

Methodist Church of Southern Africa

Conference 2018

Mozambique, Maputo

Theme: Shaping Tomorrow, Today

Greetings:

To the Presiding Bishop, General Secretary of Conference, President of the lay leaders, members of the Connexional Executive, delegates of Conference and all the people of God present; greetings to you in the name of my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Introduction:

We meet again this morning, to conclude my sharing thoughts into this conference's deliberations of the theme, Shaping tomorrow, today. Yesterday I shared a few thoughts on my understanding of shaping and pointed out:

- In shaping, there is a desired outcome one works towards (a vision of what could become)
- There's a need for a decision to be made with appropriate response made towards the collective actions made in preparation and shaping towards the envisioned state.
- Frustration and defaulting to the norm are natural, yet limiting of possibility, responses to the perceived failure. Thus leading to a limited of view of reality ever changing.
- Shaping is not a time bound activity but rather a concerted effort towards improving the essence of being, of the one being shaped. Shaping is not only intended for young people, for our faith reminds us, all us are continually being formed into the likeness of God through Christ.

We further explored concepts of yesterday, today and tomorrow and highlighted these are understood as natural progression of time. We further reflected on the Greek concepts of time; namely Chronos and Kairos. The measured and absolute time (Chronos) and the most opportune time for decision (Kairos time). And it was here that I cautioned against the limited, measured linear understanding of time which renders humanity as passively present entities of time. While calling on the embracing of the kairological conception of time, allowing for greater participation through human decision. And we reflected briefly on why we shape and the reality of our youth and children among us and used the Eutychus text in Acts 20: 7-12 as our conversation text.

Today we build on the proposed re-conception of time, kairological time, and my main focus would be what it calls of us as humanity and more specifically; as Christians.

We read together in the book of Jeremiah 1: 1-10

1 The words of Jeremiah son of Hilkiyah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, ² to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of King Josiah son of Amon of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign. ³ It came also in the days of King Jehoiakim son of Josiah of Judah, and until the end of the eleventh year of King Zedekiah son of Josiah of Judah, until the captivity of Jerusalem in the fifth month.

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me saying,

⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me,

**“Do not say, ‘I am only a boy’;
for you shall go to all to whom I send you,
and you shall speak whatever I command you.**

**⁸ Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
says the LORD.”**

**⁹Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and
the LORD said to me,**

“Now I have put my words in your mouth.

**¹⁰See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to pull down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant. (NRSV).**

Reconfiguring ourselves for the sake of tomorrow; today.

If we are to embrace the kairos view of time, allow me to point out that realistically this view of time exists in the midst of the measured time. Thus calling us to a heightened alertness to the opportune times (or moments in time, as Allan Boesak prefers to phrase it)¹ presented to us within the normal every day time of our lives. This calls therefore for a certain sense of living conscious of the ever present possibilities of the emergence of something new and the need to act decisively at the opportune time of its emergence. Thus, we are further challenged to a continuous process of discernment and decisive action when opportunities of shaping for tomorrow emerge today. This I believe call us to the need to reconfigure ourselves in an attempt to live kairologically in a constricted chronological world. Thus become a different community; an alternative community that gives new meaning and essence to the meaning of life- a Kingdom community that Jesus’ ministry shapes.

And this reconfiguration happens, not in the superficial appearance of change but the radical change and reconfiguration of mind-set and worldview that would endure the test of Chronologically heavy laden realities of our current time. We have been given this gift already as a people of faith and the task is clear which is that of prophetic witness. I find the vision of the Kairos Southern Africa, “A Humanity with a Kairos

¹ For Boesak, Kairos is seen as a moment in time, rather than a time or a season. See Boesak, A. 2015. *Kairos, Crisis, and Global Apartheid: The Challenge to Prophetic Resistance*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Consciousness” as a helpful framework, as we together reflect on the theme. My conversation partner in this work will be Allan Boesak mainly .

Kairos Consciousness: In conversation with Allan Boesak

Boesak in his work, *Kairos, Crisis and Global Apartheid (2015)*, engages on the concept of Kairos Consciousness which I believe would be a valuable offering to the kind of shaping God re-calls us to, today. For Boesak, the Kairos moment is “...a *moment* unique, for people of faith to see and understand, and act upon it” (2015:10). Yet though the kairos is a moment, he concedes that if there is a premise for one to embody a kairos consciousness, then it cannot be but limited to a moment but rather suggests “an abiding awareness” that he also calls “prophetic alertness.” I argue though, that in the word *kairos* itself, is the image of the uncontainable springing up of time, which I suggest we can not only limit it to a moment, hence my insistence of understanding the kairos as beyond just a moment.

