

Ordination 2012

Charge to the Ordinands: ZD Siwa on 23 September 2012.

Readings: Genesis 4:8-16

Matthew 16:21-28

Texts: Genesis 4:9 "And the Lord said... 'Where is your brother'...?"

Matthew 16:24 "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'if anyone would come after me, he (*she*) must deny himself (*herself*) and take up his (*her*) cross and follow me."

Theme: "Called by God, who sees chances to start all over again."

Greetings and Acknowledgements!

I greet you warmly in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, Amen. Let me acknowledge the presence of our two immediate Presiding Bishops, Revs Ivan Abrahams, who is the General Secretary of the WMC as and Dr Mvume Dandala, the former General Secretary of the AACC. We need to celebrate the good leadership example they have set for us. I further acknowledge the presence, in this service of all those who carry the cross of leadership in church and society, I greet my colleagues in the ministry and salute all my fellow pilgrims in the faith. People of God – Molweni!

It is with great sense of appreciation that on behalf of Conference, I hereby extend a word of gratitude to all the families of the ordinands, for the support you have given to these our sisters and brothers as well as all the sacrifices you have made. Strength to you! Do know that you are appreciated and your efforts do not go unnoticed, but this is just the beginning. Don't give up! I further want to thank the EMMU team and all those who were involved in this journey including the congregations who have journeyed with the ordinands over the years. To the ordinands and those being received into full connexion, I wish to assure you of the prayers of the people of God. Go, labour on and keep on keeping on.

Introduction:

Allan Boesak writes about a little known play by Dutch play-wright, Jan Wolkers, titled "Closed because of death." It is about imagination about the end of history. Jan Wolkers portrays a situation:

- Where everyone dies, leaving the earth desolate and uninhabited.
- Human beings having finally been successful in destroying the environment – leaving nothing.

Then the scene moves to heaven:

- God is pictured sitting there starrng at a distance with a monkey on His lap, and God is seen stroking its rib.
- Two angels are watching and they whisper to each other: 'what is God thinking now? We hope that God is not thinking of starting all over again! 'Has He not learnt?'"

- The other angel replies; “That’s precisely the difference between God and us – God always sees a chance to start all over again.

My dear friends, that are the nature of the God who called you- you are called to journey with Him in the ministry of ‘starting all over again.’ That is the covenant you have made when you responded to the call. Go therefore and start all over again and again and again.

Seeking to build a healing community, TOGETHER!

The story of Abel and Cain is not simply the story of two persons. It is in a sense our story here and now. When Cain was born, his mother announced in verse 1 “With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.” When in the second verse Abel is born, there is no announcement. Typical of the Hebrew language, even their names tell a story. Those who know Hebrew say that ‘Kayin’ means a smith, the maker, strong one, a leader.’ On the contrary Abel is close to the Hebrew ‘hebel’ which means nothingness like the mist that comes for a short time and by mid-morning is gone. So is Abel’s life in the story. He soon disappears. So these two brothers start off on an unequal footing. What binds them together is that ‘they are brothers.’ Like ourselves here: We come from different backgrounds, cultures and circumstances in life – but in Christ Jesus, we are sisters and brothers. The blood of Christ binds us together.

The announcement at Cain’s birth must have been repeated throughout his upbringing so much so that it went to his head. He got used to being the winner, the strong one, the favourite, the first – that he could not take it when the younger and weaker brother got recognition and celebration over him. Perhaps the announcement by the mother was intended for him to be the protector of the weaker siblings, but the effect was the opposite – it poisoned him and made him dangerous to that family unit. Shall I add that he became destructive to that young community? He became very angry, when God celebrated what the weaker one had done. His anger led to pre-meditated murder – destruction of a community. He invites his brother to the field and there, he kills him. Allan Boesak made the assertion that we must note that he did not kill *just* anybody but his **brother**. All of a sudden, Cain sees not a brother, but an enemy to be ‘removed’ from his way. “Hy moet verwerdy word” so said Apartheid Government in South Africa, in the case of many brothers and sisters. Cain comes back from the field and there is no sign of guilt – he is left as cold as Adriaan Vlok was at the death of Steve Biko. My friends, never allow the disappearance of sisters and brothers to leave you cold.

Cain was disabled by that which was supposedly meant to strengthen him. As we are about to announce you as ordained ministers, be watchful that it does not go to your heads and destroy communities. When you arrive at those stations as they announce your arrival, be careful. Take care of your selves. Announcements, whilst meant for good have tendencies to poison... Cain is so wounded:

- He fails to be the protector that he was meant to be – instead he kills.
- He is unable to rejoice when God pats his brother on the shoulder. God will pat many in your congregations on the back, even in the connexion and society, don’t be angry. Rejoice and dance with God and God’s people. God will dance with that mother who is left by a loved one due to HIV/AIDS and nurses an affected child. God will dance with that unannounced old lady, who hears of bereavement and takes her shawl and goes to visit the family, most of

the time, not just reading and passage of scripture, but actually becoming the text. Don't be angry. Celebrate with God.

