

THE LENTEN STUDY BOOK 2025

THE DIOCESE OF BARBADOS

TITLE:

**Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?
Our History, Our Trauma, Ourselves:
Reading the Psalms and the Parables of Jesus
In A Barbadian Context**



**Prepared By
Daniel Justice Eshun & Michael Anderson Clarke**

Foreword

As our Diocese observes its Bicentenary, one thing that to this date continues to plague our Church is its historical involvement and participation in the trafficking of Africans from their homeland to be enslaved in our island. While we thank God for bringing our Church and Diocese to the point of being remorse for the part played in the enslavement and dehumanization of the black race and to seek paths of restorative justice, we also take note of the severe trauma that has been passed down through the years to the descendants of the enslaved. As a Church, we are called to assist these descendants, who now make up the majority of membership within our Anglican Church and citizens of our nation, to be emancipated from, what the late great Robert Nesta Marley described as, 'mental slavery.' Having discussed this need for such a response with The Rev'd Dr Michael Clarke, Principal of Codrington College, we felt it was necessary for our Church to reflect during this Lenten season on how it can begin to greatly assist our people in this act of emancipation from mental slavery; an emancipation we truly believe our God so greatly desires to offer us as a Caribbean people for us to realize and believe in our true worth.

Considering that our Diocese is now seeking to forge a companion link with a Ghanaian Diocese, Dr Clarke joined with The Rev'd Dr Daniel Eshun - a Ghanaian serving as a chaplain at a University in London - with the mission of preparing this Lenten Study for our Diocese. They have truly produced a remarkable piece of work; and it is to be received as an essential tool for us as a Church, and as citizens of this nation, for it provokes deep theological and inward reflection on the impact of slavery on our reality and spirituality. It also calls for transformative actions to be taken as our God in Christ, through the power of His Spirit, continues to offer the means whereby all can experience their true self of who our Divine created us to be.

Through the sessions in this course, Dr Eshun and Dr Clarke invite us to revisit, and meditate upon, a number of the psalms and the parables of Jesus from the perspective of the lived experiences of our ancestors and those that are ours today. As we engage in this material, may our reflections and discussions with others, guided by God's Holy Spirit, enable us to become more aware of who we are and whose we are during our Lenten season of introspection. May we be drawn to the truth that regardless of our race, colour, ancestry or history, we are fearfully and wonderfully made, children of the Most High God and citizens of His Kingdom now and for all eternity.

Many thanks to our authors for this invaluable production and may all who engage with it be guided to the abundant life God offers that all may flourish.

+Michael Barbados

Introduction

The Church has embraced Lent as one of its traditions since the fourth century. Following the Council of Nicaea in 325 A.D. the Church instituted Lent as a period of prayer and fasting for forty days. The tradition allowed the clergy, those seeking baptism, and the wider Church to prepare for the sacrament of baptism and Eucharist at Easter. Although the biblical injunction for the institution of Lent was very thin, with the passage of time the Church linked Lent to Jesus' forty days fasting before his great ministry and other Old Testament traditions where the number forty are given significance and spiritual interpretation (Exodus 34:28; Numbers 14:34; Deuteronomy 9:18).

Drawing on the Old Testament traditions of forty day's journey in the wilderness and Matthew's account of Jesus' own forty days in the wilderness, Lent is now considered as a season of retreat from the things of the world. A retreat for the cleansing of our minds and calling to mind things of the Spirit, in preparation for the glorious Eastertide. Lent has become a preparation for the resurrection of our minds from the darkness of sin, doubt, fear, and false beliefs. Lent is to bring us into a new light of understanding that the power and enlightenment Jesus' resurrection brings.

Lent calls on each one of us to give serious attention to our individual, community and national lives which hitherto have been taken for granted. Lent gives us the chance to reread familiar biblical stories with fresh eyes with the aim of seeing the world differently and to initiate and facilitate acts of forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and pursue posttraumatic growth for ourselves, communities and the nation.

Barbados is one of the most beautiful islands on this planet. Barbadians are resilient, creative, confident and incredible people with kind hearts, and with a good sense of humour. But Barbados was founded on the institution of slavery and its attending violence, murders, rape, racism, injustices and other forms of human degradation. What kind of transgenerational traumas did these countless injustices and beyond descriptions sufferings left behind that we are still living with in Barbados? And how do we forgive, find healing, reconciliation, restore or repair what were lost and move forward towards posttraumatic growth? How do we develop a deep and vibrant spirituality that confidently gives an affirmative voice to Jesus' promise: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I have come that you may have life and have it in all its fullness" (John 10:10)? These questions are scarcely discussed or addressed within our Church communities either out of fear or the feeling that we do not have the permission to do so.

Finally, the Bible plays a significant role in our mission, liturgy, pastoral, priesthood, prophetic, and ambassadorial roles in the public square. But how do we read the Bible? How do we read Jesus' parables in our Barbadian context? How do we get behind imageries of slavery, unjust judges, racism, and unfair wages in Jesus' parables in our context where once upon time these imageries were daily reality? We go through the Lenten season every year in Barbados, but what do we do in this consciously dedicated season? What are our individual and collective expectations and aspirations within the season of Lent? How do we bring about the realisation of our individual and collective hopes and aspirations?

This booklet is written as a resource for those within our community who want to focus on Lent and give serious attention to various questions we have raised through group studies, conversations, prayers, and fasting. The booklet is meant to be used as an open-ended conversational starter. It is divided into six study chapters; each chapter is driven by the burning questions we have raised. We as writers of this booklet do not claim to have definitive answers to these various questions we have raised. However, too often as Church we sweep these burning questions under the carpet, this attitude is a symptom of trauma. Posttraumatic experiences of communities and individuals include avoidance, memory loss and loss of interest among other things.

The open-ended conversation is to lead our communities and each person towards self-examination and to encourage proactive ways to inspire one another towards acts of love and good works that recognise various ongoing injustices, historic and intergenerational trauma that continue in our society. The open-ended conversation is meant to move us towards forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and spiritual growth.

The group studies/conversations will need facilitators or leaders. The role of the facilitator is to enable participants to engage with the questions, and in so doing engage with each other. The primary role of the facilitator is to enable 'group process' to take place, that is to manage group dynamics, to promote turn taking, to keep time, to summarize each section and to find creative and empowering ways of enabling each member of the group to give a voice to what they have heard and to move the group into meditative prayers using the prayers at the end of each section. We do recognise that wherever, the Spirit of God is, there is freedom (2 Corinthians 3:17) and the Spirit blows wherever the Spirit pleases. If at the end of the conversation/study, the Spirit give directions for extemporary prayers, the group is freed to do so, and end with the meditative prayers.

One of the most valuable ways of observing the Lenten season is to let go beliefs and long held theological ideas and perceptions that stand in the way of God's will for our common flourishing as individual, communities and a nation. Our prayer is that this Lenten booklet will be a tool that enables us to lament, to learn, to aspire, to grow, and to avail ourselves for the Spirit's empowerment. This season is a time to take stock of our lives through study, conversations, prayer and fasting to allow God's Spirit to inform and influence our thoughts, words, and actions to work toward posttraumatic growth in Barbados. We pray that through rededication of ourselves to study/conversation, prayer and fasting, God will put a new song in our mouths (Psalm 40:3); and bestow on each one of us a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair (Isaiah 61:3) in Barbados.

Chapter One

Lent: Our Opportunity to Lament, To Cry for Mercy and to Grow (Bible Readings: Psalm 103: 13-18; Luke 18:9-14)

Psalm 103: 13-18

The LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him. For he knows how weak we are; he remembers we are only dust. Our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. The wind blows, and we are gone as though we had never been here. But the love of the LORD remains forever with those who fear him. His salvation extends to the children's children of those who are faithful to his covenant, of those who obey his commandments!

Luke 18:9-14

To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everyone else, Jesus told this parable: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood by himself and prayed: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other people – robbers, evildoers, adulterers – or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' "But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' "I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."