In describing assessing the phrasing of the vision, Boesak highlights that it suggests more than an individualised consciousness but rather one that seeks to ‘embrace’ and ‘inspire’ all of humanity. This stems from 1985 Kairos moment for Southern Africa where a group of prophetic Christians became alert of the truth regarding the situation in South Africa; in the context of “racist domination, political oppression, socioeconomic exploitation and the silence of the church in regard to all these” (Boesak, 2015:10). And subsequent to that, many other countries came to understand their own political and socioeconomic situation which gave rise to many other kairos documents. With the current time, Boesak points out that there is a deliberateness in calling for a kairos consciousness for all humanity rather than another kairos document.

A few things Boesak highlights about this form of consciousness:

- “It is a consciousness awake and open to the discovering of, and responding to the decisiveness of the moment” (2015:10).
- In it is a call to “discernment, repentance, conversion and commitment” (ibid.) and Boesak believes it is both a liberating and shocking space.

MCSA CONFERENCE BIBLE STUDY DAY 2

- This form of consciousness knows that the moment of truth is not one of gloating and affirming spiritual superiority but rather a moment of humble joy for the gift of discernment, discontentment and dissent. In this case, it is “discernment of what is wrong in a situation and the crisis it creates for the most vulnerable , discontent with the situation of injustice, and a refusal to leave things as they are; dissent from the dominant judgement that the status quo is acceptable, unchangeable, or irreversible” (2015:11). Thus acknowledging this discovery is a revelation from God through the Holy Spirit, and not of a result of human intelligence.
- This consciousness understand the difference between ‘order’ and ‘justice’ and refuses to accept that tyranny and injustice are to be accepted in the name of maintaining ‘order’ and should not be mistaken for order (2015:12).
- This consciousness sees the face of God in the faces of those suffering, marginalised and those it seeks to give a voice to; thus affirming their dignity as human beings created in the image of God. Furthermore, it seeks to see the world through their eyes and in so doing seeing through the eyes of Jesus (2015:13).
- Kairos consciousness is “critical and simultaneously self-critical consciousness” (Boesak, 2015:14). It is critical as it discerns and critiques the time we live in and offers prophetic critique of that situation and calls for the church to take the side of those in the margins and voiceless-in our case this year it is children and youth. But allow me to highlight that we do not shape only for the inclusion of youth and children; we are restoring the intended vision of what a community of God is like. Same as when we speak of issues of gender; it is restoring what it means to be fully human and not just a male and female discourse. Same with issues of homosexuality and people with disabilities. These are humanity issues and not just relegated for a certain few. But this consciousness is also self-critical of moments where decisive action has not

been taken , avoiding hiding behind what Boesak calls ‘*pseudo-innocence*’² (2015: 15).

This speaks to our shaping of tomorrow, today and I believe this kind of consciousness already gives us coordinates to navigate towards the tomorrow we believe God is calling us to do. This is a call to the prophetic ministry and presence of the church in the world. Walter Brueggemann³ describes the task of this ministry as one that needs “nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.” (1978:13). This prophetic ministry allows us the framework within which to shape tomorrow, today and to critically engage our being together as a transforming discipleship moment called to help realise a Christ healed Africa for the healing of nations. Furthermore, the framework for authentic action and prophetic participation in the now for the sake of that which is to come.

An offering I wish to make scripturally to our call to prophetic witness, which at the heart we are called to discern the signs of times is the book of Jeremiah.

Scholars⁴ highlight that the book of Jeremiah is written within the context of the highlighting of a criteria for critical discernment of prophetic authenticity during his time. The presence of the criteria within the book is based on the context within which Jeremiah’s prophetic ministry was situated. The ministry took place in the seventh and early sixth centuries; which was the final years of the kingdom of Judah. According to Moberly, this time “raised in an unprecedentedly disputed way the question of what kind of future , if any, the kingdom was to have, especially in relation to the growing power of Babylon” (2006:41). Jeremiah’s witness is said to have been contested by many other prophets in a way that is not evidenced in the books associated with Hoseah, Amos, Isaiah or any of the other post-exilic prophets.

