to see our Risen Lord Jesus is a call for new changes to take place in our life after we failed Him on our journey as faithful people. The Easter message reminds us to prove our true identity as Christ followers and how we obediently surrender ourselves to His calling in the first place to follow Him.

There are existing empires in our midst and from outside our regions who continue to control and exert power over the powerless. It is within our family, communities, and from those outside our regions. The Easter message speaks to us to 'Rise' with Christ and 'not to be afraid' to start afresh. We have to examine ourselves and our roles as Christians to see and to hear the cry of those who continue to suffer, the oppressed, those deprived of their human rights and dignity, the poor, women/girls and children being abused and violated, those with bleak future for their children and generations because of climate impacts, etc. Their cry depicts God's crying in our midst.

We are to become life affirming communities. It is through our obedience to Christ Calling that we have to stand in solidarity with them and to be the prophetical voice of God against the injustices systems prevailing in our societies and the world at large. We are to be visionaries and to continue in our prayers for all people who are experiencing sufferings from the calamity of this world. Our support with whatever means we could offer to minimise risks and to save and secure life, is part of our devotion and commitment to Christ. Let us embraced them together to sing the Lord's song, "Christ our Living Hope" for a brighter and hopeful future for them and for us in our faith journey.

"Let us give thanks to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! Because of his great mercy he gave us new life by raising Jesus Christ from death. This fills us with a living hope." (1 Peter 1: 3).

We acknowledge the Pacific Council of Churches for giving Kiribati the opportunity to prepare the program for this Pacific Day of Prayer where churches are to unite together in prayer and to discern who God is for us in the Pacific. We give thanks to God through His Holy Spirit for His presence and guidance in the Committee meetings and deliberations.

The Program consists of two bible studies and a sermon outline to help you in your sermon preparation and the order of service. For the order of service, feel free to change it to what you normally did in your congregation, keeping in mind the list of items to pray for in the Intercessory Prayer.

May God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit bless you all in your ministry for Christ our Risen Lord.



Rev. Maleta Kutimeni Tenten
Secretary for Mission

BIBLE STUDIES

There are two bible studies for this year's Pacific Day of Prayer. You are requested to have the bible studies two days prior to the actual day set for the service of worship.

BIBLE STUDY ONE

OPENING PROGRAMME

SHORT PRAYER

HYMN/SONG

READING: **Psalms 118: 5 – 13;**

THEME: **Trust Never Doubt**

AIM: For participants to be able to learn and understand God as the living hope for His people in every particular context.

Step One: The whole group should read the reading carefully before dispersing to working groups.

Step Two: Introductory Note

The bible studies facilitator should give an introductory background to the reading to assist participants understand the content of the reading.

Step Three: Group work

(a). Divide members to groups as directed by the bible study facilitator. Ask each group to re-read the reading carefully to all members of the group and all must read and understand what the reading is all about

(b). Group sharing – each member should share what he/she thinks the reading is all about and share his or her interests.

(c) After sharing, then each group must answer these questions

Questions

1. Identify critical issues that mostly distress you or other people and how would you address them?

2. In verse 7 the psalmist talked about his enemies being defeated. In our Pacific context today, who are your enemies? What have you done as an individual Christian to overcome your enemies?

3. What do you think your church should do in order to address the issues you identified in question No.1?

4. Do you think the theme: Christ our Living Hope helps us as we encountered the different crisis in our current situation?

Step 4: Presentation to plenary

Each group should report and share their findings in plenary, questions and discussions

Step 5: APPROPRIATION:

(a). How would you see the reading in the light of our struggle as Pacific islanders against the issues we encountered today?

(b). Identify Egypt and Babylon in the Pacific today? (see the introductory note below)

(c). What does it mean for you to trust in God in the midst of fear and hopelessness?