Reflecting on Fasting, Prayers and Almsgiving on Ash Wednesday in Barbados

What do you think about these two readings – Psalm 103:13-18 and Luke 18:9-14? These two readings are among the various biblical texts we read during Ash Wednesday. Yet, our attitudes towards Lent are increasingly becoming ambivalent, ironic and paradoxical in our contemporary world. While some Christians do strictly observe Lent with the strict discipline of fasting, almsgiving, prayers, bible studies, pilgrimages, and self-denial of their favourite food, desserts, chocolate, sugary or alcoholic drinks, other Christian traditions do not fuss or bother. Some Christians leave the observance of Lent up to the individuals to deepen their spiritual lives.

Whichever way we choose to observe the Lenten season, the challenge for each one of us is having the right attitudes. We could choose to be like the Pharisee counting on our own righteousness for not being a robber, an evildoer, an adulterer or a tax collector. We could even count on the points we have scored for our good works, our fasting and our almsgiving. Alternatively, we could be like the tax collector to beat our breasts, lament and plead for God's mercy for ourselves, communities and our nation. What path would you take this Lenten season?

The Lenten season has always been perceived as an opportunity for spiritual discipline to redirect our orientations towards God through the acts of penance, study, fasting, almsgiving, and prayer without self-righteousness, hypocrisy or complacency. Through these acts, we have the opportunity to lament the past and the present miseries and their intergenerational traumatic impacts on ourselves and the rest of humanity. This season gives us the opportunity to think about human vulnerability and mortality, and like the tax collector, lament, beat our breasts and ask for God's mercy on ourselves and the rest of humanity.

Both the Pharisee and the Tax Collector in their prayers were taking stock of their lives and that of their respective communities. Like the two characters in our parable, the nature and attitudes towards our stocktaking would determine the result of our justifications before God. Lent is our opportunity for thorough and critical study to take stock of our history, our experiences of our journey on earth, to know ourselves, our neighbours, our communities, and our collective inherited trauma. With right attitudes and with the help of the Spirit who intercedes with us and through us in union with the Son to the Father, we can pray for forgiveness, healing, reconciliation and grace for posttraumatic growth.

In the Early Church, Lent observance was used to prepare those seeking baptism and encourage those already baptised to renew their baptismal vows and to avail themselves for the Holy Spirit to work in their hearts and minds to be spiritually strengthened and to receive the holy sacraments. Lent made it possible for those who have lapsed in their discipleship to repent. Lent's penitential character totally centres on God's grace. It is God who forgives all our sins and gives us a second chance. Sin is destructive and traumatic. Its corrosive influence permeates every aspect of our history, our lives, and our ongoing earthly experiences.

In Barbados, Lent calls on each one of us to receive God's grace and renewal. We have the chance for self-examination, to question, receive wisdom, lament historical and present injustices, seek repentance, forgiveness, and pursue reconciliation in ways that lead to healing and posttraumatic growth. But which of the attitudes of the two men who went up to the temple to pray would we take in Barbados? The Pharisee or the Tax collector? The chances are that if we continue with our old ways of doing things without critical self-examination we would be acting and praying like the Pharisee.

The Pharisee in our parable is sincere and he is a very good person. Truly he was neither a robber, an evildoer, an adulterer nor even a tax collector. Sometimes, we caricaturised Pharisees in our religious thinking. But the characterisation of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts is much more complex. They challenge Jesus and his lifestyle from their very first appearance at the healing of a paralytic (Luke 5:17-26). The Pharisees complained about Jesus' consorting with tax collectors and sinners (Luke 5:30; 7:39; 15:2). Jesus himself has harsh words for the Pharisees (Luke 11:38-44; 16:14-15).

Despite Jesus' disagreement with the Pharisees, Jesus is constantly portrayed in the gospels as dining with Pharisees (Luke 7:36; 11:37). Jesus had mutual respectful dialogue with the Pharisees (Luke 17:20); and Pharisees warn him about the threats of Herod (Luke 13:31). Gamaliel, the Pharisee, argues in support of Jesus' disciples that the apostles should not be killed (Acts 5:34-39), and there are Pharisees who joined the Jesus movement (Acts 15:5), including Paul (Acts 26:5).

The Pharisee's prayer in the parable somehow resonates with traditional male prayers within the Jewish community. A Jewish man must recite three benedictions every day: 'Blessed be You, Lord, who did not make me a gentile.' 'Blessed be You, Lord, who did not make me uneducated.' 'Blessed be You, Lord, who did not make me a woman;' and perceptions about Tax Collectors were that

they are beyond God's salvation. The Jewish tradition in the Mishnah stated, "If tax gatherers entered a house all that is within it becomes unclean".

The point Jesus is making in this parable is against overconfidence in one's own behaviour and inherited traditions as righteous without critical self-examinations. Strong, religious, and devoted people can be lost. The Pharisee in the parable had many good characteristics. He was devoutly religious—he was at the temple praying. He may have been sincere. There is nothing said against his morality. He must have been faithful to his marriage vows. He was not an extortioner or unfair to his neighbours. The Pharisee was apparently liberal with his money. Yet, he was not justified. He had attitude problems. He was lacking in other areas. The Pharisee was proud and self-righteous without self-examination. Thus, being religious and devoted without critical self-examination were not enough. If mercy was granted to the Publican, mercy can be shown to us too.

To many, the Publican was an outcast. Being a tax collector, his profession links him with the foreign imperial power of the day. By his profession, the Publican has symbolically and openly answered the tricky and trapping political question posed to Jesus, "Teacher we know how honest you are. You are impartial and don't play favourites. You teach the way of God truthfully. Now tell us—is it right to pay taxes to Caesar or not?" (Mark 12:14) By collecting taxes for Caesar he has become a traitor in many people's eyes. He was thought and perceived to be unworthy. If God would grant mercy to such a one as him, we too can be recipients of God's grace when we critically examine and open ourselves to God's scrutiny during this Lent.

Lent: Occasion to Lament, to Cry for Mercy and to Grow

Opening ourselves to God's scrutiny is partly taking on the imposition of ashes on our forehead with the ancient exultation that accompanied rite of imposition of ashes seriously: "Remember you are dust, and unto dust you shall return." On one hand, this symbolic act within the liturgy calls us to reflect on our own mortality and that of our ancestors who went through excruciating pain on this island and have gone ahead of us. Also, it is a reminder to take on a new life that commit us to hold on to the Kingdom values that Jesus' taught through his parables. Values of extending the mercy and the compassion we receive from God to those within our communities.

On the other hand, symbolically, ashes represent lamentation of the past and the present injustices, and our desire to repair the present for a better future. The gift of lament that the Ash Wednesday liturgy gives us in our Barbadian context is invaluable and this is inextricably linked with seeking mercy, forgiveness and healing towards posttraumatic growth. Seeking mercy is engagement with our transgenerational trauma rooted in our history. Seeking mercy is within the gift of lament. Our resilience, Love, Hope, Faith and the cry for mercy ought to start with lament. If we are content that preaching is a language of hope, we will have to relearn the language of lament. There can be no language of hope and mercy without language of lament: lament and mercy are flip sides of the same coin.¹

¹ Cilliers, J. 2007. "Preaching as a language of hope in the context of HIV and AIDS". In Preaching as a language of hope. Studia Homiletica 6, Ed Cas Vos, Lucy L Hogan and Johan H Cilliers. Pretoria: Pretoria Book House 2007. 159

To lament is not a moaning exercise. Rather, to lament is to come to terms with the realities of the past and our present injustices. Some of them were perpetrated in the name of God and were authorised by imperialistic misrepresentations of God and misinterpretations of scripture out of arrogance, greed, and sheer inhumanity. To Lament is to wrestle with God and the tensions within our received doctrines and within ourselves.

How can we embrace a seemingly abusive God in whose name slavery was normalised and perpetrated? Is God colour blind? What kind of God permits slavery, violence, racism, exploitation, dehumanisation, rape and exclusion and indescribable historical and transgenerational trauma? To Lament is to come to terms with our inner turmoil and having the courage to protest, to confront God outwardly and inwardly against these human degradations and injustice, while seeking mercy and forgiveness for ourselves, the oppressors and those who still benefit from our oppression.²

Jesus demonstrated the significance of the gift of lament as a protestation against human cruelty, injustices, distortions of truth, abuse of power and a sense of God abandonment, when he lamented on the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46). While simultaneously pleading mercy for his oppressors “Father, forgive them, for they don’t know what they are doing” (Luke 23:34).