² I see this pseudo-innocence playing out when we all claim to be pro-youth and pro-women in our churches yet the face of women and youth does not form the public image of the church. If we are all pro-women and youth why are they still wrestles by their clear absence in leadership spaces?

³ Brueggemann, W. 1978. *The Prophetic Imagination*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

⁴See Moberly, R.W.L, 2006. *Prophecy and Discernment*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Moberly points out that this is not to say the other prophets' words do not have their own opposition. Rather, the opposition is predominantly expressed in their reluctance to take the challenge of his words seriously of whether human words can also constitute the words of God. The explicit discussion of criteria for critical discernment of prophetic authenticity is found in Jeremiah 23:9-32 (2006:42).

The passage we have read, provides the general historical context and the chronology of Jeremiah's ministry (1: 1-3). And we are told that the word of the Lord came to him (v. 4) and this word is encountered in a specific historical context. On the one hand it is that of his lineage as he comes from a family with a long religiously involved history while on the other hand he comes from a period of time labelled by its Judahite kings (1:2-3), which has led up to the exile Jerusalem; its destruction and the deportation of the people by the Babylonians. Thus placing what Jeremiah says in a particular time, even though his words become timeless as their significance goes beyond their originating context. There are two operative delineations of time which I would like us to note, the chronological time marked by the passing of Judahite kings whose kingship and life span was for a particular time span; and the kairological time, God speaking beyond the leadership terms of the kings through prophecy. While there have been chronological terms of leadership, there has been a kairological presence of the one true King, which is God, and experienced throughout the leadership changes. Shaping tomorrow, today as a prophetic witness outlives the bounds of time and is not detached from the timeless and boundless presence of God. Moreover, its relevance surpasses the initial moments of emergence while also pointing to another time beyond the current one.

Verse 5: we enter into another space of kairos time

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you"- In God's limitless space and time Jeremiah's being and essence was known by God and his consecration happens years before his resumption of his prophetic ministry. His calling and blessing of such a ministry is one located in the limitless time of God. Therefore, he is shaped in the Kairological space of God, therefore all that unfolds in Jeremiah's ministry is a horizon within God's futuristic view of howa

lcovenantal life ought to be; contrary to the life the Israelites were living in the time of him being called. Moreover, though his prophesy is by location confined to one nation, his own people, the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah; God's call is that he be a prophet to many nations. And we learn in Jeremiah 46-51also 25:15-38 we see Jeremiah addressing other people in Egypt, Philistia, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Damascus, Kedar,Elam and Babylon. Therefore, what Jeremiah has to say as the mouth of God applies not only to one nation and time but to all of humanity. Moberly rightly points out, "...the dynamics of YHWH's message through Jeremiah do not solely apply to God's chosen people but rather characterize the relationship of the Creator with created humanity generally" (2006:46).

While he sees his youth as a limitation, which might have been as resultant of most prophets being older than he is at the time; God reassures that he is already covered the ground.

The divine intention of Jeremiah's call is set out in verse 10:

Two-fold; negative and positive:

The negative is given in four verbs- to pluck up and tear down, to destroy and overthrow; which is to dismantle and destroy all that constitutes the Jerusalem establishment. This task refers to the destruction of Jerusalem that happens through the Babylonain invasion in the beginning of the 6th century (Brueggemann, 2007:60).

The second task is to "plant and build" that is to restore Jerusalem that has been devastated, an anticipation that concurs with the latter part of the book of Jeremiah, which likely happens after the person and life of Jeremiah (Brueggemann, 2007: 61)

Jeremiah shapes through prophecy and warning to the Israelites, and is given the vision and glimpses of what the future would look like in the Potters house. Yet, seemingly, he might not see the full realisation of the remoulding of his nation but his prophecy shapes today. Those who shape tomorrow, today understand they may not reap the fruits of that which they have been shaping for. Like Jeremiah' prophetic ministry, they will encounter danger and

MCSA CONFERENCE BIBLE STUDY DAY 2

challenges, they will be scarred but their work of shaping will forever be remembered by those who will experience the tomorrow. Shaping is not a work of mere volunteers in the vision and Kingdom of God but a work of investors who believe in the vision and are willing to be spent towards its realisation. You may not live to see the full view of the future, but shape anyway for generations to come will remember you.

God bless us all and may our decisions today, be motivated by God's call for us to shape tomorrow.