

BIBLICAL REFLECTIONS AND PRAYERS FOR THE EIGHT DAYS OF PRAYER FOR CHRISTIAN UNITY 2019

Day 1 | Sunday 2 June *May God enlighten the eyes of our mind (Ephesians 1: 18)*
Let justice roll down like waters (Amos 5:24)

Ephesians 1: 17-23, Amos 5:22-25,

Reflection

Christians can sometimes be very committed to prayer and worship, but less concerned for the poor and the marginalized. Sometimes we pray in church, but at the same time oppress our fellow human beings or exploit the environment. Christians in Indonesia recognize that in their land there are people who passionately try to practise their faith, but who oppress those of other beliefs, even using violence in doing so. However, in the letter to the Ephesians Paul prays that our hearts and minds be open to all that God has called us to including working for justice. When Christians work together to listen to the cry of the poor and the oppressed, they grow in communion with one another and with the Triune God.

Prayer

God of the widow, the orphan and the stranger,

You have shown us the path of justice.

Help us to follow your way by doing justice.

As Christians together, may we worship you not only with our hearts and minds, but also by our deeds.

May the Holy Spirit help and guide us to work for justice wherever we are,

so that many people may be strengthened through our works.

Mā to mātou Ariki, mā Hēhu Karaiti. Āmene.

Day 2 | Monday 3 June *Paul spoke out boldly and argued persuasively about the Kingdom of God*
(Acts 19:8)
Let your word be 'Yes, Yes' or 'No, No' (Matthew 5:37)

Acts 19: 1-8, Matthew 5:33-37

Reflection

Violence towards fellow humans is not found only in physical assault and robbery, but also in gossip and malicious rumours. Social media have made it easy for untruths to be circulated instantly to a wide audience. Christians in Indonesia are aware of how this has sometimes led to lies and prejudice being propagated by religious groups, including Christians, against other religious groups. Fear and the threat of reprisals can make people reluctant to stand up for the truth and can cause them to remain silent in the face of unjust and untrue statements aimed at causing fear. Dishonesty disrupts the unity of the Church. In the Acts of the Apostles, we hear about Paul's continual arguing for the Kingdom of God. He urges cutting across dishonesty and fear in order that justice is provided.

Prayer

E te Ariki,

grant us wisdom to distinguish right from wrong.

Let our hearts be guided by honesty and our lips speak the truth.

Give us courage to be truthful even when others go against us.

Keep us from spreading deceit;

make us, rather, agents of unity and peace,

spreading good news for all people.

We pray in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

These four pages might be made into a prayer booklet resource of A5 or A4 size. The first quotation is from the readings of the day, the second from the references provided.

Day 3 | Tuesday 4 June

I have carried out the mission the Lord Jesus gave me – to bear witness to the good news of God’s grace. (Acts 20: 24)

The Lord is gracious and merciful to all. (Psalm 145:8)

Acts 20: 17-27, Psalm 145:8-13,

Reflection

‘The Lord is good to all, and his compassion is over all that he has made’, said the psalmist, proclaiming that the love of God is beyond boundaries of ethnicity, culture, race, and even religion. Indonesia is a nation of over 17,000 islands and 1,340 different ethnic groups, and churches are often separated along ethnic lines. Such exclusivity can lead some to see themselves as the sole possessors of the truth, thus wounding the unity of the Church. Amidst escalating ethnic and religious fanaticism and a growing spirit of intolerance throughout the world today, Christians can serve the human family by joining together to bear witness to the all-embracing love of God, proclaiming with the psalmist that ‘the Lord is gracious and merciful’ to all. By doing this we will bear witness to the good news of God’s grace, just as Paul did.

Prayer

E te Atua,

we give praise to you for your great glory made manifest in all of creation.

Give us an open heart to embrace all who experience discrimination.

Help us to grow in love beyond prejudice and injustice.

Grant us the grace to respect the uniqueness of each person,

so that in our diversity we may experience unity.

This prayer we make in your holy name. Amen.

Day 4 | Wednesday 5 June

Keep those you have given me, true to your name, so that they may be one like us. (John 17:11)

Be content with what you have. (Hebrews 13:5)

John 17: 11-19, Hebrews 13:1-5

Reflection

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews warns against excessive love of money and material things. In the face of our tendency to think we never have enough, the text reminds us of God’s providence and assures us that God will never forsake creation. Through the fruitfulness of earth, rivers and seas, God’s goodness has provided ample food and fresh water to sustain all living beings, and yet many people lack these basic necessities. Human weakness and greed frequently lead to corruption, injustice, poverty and hunger. It can be tempting, instead of caring about others and sharing our goods with them, to gather and accumulate money, food and natural resources for ourselves, or our own nation or ethnic group. In the Gospel, we are reminded that as followers of Jesus we are called to unity.

In recent years, some churches in Indonesia have been providing various kinds of financial, human and educational support to small churches in rural areas. In this simple and practical example of mutual love they are demonstrating the unity with their fellow-Christians which is God’s gift to his Church. Living more simply, not preoccupied with earning money beyond our needs or with hoarding resources for the future, can enable us to make the earth, our common home, a more just place.

Prayer

Compassionate God,

we thank you for your bountiful gifts.

Give us the grace to accept all blessings in simplicity and with humble gratitude.

Enable us to be content and ready to share with others who are in need,

so that all may experience unity in the love that flows from you,

that we may be one.