Lamentations are declarations and disclosures of the darkest side of our history, our existence and our experiences. Jesus’ lamentation and his cry for mercy for his oppressors was a deep prophetic calling for vindication and justice.³ To lament is to call for human accountability for both past and present injustices and to assert one’s self-affirmation at the religious, social, economic, political, cultural and psychological levels.

An absence of lament, where there is the need for one, is a form of collusion with the oppressor and a false collective and individual sense of self. Symbolic usage of ashes in the scriptures offer us both intellectual and spiritual spaces for the development of our ‘authentic self’ at the individual and corporate levels. Symbolic ashes are demonstrations of individual and collective refusal to remain silent in the face of injustice and undue suffering. It is like the tax collector crying to God to have mercy on us and our oppressors.⁴ To lament is to cry out to God as we work together towards a future that embraces whatever are true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent and praiseworthy (Philippian 4:8) in Barbados.

Like, the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, the Psalmist reminds us that the “LORD is like a father to his children, tender and compassionate to those who fear him”. God knows our mortality, pain and historical and intergeneration trauma. God knows how weak we are; God remembers that we are only dust. And our days on earth are like grass; like wildflowers, we bloom and die. And God gives us the opportunity to lament and to cry for mercy to grow in Barbados.

² Volf, Miroslav 2005. I Protest, Therefore I Believe. *Christian Century* 122 (3), 39.

³ Kandy Queen-Sutherland (2013) Teaching/Preaching the Theology of Lamentations Interpretation: A Journal of Bible and Theology 67(2) 184–193

⁴ Brueggemann, Walter 1986. The Costly Loss of Lament. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 36, 57-71

Questions For Discussion

- ❖ What aspects of the parable do you identify within our Spirituality?
- ❖ What are your expectations for this Lent?
- ❖ What significance do we place on ashes on our foreheads on Ash Wednesday Service?
- ❖ What do you consider to be personal and collective painful experiences that demand lamenting to God in Barbados?
- ❖ What challenges confront us as we lament, pray for mercy, forgiveness and reconciliation for ourselves, our oppressors and those who still benefit from historic injustices?
- ❖ Which areas of our personal, community and national lives that we want to see growth?

A Meditation on Seeing Christ in the Other

Leader:

Take a deep breath beloved, and gently turn inward. Come within and rest in the sacred space of your heart. If it helps, place one hand or both upon your chest, feeling the rise and fall of your breath. As children, we were taught to clasp our hands in prayer, often resting them at the centre of our being – perhaps without knowing, we were already drawing near to the heart- the space where the Divine dwells.

Now, breathe deeply once more. Let your breath fill your belly, expanding with life as you inhale, releasing all tension as you exhale. Feel the sacred rhythm, the gentle movement of Spirit within. There is no rush, no need to strive – simply be here. Present. Open.

With your heart awakened and your breath steady, sit with the two images of the parable – the accomplished and the one in need. Without fear, without self-condemnation, notice: where do you show up as one or the other?

Allow this awareness to surface, not with judgment but with tenderness. Open your heart to the lament that lies buried beneath layers of justifications, beneath the stories we tell ourselves. Let it rise like a whispered confession before God, for we are reminded:

"Let the one without need for remorse be the first to throw a rock."

And so, we pray:

Lord, when did I see You?

"It was Me that time. Yes, it was Me – the Christ in the other."

But, Lord, I did not know! I did not recognize You! Have mercy.

Lord, help me to see You – not in some distant heaven, not at the end of time, but here, now, in this moment. Open the eyes of my heart that I may see Your face in my neighbour, in the stranger, in the one I struggle to love. And as I behold You in the other, help me also to find myself there. God of Love, Hope and Faith in every glance, in every human encounter may I see your grace, mercy, forgiveness, glory, and VERY SELF reflected back. Amen.

May this meditation lead you deeper into the presence of Christ in your daily life. 🙏 ✨

Chapter Two

Our History, Our Trauma, Ourselves (Bible Readings: Psalm 44:9-17; Luke 15:3-10)

Psalm 44:9-17

"You have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale. You have made us a reproach to our neighbours, the scorn and derision of those around us. I live in disgrace all day long and my face is covered with shame. All this came upon us, though we had not forgotten you; we had not been false to your covenant."

Luke 15:3-10

Then Jesus told them this parable: "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Doesn't he leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Doesn't she light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbours together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."

Holding on to Traditional Interpretations While Embracing the New

The history of interpretations of the parable of the lost sheep and lost coin do show their interpretations have not changed significantly. Almost all the various interpretations see these parables as either emphasising God's forgiveness, grace, mercy, love and compassion for the lost, or God's joy when a sinner is found. The reason for this unanimity is that almost all interpretations see the shepherd or the woman in parables as a metaphor for God or Jesus.

One of the earliest interpretations of the parable of the lost sheep is the allegorical interpretation of the Church Father Tertullian. According to Tertullian, these parables were directed at the Pharisees and is a proof of God's willingness to forgive; the lost sheep or the lost coin refers to the Jews with the intention to shame the Pharisees because they thought repentance was only necessary for the Gentiles. Aquinas and Calvin, who tried to move away from the allegorical interpretation of the parables, sought to look for one central theme in each of the parables but equally interpreted the parable symbolically. Both focused on the shepherd or woman as a metaphor for God. For Aquinas the shepherd typified the grace of God. Calvin saw in the shepherd a God who rejoices over the repentance of one sinner.

Of course, in pursuing our mission and evangelistic tasks these interpretations have their place and need to be affirmed and embraced. A great number of people are lost in the manner that the sheep become lost. Sheep tend to stray away from the flock and the shepherd. Some of the flock become over occupied with the search for grass to graze. In doing so they wander from one hill and pasture

to another and become lost unintentionally. They do not stop to think. They stop listening to the calls of the shepherd. Eventually they realize they are lost and have no idea of how to return home. They become defenceless and easy prey for wild animals or can easily fall from high places in attempting to navigate the narrow paths in their search for home. Many people become spiritually lost in the same way. They become so enamoured with worldly riches and pleasures that they stray from the fold. They stop listening to the Shepherd of their souls. They do not intend to become lost but do so because of distractions.

The job of a shepherd, whether we interpret this as a metaphorical role of every Christian, those in ordained ministry or the people of God as a whole, seeking the lost is extremely demanding but it is fundamental to our calling. We have the duty to metaphorically protect the flock from wild animals such as lions, wolves, and bears along with the threat from those who would literally steal the sheep. Our roles as shepherds would constantly expose us to extreme metaphorical variations of weather conditions - storms, rain, drought, heat and cold as we seek the lost sheep who are suffering from scratches, cuts, and even broken legs and lead them from one pasture to another and finally to still waters.

In the parable, a shepherd is willing to leave ninety-nine remaining sheep to find the one lost sheep. The shepherd does not have to wait for the lost sheep to find its way home, for this would seldom occur. It is incumbent on the shepherd to continue his search until the lost sheep is finally found. When he finds it, he does not strike the sheep in anger to punish it for the trouble the lost sheep has caused, nor does the shepherd take out a whip and drive lost sheep back to the fold accompanied by a continual flow of words of harshness, but gently and lovingly the shepherd places the lost sheep that cause so much heartache and anxiety on his shoulders for the journey home. Joy fills the heart of the shepherd. These traditional interpretations ought to be embraced while we open ourselves to new ones.

Humanising the Parables of the “Lost Sheep” and the “Lost Coin” in our Barbadian Context

While these traditional interpretations are very helpful for our mission and evangelism in Barbados, we could easily over spiritualised and over allegorised these parables at the expense of not seeing our own history, our own trauma, and our own experiences within the parable of the lost. But there will be no healing or salvation from Scriptures unless we read them as human stories and the various insights gained may be prayerfully related to our history and ongoing experiences. We too easily forget that many of our spiritualised interpretations were produced within a colonial context. Besides, we should never forget that the bible was used to justify slavery, racism, cultural domination, alienation and oppression.