- He is unable to see the success story of God – and you will be witnessing many such success stories. Some may exclude you. Rejoice and again I say rejoice!
- Cain was so wounded that he failed to join the celebration, because it was not about him and instead was engaged in an activity that dismantles the community. Be careful!
- Many wounds are caused by this attitude or state of woundedness.

We are brothers and sisters:

The writer does not want us to forget that Cain and Abel were brothers:

- Verse 2 'Eve later gave birth to his brother Abel...'
- Verse 8 'Cain said to his brother Abel, let us go to the field... and attacked his brother Abel'
- Verse 9 "...Where is your brother...? Am I my brother's keeper?"
- Verse 10 "Your brother's blood cries out from the ground... the ground opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood"

In just four verses in a short passage of 11 versus the word brother is mentioned 7 times. It is as if God is saying our first responsibility to each other is as sisters and brothers. It is being human in community with one another in God's world. People we are called to be human together in God's world. Every year in this church which is a community of sisters and brothers, we have to explain or beg and sometimes admit defeat when we station a person of another race or tribe or culture or gender in a different community. I am scared to say that sometimes we live a lie. John in 1 John 4:20 warn us:

"If anyone says 'I love God' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

I pray that as new ministers in the church of Christ, you are going to help us, not to live a lie! In losing his brother, Cain lost even God and was chased away from Paradise – a place of community. The Dutch Reformed Church were at least honest when in 1857, their Synod had to change its stance and bow to pressure and declared "though not desirable or scriptural, due to the weakness of some, it is permissible to hold separate services for whites and blacks." (De Gruchy 1986:8).

God starts all over:

But God who loves to see chances to start all over again comes to Cain. Where is your brother? God offers a second chance for Cain to confess and begin a new life of being able to live in community. It is as if God says Cain, 'come, let us talk about it – what happened?' Cain refuses and he plays games. He ducks and dives. We are called to start all over again in search of brothers and sisters and be part of the process of building a healing community together.

Jesus continues the story; "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, pick up the cross and follow me." The business of joining in with the bleeding heart of God involves self-denial. Following Jesus involves joining the community of cross-bearers. The disciples of Jesus have just received the revelation that Jesus is the Messiah. Before the party is over the second half of the story is revealed. Allow me to 'over-extend' the story and borrow the same image and say to you

'you will now be ordained, but before the service is over the second half of the story will be revealed. 'Yesterday at Orlando, South Africa, the Swallows won the MTN Top 8. The score at half-time was 1 all, but the second half was a different story. The outcome is not judged by half-time scores. You have to preach and live out the whole Gospel. Don't live on the glory of the first half, move on to the second half. Go and lead churches out of the first half and be communities that do not exclude those in the surroundings of the churches in which you are going to serve.

When the second half came, Peter the solid rock crumbled and instead became the stumbling block. Churches that spend too much time in the first half become stumbling blocks to the ministry and mission of Jesus. Peter took Jesus aside and wanted to give Jesus his own agenda – 'let's not go to the second half. 'Even in the very next chapter, as if Peter had forgotten the rebuke of Jesus, he still says: "Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you wish, I will put up three shelters on this mountain top. 'But Jesus leads them to the second half – **down** the valley where the troubled father with a sick boy waits. There the father brings the report to Jesus and says that he had begged the followers to make a difference and nothing happened. The mystery of the Gospel is taking up the cross and following Jesus and that is what you responded to. Thomas Long writes that "what appears to crush everything one hopes for to be a human being – bearing the cross of service and suffering is in fact the only way for a human being to be fully alive." Cross bearing means:

- Putting your life on the line in ensuring that no one kills the other – in a culture that sometimes promotes killing for leaders. Jesus is the leader who died for the people.
- It means being there in the 'stench "with Jesus, rubbing shoulders with the unacceptable, and seeking to become a healing community together!
- Cross bearers forfeit the game of power and lay down their personal agendas for the sake of a better whole.
- Thomas Long continues; "Cross bearers are drop-outs in the school of self-promotion."
- Cross bearing means denying self for the sake of others especially those who are down in the valley.

Let me conclude with the words of this song by Gareth Hill:

"Let the song go round the world, every note a prayer. Hearts and voices joined as one, celebrate the Christ we share. We long for God's transforming love to flood our streets again. We dare to hope the Kingdom comes on earth. We go to preach the truth of Christ: that love will overcome. We dare to be His hands and feet today." AMEN.