Step 6: Closing: Song/Hymn & Prayer and Benediction

Introductory Note – Background Psalms 118: 5 – 9

Some of the scholars believed that the book of Psalms is a collection of books which contains different themes of which all pointed to God as sole Creator. The book of Psalms is divided into the following books such as: Book I: Psalms 1 – 41, Book II: Psalms 42 –72, Book III: Psalms 73 – 89, Book IV: Psalms 90 – 106 and Book V: Psalms 107 – 150. Each Psalms in each particular book has their own themes which all pointed to God, either in thanksgiving or praise, confession and intercessory prayers.

Psalms 118, was thought to have been composed by the composer in 444 BC may be after the rebuilding of the temple and the wall of Jerusalem. King Solomon built the temple in 950 BC that is years before the coming of Christ. In the year 587/6 the Babylonian army destroyed the temple and the people together with their leaders were taken as captives or prisoners to Babylon. Psalms 118 is also thought of as reflecting the Egyptian episode where the Israelites were treated as slaves and suffered injustice and ill treatment.

Verses 5 – 7: Tell us what God did to help and save his people. The use of the 'Me' and 'I' in these verses does not refer to one person but to Israel as a community and country. This we can also take this to mean people of the Pacific or Pacific communities.

Verses 8 – 9: The word 'Trust' is an important and significant word in any context. It means believing that someone is faithful, reliable, honest and responsible..The Psalmist teaches us that Trusting in the Lord is much more important than trusting in someone else or existing powers of evil in the world.

Verses 9 – 13: The enemies surround Israel and explained as like a cloud of bees. Bees are insects that make something sticky and sweet. Bees are also regarded as a dangerous insect because it can sting and provide sharp pain. Bees live together and can fly as a cloud or swarm and attach to people both individual and community. However, he destroyed them in the name of the Lord. Everything is in the power of the Lord. He loves his people and punishes those who create injustice and suffering to his people.

BIBLE STUDY TWO

OPENING PROGRAM

SHORT PRAYER

HYMN/SONG

READING: Mark 5: 1 - 20

THEME: **Power in Action**

Step 1: The whole group should read the reading carefully before dispersing to working groups.

Step 2: Introductory Note

The bible studies facilitator should give an introductory background to the reading to assist participants understand the content of the reading.

Step 3: Group work

(a). Divide members to groups as directed by the bible study facilitator. Ask each group to re-read the reading carefully to all members of the group and all must read and understand what the reading is all about

(b). Group sharing – that is each member should share what he/she thinks the reading is all about and share his or her interests.

(c). After sharing, then each group must answer these questions

Questions

1. In the story when Jesus and his disciples arrived at the other side of the lake Galilee at the territory of Gerasa; he was met by a man who came from the burial caves. Why Jesus was met by this man and where are the people?

2. The man lived in burial caves, how would you relate this to our context in the Pacific today? Especially our own countries and communities? What are burial caves for us today?

3. The man was possessed by an evil spirit and being chained both hands and feet, sometimes he broke the chains. What does this mean to you as Pacific women and men? (chained /unchained)

4. The man's name is Mob or Legion (not his real name) which means many, please list down the legions we encountered in our own countries, communities, Churches and Governments today.

5. Jesus power was in action and proved to be stronger than the army of evil spirit; instead of destroying the evil spirits right away, he sent them to the herds of pigs, the pigs ran into the sea and all drowned. How would you see Jesus' action in the light of our struggles with the COVID 19, Climate Change & Sea Level Rise, Women & Children issues, Gender Inequality, Impacts of Globalization and other related issues?

6. The story in Mark 5: 1 – 20, tell us that people feared when Jesus healed the man possessed with evil spirits and sent the evil spirits into the pigs. What caused the people to fear? Who were these people?

Step 4: Presentation to Plenary, Questions and Discussions.

Step 5: Appropriation:

(a). Different groups are asked to appropriate the text and state its relevancy to the issues we encountered today.

(b). What lessons do you learn from the story, does it help to keep your faith alive in Christ our living Hope?