Our Lenten reading of the parables and psalms with Jesus in Barbados ought to be through lenses of Jesus’ saying, “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that you may have life and have it to the full” (John 10:10). Our reading of the parables ought to be geared towards the thirst for justice, mercy, freedom, self-discovery, healing and the fulness of Life that Jesus promises. Our reading of the parables and the Bible as a whole ought to be a declaration of war against the sin of slavery, colonialism, neocolonialism, dictatorship, cultural genocide, corruption and social

injustices in every aspect of our society, regardless of who is in charge. Our reading of the parables of the lost ought to be a commitment towards rediscovering what has been lost through historical slavery, and its attending intergenerational trauma in Barbados, and how we as Barbadians pursue the task of decolonization and liberation from any form of oppression.

What have we lost in Barbados?

The island Barbados is charmingly stunning! The people are incredibly creative, imaginative, resilient, genuinely hospitable and friendliness towards visitors is legendary. Every Parish in Barbados has its own distinctive story and beauty which captivate a visitor. Barbados is a small island measuring 439-kilometre square yet there is always exciting possibilities of new experiences, discoveries and celebrations that any visitor would treasure for life. A day spent in Barbados leaves exquisite, delightful and permanent memories that continuously bring visitors back to the Island. Since Barbados independence in 1966, the country has made positive strides in economic, political, social, cultural and educational developments.

The Barbadian economy has now moved from its over dependence on sugarcane related activities. The economy has diversified into light industry, tourism and other services. Today, about 75% of Growth Domestic Product (GDP) and 80% of exports are attributed to services, mainly finance activities, wholesale and retail trade, and tourism. Offshore finance is an important foreign exchange earner and the benefits from having the same time zone as eastern North American financial centres and a relatively highly educated workforce has placed the country in an advantageous position. According to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Barbados now enjoys one of the highest per capita incomes in the Caribbean region. On the surface as Barbadians, we are doing very well. But what have we lost?

The parables of the lost sheep and the lost coin are about experience of lost and the mayhem that comes with that experience. Both parables point to the joy of finding what was accidentally or tragically lost. And in Barbados we have lost so many invaluable things in our history and through our shared intergenerational traumatic experiences with our ancestors. Our losses came through the dehumanisation within slavery, history of terror, oppression, murders, lynching, violent rapes, colonialism and neocolonialism. Losses through our own African indigenous leaders' betrayal and collusion with European enslavers. Losses through insatiable greed that exchanged spirituality with materiality without conscience.

"In the early days our forebears sold their kinsmen into slavery for minor items such as beads, mirrors, alcohol, and tobacco. These days, the tune is the same, only the articles have changed into cars, transistor radios, and bank accounts". Our losses came through betrayal, apathy and lack of curiosity of what the cries and painful dirges in the next village were all about. Losses through historical and intergenerational trauma. We lost dignities, identities, cultures, sense of self, and our authentic spiritualities.

Our Trauma and our Losses

There are historical and intergenerational trauma in Barbados rooted in the history of slavery and its appalling dehumanisation, colonialism, landlessness, low wages, racism, cultural genocides, and other forms of exclusions. Barbados' history is rooted in traumatic experiences of our ancestors. We cannot put all the blame of the ongoing youth violence and crime on poverty, unemployment, limited job opportunities, political exclusion, failures of government's policies and family backgrounds. These factors ought to be taken seriously in addressing youth crime and violence.

However, no society built on violence, racism, exploitation, dehumanisation, multiple rapes and forms of exclusions will be sacred without scars of historical trauma and transgenerational. We sweep under the carpet that multiple rapes were perpetrated against enslaved black women by white men which were considered legal. These women were our real ancestors whose genes run through us. We have lost so many tangibles and intangibles through our historical and intergenerational trauma that came through violence.

What is trauma? 'Trauma is an event or series of events such as abuse, rape, repeated violence, maltreatment, neglect or natural tragedy that causes profound experience of helplessness leading to terror.' Trauma shatters our sense of safety, stability, trust and innocence. Toxicities of stress entered our genes. Toxic stress is created when the trauma is prolonged. Trauma is when we experience very frightening or distressing events that are difficult to cope with or are completely out of our control. Without proper intervention trauma is passed on from one generation to the next. This is what we call intergenerational trauma, the type of trauma that is experienced across generations of families, cultures or groups. We now know there are scientific evidence that children and grandchildren of people who survived the Holocaust experience far higher rates of mental health problems. The legacy of trauma could continue to impact wellbeing, health and sense of safety, if trauma is not properly addressed.

The routine practice of sexual violence against our enslaved African women ancestors by white men was not merely because of sexual desire and opportunism, or simply a form of punishment and racial domination, but these crimes encompassed all the identity of their masculinity. Sexual violence against women was a form of oppression used to reinforce the monstrosity of total power, white supremacy, racism, dehumanisation, entrenched patriarchy and social hierarchy. The imperial legal systems on the islands entirely dismissed sexual crimes against African women during slavery, in part because rape was not legally considered a crime against black women, and because white judges framed black women as sexually promiscuous hence, they cannot be raped. How can any group of people go through such horrific violation and brutal violence without historical and intergenerational trauma?

We Lost Our Heroes and our Community Leaders

We lost community leaders who resisted human slavery, leaders who wanted to shape a better future that respects the dignity of every person on this beautiful island. Sir Hilary McD Beckles articulates with clarity how in 1675, a slave from Coromantees (in Ghana) called Cuffee (Kofi) planned to free himself and his fellow slaves and establish free state for all. Like many of our losses through betrayals, Cuffee's freedom plan was internally betrayed and dozens of those who were

involved in the plot with him were captured, either burnt alive, or beheaded for their revolutionary plans against enslavement and for freedom. The burning became a public ritual in the town centre and was graphically described in the British historical documents. Most of our ancestors who were convicted were burnt alive. Others were beheaded and their bodies chopped to pieces and then burnt. The British in Barbados became the pioneers of the practice of burning of Black bodies as a principal punishment, so if you are looking for the history of the lynching of Blacks in America do not go far, the gruesome practice had its origin here in Barbados. Burning of our ancestors who dared to demand their freedom alive was written into the laws as a guide for presiding judges of Courts Martial in Barbados.

Our ancestors lost freedom that we take for granted today. From the beginning our ancestors had persistent desire for their freedom. There were uprisings at the local and the national levels including the following 1649, 1675 1692, 1701 and even one on Easter Sunday, April 14th, 1816 . At the heart of all these uprisings were the cries for Freedom. Freedom to be, freedom to love their spouses, freedom from fear of violent rapes, freedom for justices, for authenticity of their identities, freedom to translate their hopes, dreams and aspirations into reality and pass on their legacies to generations to come.

Our ancestors' desire for freedom was met with scorn. The so-called "Apprenticeship" which was introduced in Barbados after the proclamation of Emancipation was nothing but slavery under another name. The apprenticeship with its economic, political, social, racial and cultural injustices ushered in landlessness, low wages, starvation and infant mortality.

We might not have lost sheep like the Shepherd or a coin like the woman in the parable of the lost. However, when the parable of the lost is humanised our own historical and ongoing traumatic losses become apparent. We and our ancestors before us have lost invaluable things through our historical and our intergenerational trauma. We know that when people are frightened, feel undervalued, threatened, humiliated, rejected, abandoned, invalidated, dismissed, denied, feel unsafe, unsupported, trapped, ashamed and powerless, they do experience trauma. This trauma as it unfolds is passed on intergenerationally.

Perhaps, if we do take seriously our ancestors' desire for justice, freedom, dignity and equity that underpinned their uprising on the Easter Sunday, April 14th, 1816 and do lament the beastly brutalities with which the uprising was suppressed, and the intergenerational trauma that came out of that experience, the resurrected power of Christ would make us rise like the phoenix out of the deadly ashes that buried our ancestors' dreams, hopes and aspirations for freedom and fulness of life. Despite misrepresentations of the Christian faith to our ancestors, our ancestors instinctively knew in their hearts and minds through the power of the Holy Spirit who transcends human prejudices and suppressions of freedom that Easter Sunday brings hope. This history is our ancestors prophetic call for us to pursue whatever brings justice, wisdom, kindness, freedom, growth, dignity and peace during this Lent as we look forward to Easter in Faith, Love and Hope.