Mā to mātou Ariki, mā Hēhu Karaiti. Āmene.

This prayer resource has been prepared by the Ecumenical Committee of the New Zealand Catholic Bishops Conference from material prepared by representatives of different Christian communities in Indonesia.

Day 5 | Thursday 6 June

May they all be one.

(John 17: 22)

To bring good news to the poor

(Luke 4:18)

John 17:20-26, Luke 4:16-21

Reflection

We live in a globalized world where marginalization, exploitation and injustice are rampant. The gap between the rich and the poor is getting wider. Economic achievement becomes a deciding factor in relationships between peoples, nations and communities. Economic issues often trigger tensions and conflicts between them. It is hard to enjoy peace when justice is absent.

By virtue of our common baptism, all Christians share in the prophetic mission of Jesus to proclaim good news to the poor and the weak, in both words and deeds. When we recognise this mission, the Spirit of the Lord will be upon us, empowering us to work for justice. As Christians by working together to bring good news to the poor we are living out Christ's prayer that we may all be one.

Prayer

God Creator who calls to life and mission,

forgive our lust for power

and free us from the temptation to oppress others.

By your Holy Spirit of communion,

help us to live in solidarity with our neighbour,

and so share together with your Son Jesus

in fulfilling your promise of freedom from poverty and oppression.

Mā to mātou Ariki, mā Hēhu Karaiti. Āmene.

Day 6 | Friday 7 June

Jesus said to Simon Peter "Feed by sheep". (John 21:17)

The Lord of hosts is his name.

(Jeremiah 10:16)

John 21: 20-25, Jeremiah 10:12-16,

Reflection

The created world is a manifestation of God's wondrous power. The greatness of God is made visible in and through all creation: 'The Lord of hosts is his name.'

Today, however, we are facing a serious global ecological crisis, which threatens the survival of the natural world. Many people have been driven by greed to exploit creation beyond its capacity. In the name of development, forests are cleared and pollution destroys land, air, rivers and seas, rendering agriculture impossible, making fresh water unobtainable and causing animals to die. No part of creation is outside God's plan to make all things new. And so conversion is needed from a tendency to exploit to an attitude that values and reconciles us with creation.

Movements among people of different faiths in Indonesia and many other places are inspiring Christians to promote eco-friendly churches, and to take a stand against environmental abuses. This unites Christians in bearing witness to their Creator, 'for he is the one who formed all things'. When we join with other Christians in defence of our common earthly home, we are not just engaging in activism. We are fulfilling the Lord's command to feed God's sheep through healing and restoring love to *all* of creation.

Prayer

Loving God,

By your word all things came to be.

We thank you for the universe

which manifests your glory, beauty and kindness.

Grant us the wisdom to walk gently upon the earth and to care for all creation.

Strengthen us that together we might be prophets of your good news to all creation. Amen.

Day 7 | Saturday 8 June *The just will gaze on your face, O Lord (Psalm 10 v7)*
Woman, great is your faith! (Matthew 15:28)

Psalm 10: 4-5, 7, Matthew 15:21-28

Reflection

When the Canaanite woman came to beg Jesus to heal her daughter, he initially dismissed her, saying that he had come only for his own people. Yet she persisted in her begging and challenging and eventually, recognising her great faith, Jesus granted her request. A woman who was initially marginalised and judged unworthy of attention turned out to be speaking prophetic words that softened hearts and brought healing and wholeness.

The marginalization and dismissing of women's voices continues in our own times. Indeed even within our churches we are often complicit with cultures that devalue women. As Christians become aware of their own failings in this area, they come to recognize more clearly the horror of violence against women and children, snatched forcibly from their homes and trafficked to other lands. In recent years churches in Indonesia have taken common action against human trafficking and the sexual abuse of children. As Christians unite in prayer and study of the Scriptures, truly listening for God's voice, they can discover that God also speaks today through the cries of the most abused in society. It is when they hear God's call together that they are inspired to join in common action against the scourge of human trafficking and of other evils.

Prayer

E te Atua,
You are the source of human dignity.
By your grace and power,
the words of the Canaanite woman moved Jesus to heal her daughter.
As we search to manifest the unity of the Church,
grant us the courage to reject all forms of violence against women
and to celebrate the gifts of the Spirit that women bring to the service of the Church.
This we pray through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Day 8 | Sunday 9 June *If you love me you will keep my commandments. (John 14:15)*
The Lord is my light and my salvation. (Psalm 27:1)

John 14:15, Psalm 27:1-4,

Reflection

Throughout the eight days of this Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, the daily reflections have considered many difficult situations facing the world today, including greed, violence, exclusion, exploitation, poverty, pollution, hunger and trafficking. Churches in Indonesia are conscious of these issues as challenges facing all Christians. They recognise and confess that some of these sins have tainted the lives of their churches too, wounding their unity and diminishing their witness to the world. At the same time, they recognise as well the many promising instances of churches coming together to witness to their unity in Christians in other parts of the world can name many other examples from their own situations.

On this great feast of Pentecost, we recognise that the Holy Trinity is the source of all unity and that the Spirit is given us that we might not lose hope, but be moved to action. Because the Spirit has come to us we do not fear.

Prayer

God our Sustainer,
we praise you for your loving kindness,
for showing us your light in times of darkness.
Transform our lives so that we may be a blessing for others.
Help us to live unity in diversity as a witness to your communion,
Mā to mātou Ariki, mā Hēhu Karaiti. Āmene.