(c). How do we understand power in action mean for us today?

Step 6: Closing: Song/Hymn & Prayer and Benediction

Introductory Note:

The Gospel of Mark was written round about the year 60 AD before the destruction of Jerusalem in the year 70 AD. Though the gospel was ascribed to John Mark, yet there is no account in the gospel that state Mark as the author, but the early Christians had no doubt that John Mark wrote the gospel. Mark lived in Jerusalem as we can see in Acts 12: 12; he was not an important figure like Paul or Peter. He was a co-worker at different times with Paul and Barnabas (Col 4: 10) and Peter. Mark was said to be a valuable witness to the events and words, especially Jesus last week as Mark lived in Jerusalem. There were those who suggest that Mark get most of his information from Peter. However, it was certain that Mark was with Peter in Rome (1.Peter 5: 13). Most scholars believed that the gospel was written in Rome before the death of Peter in 64 AD.

Mark had more than one purpose in writing the gospel: First, he wrote to make the good news accessible to the Gentile. Rome was a Gentile city, there were many Jews living in Rome they were drawn there by trade and business. The Church in Rome consisted of Gentiles and Jewish Christians. The gospel was also written to encourage the Christians facing persecution. Rome was the imperial capital where the government functions and

the very place where persecution emerged. The other purpose for writing the gospel was to defend the faith of the church. Mark described the nature of Jesus and removed false ideas about him. Mark does not only describe Jesus humanity, but also described him as more than a prophet; he is the Son of God.

If Mark wrote with the purpose of bringing the Good News to the Gentiles, it is therefore very appropriate to look at Mark 5: 1 – 20 in the light of our theme: Christ our Living Hope.

Mark 5: 1 Jesus went to the east side of the lake. Some copies of Mark's book have 'Gergesenes' as a name for these people from Gerasa. And some copies have 'Gadarenes'.

Mark 5: 2 The graves were caves among the rocks. People thought that evil spirits lived among graves.

Mark 5: 2-3 The details about the chains show how strong the mad man was. Mark perhaps wants to show that the power of Jesus to cure the man was much stronger. Perhaps that is why he includes these details.

Mark 5: 5 The man could never stop to rest and he was a great danger to the people.

Mark 5: 6-8 The man called Jesus 'the Son of the most high God'. He perhaps meant, 'You are the Messiah.' The 'unclean' spirits were afraid that Jesus was going to punish them. They recognised his power.

Mark 5: 9 In those days (and even in some countries today), to know a person's name is to have some power over him. People also thought that nobody could send an evil spirit out of a person unless they knew the evil spirit's name. Perhaps Jesus asked the man's name to show that he wanted to help him. A 'legion' was a section of the Roman army, of about 6000 soldiers. The man believed that many evil spirits had gone into him. It is possible that Roman soldiers had frightened the man in the past. This may have caused his very disturbed mental state.

Mark 5: 10-13 Some people do not believe that evil spirits exist. They think that the man's screams probably frightened the pigs. The men should have guarded the pigs. But the men were watching Jesus instead. So they could not stop the pigs from rushing down the hill into the lake.

In Luke (8:31) says that the evil spirits did not want Jesus to send them into the place for punishment. This is the place where God will put evil spirits on the day of judgement. The evil spirits were afraid that Jesus would punish them now. Jews would not keep pigs. The law said that they must not eat pigs (Leviticus 11:7). The owners of the pigs would therefore have been Gentiles. Some people blame Jesus because he allowed the death of 2000 pigs. They say that the owners had lost their way to earn money. But the healthy mind of a person is more important than money. The death of the pigs convinced the man that he was now free from control by evil spirits.

Mark 5: 15 The man was sitting as a disciple would sit. He was waiting for Jesus to teach him.

Mark 5: 17 The man was no longer a dangerous public nuisance. The people should have been happy for the man's return to health. But, instead, they were frightened. They did not want Jesus to disturb their lives any more. His power might affect them too much.