Call to Lament Our Individual and Our Intergenerational Losses

Earlier we noted that Lent provides opportunity to lament. This lamentation of what we have lost ought to be at the individual, collective and intergenerational levels. A careful reading of Jesus' lament on the cross recorded in the synoptic gospels, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' does draw attention to the importance of lament at the individual, collective and intergenerational levels. Jesus' lament of the sense of abandonment, reflected his own personal experiences of abuse of power, betrayal, injustices and dehumanisation on the cross. But Jesus' lament echoes intergenerational trauma of his human Jewish roots in Jewish painful historical experiences. Historical trauma that came out of foreign dominations, the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the exile in Babylon. In Babylon, the Jews were mocked and taunted leading to a collected trauma: "By the rivers of Babylon, we sat down and wept, when we remembered Zion.... for there our captors asked us for songs, our tormentors demanded songs of joy; they said, sing us one of the songs of Zion! How can we sing the songs of the Lord while in a foreign land?" (Psalm 137). Jesus shared this ancestral and intergenerational trauma rooted in his ancestral concrete historical experiences. Before Jesus cried, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?", one generation after another in his ancestry history have lamented in a similar manner, using the same intergenerational traumatic words "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from my cries of anguish?" (Psalm 22:1).

Understanding Jesus' personal and intergenerational trauma rooted in the emotional history of Jesus' ancestors do help us to lament what we have lost at the personal and collective levels through intergenerational trauma, the sense of abandonment in our Barbadian context. Recognizing Jesus' used of Psalm 22:1 (in Mark 15:34; Matt 27:46) as part of Israel's memories of national catastrophes, and transgenerational trauma associated with imperial oppression and self-blame are helpful ways for approaching our own laments this Lent as we engage with our historical and intergenerational trauma and pray for healing. Lent offers us space to lament and reflect on our personal and collective histories and traumatic experiences in an honest dialogue with God within a covenantal relationship where hurt and pain are acknowledged rather than denied and avoided. Lent is always a new beginning, a path which leads to Christ's victory over death.

Questions For Discussion

- ❖ What imageries within the parable of the lost that you identify with?
- ❖ In what ways have traditional interpretations diverted our attentions from our own historical experiences as individuals, communities and as a Church?
- ❖ As individuals and a nation what have we lost through our historical and transgenerational trauma?
- ❖ As Christian communities in Barbados what losses do we need to recover?
- ❖ The Shepherd took a huge risk of leaving the ninety-nine sheep behind to find one lost sheep. What risk do you think we have to take as individuals, a Church and a nation to recover what we have lost through historic and intergenerational trauma?
- ❖ What insights could we draw from the Jesus' parables of the Lost Coin and Lost Sheep towards posttraumatic growth?

A Meditation on Loss and Wholeness

Leader:

Take a deep breath, beloved, and gently turn inward. Come within and rest in the sacred space of your heart. If it helps, place one hand or both upon your chest, feeling the rise and fall of your breath. Let this simple act remind you that you are held in love, that the Divine breath sustains you in every moment.

As children, we were taught to clasp our hands in prayer, often placing them near the centre of our being. Perhaps, without knowing, we were already being drawn into the very place where God dwells.

Now, breathe deeply once more. Allow the breath to fill your belly, expanding with life as you inhale, releasing all tension as you exhale. Feel the sacred rhythm, the gentle movement of Spirit within. There is no rush, no need to strive – simply be here. Present. Open.

As you settle into this sacred stillness, let your heart gently turn toward the theme of loss – your own personal loss. Loss is something we all carry, whether from the past or as something we are presently coming to grips with. The loss of a loved one, the absence of something cherished, the quiet grief of things left behind. We know, all too well, what it is to hold something in one moment and then find it gone the next.

Take a moment to feel this deeply, not just in your mind, but in your body. Where do you carry loss? Is it a heaviness in your chest? A tightness in your throat? A weariness in your limbs? Simply notice. Without fear. Without judgment.

These are places we rarely visit – places we have fenced off, marked with silent “no-entry” signs. We are afraid to unearth what lies beneath, afraid of the pain it may bring. Yet, these are the very places of healing.

For to find that which was lost, we must go to where it was lost. If we stand at a distance, it can never be found.

And so, in this stillness, allow yourself to venture into those quiet, hidden spaces. Let what has been concealed rise gently to the surface. See what has been buried – not to judge it, not to fix it, but simply to see.

For in seeing, there is reclaiming.
In reclaiming, there is healing.
In healing, there is joy.

Now, let us rejoice.

Let us give thanks for the ways in which we have been protected, even when we did not understand. Let us acknowledge the ways our soul has shielded us, keeping some burdens hidden until we were

ready to face them. And now, we release them – so that we may live in the fullness of who we are.

Let us pray:

O Divine One,

who calls us into wholeness

and holds each part of us in love,

give us the courage to face what we have hidden,

to embrace what we have lost,

and to reclaim what is ours.

Grant us the grace to welcome back the wounded places within,

to release what no longer serves,

and to stand before You fully alive, fully found.

In Your mercy, restore us.

In Your love, make us whole.

We give thanks. We rejoice. We are found.

Amen.

Chapter Three

Our History, Our Trauma, Ourselves Eloquent Silence on Intergenerational Trauma in Barbados (Our Bible Readings: Psalm 44:9-17; Luke 15: 11- 32)

Psalm 44:9-17

"You have rejected and humbled us; you no longer go out with our armies. You gave us up to be devoured like sheep and have scattered us among the nations. You sold your people for a pittance, gaining nothing from their sale. You have made us a reproach to our neighbours, the scorn and derision of those around us. I live in disgrace all day long and my face is covered with shame. All this came upon us, though we had not forgotten you; we had not been false to your covenant"

Luke 15: 11- 32

Jesus continued: "There was a man who had two sons. The younger one said to his father, 'Father, give me my share of the estate.' So, he divided his property between them. "Not long after that, the younger son got together all he had, set off for a distant country and there squandered his wealth in wild living. After he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that whole country, and he began to be in need. So, he went and hired himself out to a citizen of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed pigs. He longed to fill his stomach with the pods that the pigs were eating, but no one gave him anything.

"When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired servants have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired servants.' So, he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. "The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' "But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So, they began to celebrate. "Meanwhile, the older son was in the field. When he came near the house, he heard music and dancing. So, he called one of the servants and asked him what was going on. 'Your brother has come,' he replied, 'and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has him back safe and sound.' "The older brother became angry and refused to go in. So, his father went out and pleaded with him. But he answered his father, 'Look! All these years I've been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders. Yet you never gave me even a young goat so I could celebrate with my friends. But when this son of yours who has squandered your property with prostitutes comes home, you kill the fattened calf for him!' "'My son,' the father said, 'you are always with me, and everything I have is yours. But we had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.'"

**Parable of The Prodigal Son:
Traditional Missionary, Pastoral and Evangelistic Interpretations**

Like many of Jesus' parables, the prodigal son has been traditionally and continuously been interpreted as a story that fully reveals the pull, the progress and the end product of sin. These interpretations give us a tangible glimpse of God's mercy and gracious character. The parable illustrates the process of human salvation - a combination of God the Father's grace through Christ and the repentant sinner's need for awareness of God's grace and active response.

Preachers have used this parable to rebuke human pride and arrogance that hold in contempt sinners that are deemed too lost to be worthy of God's grace and mercy. Regarding this rebuke, whether against angry scribes and Pharisees or their modern counterparts in our too often self-righteous churches, the parable encourages us not to be too hasty in putting any sinner beyond God's grace. The moral lesson of this story is timeless. The story captures the essence of Adam's fall and our individual and corporate sins and their consequences for the rest of the human family. Human sinfulness brings hopelessness and despair, God's grace and generosity brings each person within the tent of God. Hope and joy are possible once we come to our sense through self-awareness and reflexivity. The Father's love is always open to sinful and mortal humanity for forgiveness, reconciliation and restoration.

When combined with the parables of the "lost sheep", the "lost coin," and the parable of prodigal son, every listener immediately realizes that a sense of lost brings disorientation. There is normal and innate human tendency to rejoice when something "lost" is "found." So, the parable illustrates the propriety of loving and receiving the sinful. The parable further demonstrates God's willingness to receive not only the "lowly" but the "low of the low." All these traditional interpretations are laudable for our mission, evangelism and pastoral care.

