

Ordination 2017

UJ Soweto Campus on 10 September 2017.

Readings:

Isaiah 40: 1-11; Romans 13:8-14; Luke 5:1-13

Greetings and Acknowledgements!

Thanks to:

- families of ordinands, Circuits,
- Retreat Leaders, EMMU and all those who accompanied our sisters and brothers on the journey thus far.
- The sacrifices, the prayers, the frustrations and anxieties have surely not gone unnoticed by God.
- To the Ordinands: I assure you my dear sisters and brothers – of the prayers, love and support of the Methodists on our journey of *being together with God's creation*. Love God. Be always mindful that we carry this treasure in jars of clay; “to prevent anyone from confusing God's incomparable power with us. It is the divine message through the human medium (to borrow Daniel Groody's words).

TEXT:

Romans 13:12 “The night is *nearly* over; dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing.”

INTRODUCTION:

The letter to the Romans, like all Paul's letters was not Theological Theses written from an ivory tower. It was written to specific people addressing specific circumstances. It is a letter to a community at a time of many changes.... The Jewish community was allowed under favourable policies of Augustus, but viewed with suspicion as they practiced an exclusive religion. But things changed from the time of Tiberius and they were even expelled from Rome – eg. Aquila and Priscilla in Acts 18. When Christianity emerged it became a further confusion. It was difficult to imagine this new emerging religion whilst they were struggling with the old. But the church in Rome with its complexities became the Church of former enemies – Jews and Gentiles. These were the recipients of Paul's letter. The letter comes from the one who had struggled with the transition himself. It comes from the former defender of faith that excluded Christian faith. It comes from the one who was promoting human understanding at the expense of not listening to the very Lord of Life – until that Damascus experience. Over the years of your journey thus far you were asked over and over again about your conversion experience – ‘your experience of the touch of God on your life.’ As the Hymn writer says: “*Phefumlela Thixo wethu, xa sithandazayo kuWe. Sidalele ubomi obutsha, masikhanyiselwe nguWe.* (Breathe on me, Breath of God, fill me with life anew, that I may love what Thou dost love, and do what Thou wouldst do). It is - the divine encounter that guided Paul's missionary journeys and writings.

In this letter to the Romans, we can't miss the flavor of that encounter, as he guides this young church of former enemies – Jews and Gentiles – at a time of historic transition.

- The letter puts the story of God's justice at the climax, as the writer speaks of liberation and God's intention
- It points to a new reality

The wall of hostility is dismantled – Jews and Gentiles experience it together! Some try to lull the eyes to divert the focus from imagination. The one who was on the task of fixing others discovered that his own world was falling apart – and not only his but actually that God was mending the broken world and that instead of fixing others on behalf of God, the call was to love what God loves and do what God is doing. He was there when Stephen of Acts 7 was being stoned – he was right there and Acts records – was giving approval to his death and congratulating the killers. But now, he woke up on the Damascus road. Acts records that he was still breathing out murderous threats against the disciples – he had an encounter with the Lord of life and began to think, live and speak differently. He was full of the renewed hope for the new world for which there was no need to kill for. There was a radical mind shift! His hope was now anchored not on himself, but on a Power beyond – the name above all names. And he writes to the Romans:

“The night is nearly over; dawn is about to break. Be up and awake to what God is doing.”

THE NIGHT AND THE DAWN:

His life was now led by hope in God of Life. He gives us an analogy of a passing night and the coming dawn. Night is not a bad time:

- It's generally a time of rest – and normally a time of tranquility
- The noise of the day dies down. The night is necessary at this time of lot of noise – lerata/ingxolo – 'barrulho (Portuguese)' 'pongwe (Ronga).' - The night is necessary.
- It is at such a time that the song writer captures the clarity of the call:
“I, the Lord of sea and sky, I have heard my people cry. All who dwell in dark and sin my hand will save. I who made the stars of night, I will make their darkness bright. Who will bear my light to them? Whom shall I send?

The Refrain:

Here I am, Lord. Is it I Lord? I have heard you calling in the night. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart.” The whisper of God had become clear!!!

- Don't run away from the night. Don't lull the eyes of faith when nights of the world fall on you. At times like those, find a space and dig deep from 'faith storage bins' (Dandala): “Abide with me; fast falls the eventide. The darkness deepens; Lord abide with me. When other helpers fail and comforts flee; Help of helpless, oh abide with me... Shine through the gloom and point me to the skies.” Remember you have been set aside to focus on the ever present God; the one the hymn writer says:
 - Immortal, invisible, God only wise. To all life Thou givest, to both great and small. In all life Thou livest the true life of all. The Ancient of days!

Yes other nights become so dark that it becomes difficult to see which way to turn. It was on 14 September 1958 that Martin Luther King Junior, preaching on the parable in Luke 11:6 wrote:

- 'It was midnight in the parable, and it is midnight in our world today. Things stand at the midnight of life's revolving cycle.

- It is midnight in the social order... The deep rumblings of discontent from around our globe are obvious signs of the social disruption of our age.
- It is midnight in the moral order. All moral principles have lost their distinctiveness. Nothing is right or wrong absolutely for modern human beings. It is just a matter of what the majority of the people are doing. Everybody is doing it, so it must be right. We have developed a generation of moral cowards'

And I add it is the midnight of moral bankruptcy or moral illiteracy.

Paul writes: The night is nearly over. Dawn is about to break. Wake up and be awake to what God is doing. In the midnight hour of life circumstances, the world is waiting for a message from one who senses that dawn is about to break.

When dawn comes - birds begin to sing. Go and sing the song of hope especially in the dark moments of people's lives. Hope is the last thing to die. When people lose hope they become dangerous to themselves. Go announce in word and deed the coming dawn.

- Paul writes in chapter 10:15 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news.' It is fascinating that it is the feet that are beautiful. It is walking the talk that shines beautifully in the eyes of those who wait in the darkest moments of life.

As the dawn breaks it brings the ability to see the other – not jostling for own space where God will take a back seat! – Jealous God taking the back seat.

THEREFORE; WAKE UP AND PUT ON THE ACTIONS OF THE COMING DAWN:

One who waits for the coming dawn readies himself/herself for the new day. As Ivan Abrahams said in Bloemfontein; "he/she puts off the attire of the night and puts on the attire of the day." The hope of the coming dawn helps us to keep focus and not to lose identity. There is a story recorded by Francis Collins in the book; The Language of God. It is a story by Sister Joan Chittiser, a Benedictine nun and it goes as follows:

- Once upon a time there was an old woman who used to meditate by the banks of a river. One morning she saw a scorpion floating helplessly in the strong current. She immediately reached out to the drowning scorpion. As soon as she touched it, it stung her. The woman withdrew her hand, but tried again – every time she tried the scorpion stung her so badly that her hands became bloody and her face distorted with pain. A passerby saw her and shouted; 'You fool, do you want that ugly thing to kill you.' The woman replied; "Because it is the scorpion's nature to bite, why should myself, my own nature to save it."

It is the cause and faith in God that keeps the followers going. The world may be overcome with the midnight darkness. It may even sting, but we must not lose our nature to save. But it is the nature of the follower of God of life to imagine new life waiting to be born. You are never alone. God promises; "I am with you always.

AMEN