Mark 5: 18-20 Jesus did not usually tell a person to speak about his healing. But Jesus was in 'Decapolis'. 'Decapolis' is a Greek word that means 'Ten Towns'. They were cities east and south of the River Jordan, where Greek people had lived for about three hundred years. So Jesus was in Gentile territory to which he would not return. Therefore there was no danger that crowds of Jews would want to make Jesus king. Jesus sent the man to tell other people the good news. He would be a witness among Gentiles to the saving power of Jesus. To explain the miracle to other people would also make the man's own faith stronger.

Very interestingly to note was the fact that Jesus was not welcomed by people but the man possessed with the evil spirit. This raised the question why the people did not come to welcome Jesus? Was fear the reason? The other question is fear of what? The answer to these questions can be explored as you reflect on the story itself. The story though tell about the man possessed by the evil spirits, it also reminds us of the active forces of evil

we encountered today. Can we identify these evil forces in our own different countries, communities and churches?

Fear is part of our everyday life especially as we encountered the issue of covid 19, the aftermath of severe cyclone Harold and its destructions, climate change & sea level rise and its related issues, violence against women/girls and children, sexual abuse to women and children, gender inequalities, genocides, etc… However, the theme 'Christ our Hope' does not only encourage us to stand firm in our faith, but it also challenges us to work together as families, communities, churches and government to find relevant solutions to reduce the risk of fear.

SERMON OUTLINE

Reading: 1. Peter 1: 3 – 12

Text: vs. 3

Theme: "Christ Our Living Hope"

Introduction

The text for the sermon is taken from 1.Peter 1: 3 and based on the 2018 Pacific Conference of Churches Assembly theme: How Can We Sing the Lord's Song in a Strange Land. You are requested to explore the text in its context and understand the situation by which Paul wrote, and try to relate it systematically to our current situation. Try to think in terms of persecution that cause fear and how God act in Christ to bring living hope. The bible studies themes of Trust and Never Doubt (Ps 118) and Power in Action (Mark 5) demonstrated the theme of Christ our Living Hope to give us hope and not fear as we journeyed through and face the crisis in our own time. This reminds us that the Spirit of God is moving through our lives bringing hope, faith and confidence.

Note
Feel free to come up with your own stories or testimonies that could be in the form of a drama, skid, songs, depicting the issues happening in your context to be included in the Order of Service / Bible Studies

ORDER OF WORSHIP

1. Call to worship
2. Prayer of adoration
3. Hymn/Song
4. Prayer of Thanks Giving and Confession
5. Hymn/Song
6. Bible Reading: 1. Peter 1: 3 – 12
7. Reflection– Sermon – CHRIST OUR LIVING HOPE
8. Hymn/Song
9. Item by Special Choir

10. Intercessory Prayer

(add to the list issues that you think you should pray for relating to your context/country).

i. Pray for the impacts of Coronavirus

- Victims of covid 19
- Families who had lost their loved ones
- The safety of health care/service providers/volunteers
- Safety of our countries from this life threatening disease/virus
- Etc…

ii. The effects of Cyclone Harold/other natural disasters

- Victims of natural disasters
- Families who had lost their loved ones
- Support to victims who lost their homes, livestock, farms etc…
- Children's of families affect and for their education and
- Etc…

iii. Those who continue to suffer in our societies

- The poor
- Women and girls from sexual abuse
- Violence against women and children
- Disabilities/disabled people including elderly
- Gender inequality
- Etc…

iv. Pray for victims of climate change and sea-level rise

- Those in coastal and low lying islands
- Poor health due to water shortage and brackish water
- Poor housing especially those alongside the coastal line due to strong wind and king tides
- Etc…

v. West Papuan Issues

vi. The impacts of globalization in our countries, etc…

11. Hymn/Song/Collection

12. Dedication and Benediction

END OF SERVICE AND THANK YOU FOR COMING

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