**Parable of The Prodigal Son:
A Dysfunctional Family that Refuses to Honestly Talk To Each Other**

But could Parable of the Prodigal Son be read differently within Barbadian context? A careful reading of the parable of the prodigal son demonstrates a culture of a family who do not honestly talk to each other and they sweep matters under the carpet. It is clear from the parable that the father is very generous, but he is a generous father who refuses to honestly talk with his family about their cultural heritage and what norms are acceptable and unacceptable. A dysfunctional family that refuses to talk to one another about what matters.

It is very difficult for our contemporary individualistic global capitalist culture to see anything odd with the Prodigal's Son's request in the parable. But within the immediate context of the parable the son's request is a taboo. Unlike our contemporary culture, the ancient Mediterranean peasants were not individualistic. For the ancient Mediterranean peasants, the community is the psychological centre of human wellbeing and flourishing not within the isolated egotistical individual. It is the family that roots the individual within the community and give the individual an identity.

If the family solidarity was of first importance, the harmony within the village was second. In a world characterised by social and geographical immobility, the ancient Mediterranean family and the village formed what social anthropologists would call a 'closed' social network. Tightly knit circles of family and friends lived in proximity over long periods of time and developed deeply felt and held community attachments. Even though peasant families were normally quite self-sufficient, very few of them could not manage without calling on their neighbours for economic and social support. For an isolated individual, success was almost impossible as the prodigal son soon found out. This traditional family and community solidarity made the prodigal son's request in the parable very odd, in appropriate and unheard of. But the family does not sincerely talk about issues that matter to their very survival and existence.

Family conflicts are facts of peasant life. Conflicts between fathers and sons are often intense and usually do revolve around inheritance rights, marriage (and the establishment of an independent family), and, in early youth, a son's demand for his own way in matters of work and entertainment. When such generational conflicts threaten family stability, mothers are often pushed into the role of buffer or family reconciler through amicable conversations.

Also, brotherly rivalries can cause serious conflict in peasant families. Sons commonly live in their father's house even after marriage, but on a father's death a major restraint on fraternal tension disappears. At this point, rivalries frequently result in brothers establishing separate nuclear families. If uncontrolled, of course, such rivalries threatened the kind of instability that destroys everyone in the group. This is equally resolved through honest and fruitful dialogue within the family.

Besides, land-rights are not exclusively individual, hence the land cannot be sold in perpetuity as the prodigal son is requesting. Land is sacred. The land belongs to the past and the future generations, not merely to the present occupants - fathers, mothers, sisters, sons. The father as current occupant of the land is not free to dispose of the land as his personal property according to his personal wishes and hand over the son's share of proceeds as the son requested in the parable. This family ought to have had serious and honest conversation about this aspect of their communal life.

More significantly, the Jewish law and cultural tradition stated in Sirach 33:19-23:

"To a son or wife, to a brother or friend, do not give power over yourself, as long as you live; and do not give your property to another, lest you change your mind and must ask for it. While you are still alive and have breath in you, do not let anyone take your place. For it is better that your children should ask from you than that you should look to the hands of your sons. Excel in all that you do; bring no stain on your honour. At the time when you end the days of your life, in the hour of death, distribute your inheritance".

A dysfunctional family that refuses to honestly talk to each other about what matters endanger their survival. The parable of the prodigal son ends well with forgiveness and restoration. But could we equally imagine the trauma all the whole family went through for simply not honestly talking to each other?

Eloquent Silence on Historical and Intergenerational Trauma in Barbados

Despite Jesus' own experiences of the trauma of betrayal, injustices and feeling of God's abandonment, we are rarely permitted to talk about our historic, personal or intergenerational trauma or explore ways forward for our healing and moving forward. Yet, we know that the past is never dead. It's not even past. When those in our family have experienced unbearable trauma or have suffered with immense guilt or grief, the feelings can be overwhelming and can escalate beyond what they could manage or resolve, their trauma is passed on. As a Church we should not be a dysfunctional family that does not talk to each other honestly about our trauma and other challenges.

It is human nature, when the pain is too great, to avoid talking about it. Yet when we block our feelings, we unknowingly stunt the necessary healing process, and we do pass on our trauma to the next generation as inherited family and community trauma. "If you look deeply into the palm of your hand, you will see your parents and all generations of your ancestors. All of them are alive in this moment. Each is present in your body. You are the continuation of each of these people". If we are continuation of our ancestors, we need to talk about their trauma and that of our own.

Our trauma wounds continue to be transmitted through injuries of economic, political, psycho-social processes, and contemporary institutional practices that model themselves on former structures without critical reflections with the view to tackle intergenerational trauma. Descendants of both sides of mass atrocities - victims/survivors/perpetrators, and bystanders, share common responses to pain. Avoidance, numbness, denial, and silence may be ways of coping with profound indescribable traumatic experiences. Our refusal to talk honestly about our pain leads to intergenerational trauma. Intergenerational traumas do contribute to low self-esteem, distorted imagery of the self, sense of helplessness, hopelessness, depression, destructive and risk-taking behaviours, distrust, suspicion, anger, aggression, and violence against others, including our family members, friends, and those within the wider community. Consciously or otherwise, refusing to honestly talk about what happened to us make us internalized toxicities of lack of self-agency, a feeling of disempowerment that we sustained as part of the legacy of slavery and colonialism in the form of "mental slavery."

The Joy of Finding What We Have Lost

The parable of the prodigal son ended very well and with joy: "Let's celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found." But this joyful process begun with self- realisation. When the young man "came to himself" he realized life was much better back at his father's house. Even the hired servants there had plenty to eat. But in this far country he found himself ready to perish from hunger (Luke 15:17). It is the son's self-realisation that led to the dysfunctional family finding themselves again to recover what they have lost as individuals, family and the wider community.

How can we find what we have lost? When can we, like the Shepherd say, "Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep."? or "rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin" or "let us celebrate and be

glad," we were dead and now we are alive again; we were lost but now have found ourselves again in Barbados? As human beings we are extremely resilient species. We do recover from relentless wars, countless natural and human made disasters, the violence and the betrayals in our lives. However, traumatic experiences do leave traces on our histories, cultures and closer to home, on our families. They also leave traces on our minds and emotions, our capacity for joy and intimacy, and even on our biological and immune systems.

However, this is not to say that we cannot find ourselves and what we have lost again. We can find ourselves again in Christ, with Christ and through Christ who identifies with what we have lost and our historical and intergenerational trauma. But this will demand taking concrete steps. The son in our parable took concrete steps to recover what he had lost. The solution to every problem begins with the recognition that there is a problem. We first need to recognise the reality and preciousness of what we have lost. In Psalm 44:9-17 Israel recognised the painful reality of their situation and what had happened to them: "I live in disgrace all day long and my face is covered with shame."

To recover what we have lost, on this beautiful Island, we need to own what happened to us. What has not been named cannot be tamed, and what has not been tamed cannot be reclaimed. Let us name what happened to us, to tame the past to reclaim them for the present and the future. Let us recognise our painful past and the sense of abandonment that W.E.B Du Bois, gives a voice to: "Everything Negro did was wrong. If they fought for freedom, they were beasts; if they did not fight, they were born slaves. If they were cowered on the plantation, they loved slavery, if they ran away, they were lazy loafers. If they sang, they were silly, if they scowled, they were impudent.... And they were funny, ridiculous, baboons, aping men." How do we begin to assert our sense of self and reclaim our identities amid lampooning, suffering, shame, injustices, pain and abandonment? When we recognise what happen to us, we can recover. One cannot talk about the resurrection without the crucifixion. We were crucified with Christ and in Christ, through Christ and with Christ we can be raised again.

Secondly, we should stop internalizing shame. Shame is a feeling of embarrassment or humiliation that arises from the perception of having done something dishonourable, immoral, or improper. Our history is painful and shameful. We can recognise the pain without internalizing this shame. People who allow chronic and perpetual shame to cripple them continuously feel they are fundamentally flawed.

As Church we all want to move beyond shame that came with our historical trauma and become a very vibrant community of wounded healers. It is the case that after a traumatic experience is over, it may be reactivated at the slightest hint of danger and mobilize the disturbed brain circuits and secrete massive amounts of stress hormones. This could cause unpleasant emotions, intense physical sensations, and impulsive and aggressive actions. But healing is a process, and we must begin somewhere or there would be nowhere!

Thirdly, we need to stop looking to others for validation. We should stop putting too much importance on other people's opinions, feelings and beliefs about us as Bajans. It is very ironic that despite biblical assurances that "there are different kinds of gifts, cultures, and epistemologies," Christians of African descent, whether in Africa, Barbados or other parts of the diaspora, often want to seek affirmation of their spiritualities, biblical interpretations, liturgies, identities and ways of knowing through European paradigms. The very paradigm that led to our subjugation in the first place.

Finally, to reclaim what was lost we need to critically reconsider our own contemporary moral values and choices. The previous economic and political systems were built on dehumanisation and exploitation of our ancestors. We need to make moral choices in our educational, economic, political, religious and cultural institutions that demonstrate love, neighbourliness, kindness and sense of optimism despite our ancestors past experiences of brutalities and cruelties. The moral choices we make would enable us to shout with confidence we were dead but now in Christ, with Christ and through Christ we are alive again. We were lost but now we have found ourselves again.

Questions For Discussion:

- ❖ What imageries within the parable of the prodigal son can you identify with in Barbados?
- ❖ What are some of the honest conversational topics that we should be permitted to have within the Church and the nation?
- ❖ What challenges prevent us from talking about historical and intergenerational trauma in Barbados?
- ❖ What risk do we have to take as individuals, a Church and a nation to recover what we have lost through historic and intergenerational trauma?
- ❖ In what ways would the internalization of shame and seeking validation from others hinder our individual and community healing?
- ❖ What insights could we draw from the Jesus' parables of the Prodigal Son for our healing and our posttraumatic growth?

A Meditation on Unspoken Truths and Ancestral Healing

Leader:

Take a deep breath, beloved, and gently turn inward. Come within and rest in the sacred space of your heart. If it helps, place one hand or both upon your chest, feeling the rise and fall of your breath. As children, we were taught to clasp our hands in prayer, often resting them at the centre of our being – perhaps without knowing, we were already drawing near to the heart-space where the Divine dwells.

Now, breathe deeply once more. Let the breath fill your belly, expanding with life as you inhale, releasing all tension as you exhale. Feel the sacred rhythm, the gentle movement of Spirit within. There is no rush, no need to strive – simply be here. Present. Open.

In this place of openness, we welcome the unspoken. We give space to the thoughts we have learned to suppress, the difficult truths we have feared to name. We acknowledge the weight of

conversations we have avoided conversations that stir in the early hours of the morning, keeping us restless in their silent demand to be heard.

Beneath these surface thoughts, deeper wounds remain – unspoken pain, inherited silence, patterns of self-denial and fear. Here lies envy, deceit, unspoken grief – ways of being passed down through generations, lessons taught in whispers or through the heavy hush of things never said.

We have mistaken silence for peace. Yet, a peace built upon silence is no peace at all. It is a fragile shell, covering wounds that continue to fester. We have held our tongues for fear of shame, for fear of blame, for fear of disrupting the delicate balance we were told to preserve. But truth does not disrupt – it liberates.

Where in our journey have we held onto these habits, these inherited burdens? Where have we carried the weight of past generations, mistaking it for our own?

Now, let us release.

What our ancestors could not process, we can now bring into the light. We are not meant to protect these wounds; we are meant to heal them. Their silence need not be ours. Their burdens need not bind us. We honour their struggles not by carrying their pain, but by transforming it.

As we give voice to what has been hidden, we reclaim all that was lost. We welcome home the exiled parts of our story. We embrace our prodigal ancestors – not as sources of shame, but as ones who lived, who fought, who suffered, and who, even in their brokenness, paved the way for us.

We receive them in fullness, without fear. Without shame. Without silence.

Now, let us pray a 'Prayer of Release and Ancestral Reconciliation':

**Gracious and Eternal God,
we stand at the threshold of truth,
no longer bound by silence,
no longer burdened by inherited pain.
We declare the beauty of those who have gone before us,
not only in their victories but in their struggles.
We acknowledge their sacrifices,
their wounds, their hopes unrealized.
We walk upon the earth they laboured on,
we breathe the air that carried their sighs and their prayers.
We are them, and they are us.**

O God of the exiled and the forgotten,
we now bring home the parts of our past
that have been cast away in shame.
We call forth our ancestors – not as ghosts of regret,
but as companions of wisdom.
May they walk beside us, not as burdens,
but as guides who rejoice in our healing.

Give us the courage to speak,
to name what has been hidden,
to release what no longer serves.
May the pain we unearth be transformed,
no longer a weight of sorrow,
but a path to wholeness.

We give thanks for the redemption of all things,
for the mercy that binds generations together,
for the love that was always present, even in silence.
And so, we walk forward, unafraid –
whole, healed, and free.
Amen.

Chapter 4

Our History, Our Trauma, Ourselves: Resisting Normalisation of Traumatic Slavery Imageries (Bible Reading: Psalm 139:13-20; Matthew 25:14-30)

Psalm 139:13-20

For you created my inmost being you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful; I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place, when I was woven together in the depths of the earth. Your eyes saw my unformed body; all the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, a God! How vast is the sum of them! Where I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand – when I awake, I am still with you. If only you, God, would slay the wicked! Away from me, you who are bloodthirsty! They speak of you with evil intent; your adversaries misuse your name.

Matthew 25:14-30

“For it is just like a man about to go on a journey, who called his own slaves and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents, to another, two, and to another, one, each according to his own ability; and he went on his journey. The one who had received the five talents immediately went and did business with them and earned five more talents. 1In the same way the one who had received the two talents earned two more. But he who received the one talent went away and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. “Now after a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. 20The one who had received the five talents came up and brought five more talents, saying, ‘Master, you entrusted five talents to me. See, I have earned five more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master.’

“Also, the one who had received the two talents came up and said, ‘Master, you entrusted two talents to me. See, I have earned two more talents.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things; enter the joy of your master.’ “Now the one who had received the one talent also came up and said, ‘Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed. And I was afraid, so I went away and hid your talent in the ground. See, you still have what is yours.’ “But his master answered and said to him, ‘You worthless, lazy slave! Did you know that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter seed? Then you ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival, I would have received my money back with interest. Therefore: take the talent away from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents.’ “For to everyone who has, more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but from the one who does not have, even what he does have shall be taken away. And throw the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Traditional Interpretations of The Parable of The Talents

In our contemporary times the Parable of the Talents is sometimes read as warrant for the modern economy where those who already have could have more. In the parable the master gives his servants substantial sums of money - a talent roughly equates to 1,000 pounds in today's money -

and when he returns from a far country, he heaps praise on those servants who were able to show they had put their talents to good use by diligently trading with them, while he sends into outer darkness the one who fearfully buries his one talent in the ground and digs it up on his master's return.

Early Church Fathers read the parable in an entirely different, and differing, ways. For Origen the parable of the talents is an allegory in which the nobleman is Christ who leaves his disciples at the Ascension, while those given the talents are the disciples, entrusted with the ministry of the Word which has been given to them until he comes again.

For John Chrysostom, the principal lesson of the parable is that we are to be diligent in proclaiming the Word in the service of Christ, and in admonishing and instructing others to follow him. And equally we are to avoid the spiritual slothfulness of the person who just sits down and buries the gift of God's Word in the ground. Chrysostom says, we all, like the widow who gave her mite, have talents, capacities, with which to contribute to the common good of all and it is by being diligent in the use of them that we may attain to heaven, "for nothing is so pleasing to God as to live for the common advantage".

What unites the past and our contemporary interpretations of the parable of the talents together is that there is reward for faithful Christians who used the gifts/goods/talents for profit for God. Those who made profits with their talents represent faithful Christians and will be rewarded with heaven. And there will be eternal punishment or damnation for those who did not use gifts/goods/talents God placed in their possession for profit, these are unfaithful Christians.

All these past and contemporary interpretations are well and good. However, what these interpretations do not talk about is the normalization of slavery imageries and violence perpetrated against the slave in this parable and others. The lessons of the parables are as important as the usage of imageries that normalizes abuses and oppression of slaves. In the parable of talents, to be a good and faithful slave is to internalize the economic vision of the master without imagination, creativity and plausible alternative ideas. This interpretation ought to be resisted within Barbadian context for imageries are powerful.

The Power of Words and Imageries in Jesus' Parables

Everyone accepts that words and imageries do have power to trigger traumatic wounds. Words, imageries, objects, and situations are reminders of events. Jewish survivors and their descendants who suffer from intergenerational trauma of the holocaust do not approve of emblematic Nazi salute because this triggers their wounds. So why do we as people of African descent accept portrayal of slaves as people whose body can be abuse in various parables of Jesus as normal?

Women who have gone through sexual trauma do suggest that words and imagery that are used in recounting their experiences make them relive their experience of violence again. How then do we continue to normalize imageries of slavery without protest in our interpretations and preaching? Trauma is a betrayal of trust by and of other relational beings. Trauma does occur

when the very powers that we are convinced will protect us and give us security become our tormentors: when the community which we thought we were members do turn against us or when our families no longer serve as a source of refuge but a site of danger.

The Church is consciously or unconsciously obsessed with imageries and language of slavery/servants in her theology, liturgy, and hierarchical arrangements. As we continue to use these imageries of masters and slaves as parabolic imageries of our theology and hymns, we do normalize the master and slave relationship as God ordained order. The power of imageries and words implies that language do matter. Trauma is not “outside language” or imageries, rather trauma is “inherent in imageries and words.”

Resisting Normalization of Slavery Imageries in Parables in Barbados

Parable means to put something “alongside” to make a meaning. The term suggests some kind of comparison, whereby one idea or theme is laid alongside or compared with another to give meaning. Parables could be figurative forms of speech, riddles, proverbs, metaphors, fables and symbols. Parables do contain stories; these stories convey lessons, so parables have double meanings, the stories and the lessons. The purpose of parables is meant to effect change in the hearers, to lead them to decisions or actions. The lessons are always religious or moral. Parable of the Tenants focuses on the imageries of slavery but does not condemn slavery.

As we have already noted, trauma is not “outside language” or imagery, but rather “inherent in language, metaphors and symbols. When Paul uses the metaphor “slave of Christ” (Rom. 1:1; Gal. 1:10; Phil. 1:1), it does not matter how much we try contextualizing these texts, various images of oppression, forced compliance, obedience, and subjugation do come to mind; even if we make a robust theological argument that Paul has freely surrendered himself to Christ. This robust argument does not obliterate the reality of human slaves being viewed as another person’s possession with lesser rights. The Greek word “δοῦλος refers to ‘absolute ownership by a Master’. Why can’t we be free human beings with all our dignity in relationship with Christ and with one another in the body of Christ?

Bible translators are making effort to change the Greek word δοῦλος (slave) to “bondservant”. The English Standard Version and Others have moved towards this translation. In the 2011, the English Standard Version preface says, “Where absolute ownership by a master is in view (as in Romans 6), ‘slave’ is used; where a more limited form of servitude is in view, “bondservant” is used (as in 1 Corinthians 7:21-24); where the context indicates a wide range of freedom (as in John 4:51), ‘servant’ is preferred.” But some American translations such as E.J. Goodspeed’s The New Testament (1923) consistently translated δοῦλος as “slave”.

Perhaps what is driving transition of δοῦλος (slave) to “bondservant” is the universal abhorrence of slavery and traumatic emotional connotations that are attach to the word “slave”. However, changing the image of a slave to “bondservant” or “servant” does not take us very far. Our Christian faith is rooted in a hierarchical master/slave/servant/men/women/black/white relationship which often lead to abusive, unequal and imbalance of power. Both ‘slaves’ and

'servants' do share common attribute with very subtle differences. Every slave is a servant, however, not every servant is a slave. However, both slave and servant do render service for another often under abusive contracts of human degradation.

People argue that δούλος (slave) as used in the Parable of Talent should be translated as "slave and not a servant." The argument is that the transatlantic slave trade and its inherent evils of exploitation, sexual abuse of women, and racial injustices should not influence the original meaning δούλος (slave) as used in the Parable of Talent, that the biblical imageries of slavery and its theological message cannot be compared to the transatlantic slave trade that our ancestors experienced in Barbados.

It is true that contexts and periods of transatlantic slavery and the ancient institutions of slavery that biblical writers draw upon are different. But it was the various imageries of biblical slavery that were used to justify the transatlantic slavery. Concepts of slavery at any given period do share commonalities. Slaves whether ancient, transatlantic or current human trafficking do imply one person completely dominating another.

We can deceive ourselves and normalized the concept of slavery as an ideal model of being faithful in the Kingdom of God. However, this normalization even distorts brutalities attached to slavery as an institution portrayed in the Bible. None of the slave parables, do directly attack the institution of slavery, rather gospel writers do use the slavish obedience and servitude as excellent model of faithful Christian commitment without queries. This normalizes this abhorrent institution.

We cannot talk about the need to repair the damage and the intergenerational trauma of slavery and simultaneously normalize the institution in our theology and biblical interpretations without critique. Perhaps part of the reason why conversations on repairing the damage of transatlantic slavery become very difficult and different for many Christians is because to many the institution is rooted in Bible; and slavish obedience are used as example of Christian faithfulness in the Bible. The metaphor of slavery that is used for understanding aspects of Christian identity is very problematic and ought to be critically interrogated.

A case is made that the Cross is the event that unites all Christians. And the crucifixion was a standard method of executing slaves, and therefore, Jesus died a slave's death. Those who make this theological suggestion note that the wage that Judas was paid for betraying Jesus was the price of a slave (Matt 26:15; Ex. 21:32). But this language normalizes abuses associated with slavery and its traumatic experiences rather than condemn the institution. Remember trauma is not "outside language" or imageries, rather trauma is inherent in words and the imageries that we use. So why do we have to normalize slavery as an institution through our theology without question?

We are Fearfully and Wonderfully Made For Creativity and Imagination Without Fear

Our religious desire to learn from the parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:14-30), of the need to make judicious use of our gifts, has blinded us to question the traumatic violence and abuses of slaves inherent in the parables that endorse and normalize the institution. The details of the parable of the Talents resonates with our ancestral painful experiences more than we initially realise.

It is clear that the slaves depicted in the parable of Talents do work closely with their master who presumably is very acutely aware of the quality of their work. However, despite being trusted with responsibilities, these slaves in the parables are equally terrified of their master. Who did God create to live in terror? As slaves they are of their position within the economic, political and social structures within which they live. As slaves, they could be subjected to severe bodily punishment at the whim of the masters at any given time. In the parable of the Talents, to be a slave is to live in fear of any initiative, creativity and imagination that digress from that of the master.

Slavery by its fundamental morality extinguishes individual creativity, imagination, independent thinking and ingenuity. To be a faithful slave is to internalize the master's economic interests at the expense of individual's alternative vision. Ironically, we do not even ask how these two faithful slaves who have internalized their master's economic morality made their hundred percent profits. It is significant to note that these so-called faithful slaves did not receive their freedom from the master to go and use their skills, imaginations and creativities they have demonstrated to work for themselves. Rather they remain slaves and had been given even more responsibilities to make the master even more profits.

In the parable of the Talents, the wicked slave does not abuse his master's property, neither does he work assiduously for his master. Rather, he stores the goods with which he has been entrusted, the single talent still a considerable sum to the master. The third slave in the parable buried his single talent because the master is a harsh man, whom he fears. The master did not deny the third slave's reason of fear. Rather the master confirms it: "You worthless, lazy slave! You know I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter seed? You ought to have put my money in the bank, and on my arrival, I would have received my money back with interest." How could we normalize this traumatic intimidation that resonate with our ancestors' experience without protesting? The concluding statement about the third slaves being beaten and be cast unto outer darkness where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth needs not be normalized. What did the third slave do? He only had an alternative vision from that of the master.

Throughout the history of transatlantic slavery in Barbados our ancestors only alternative vision that was different from their imperial masters was freedom. This alternative vision of freedom led to their conviction as rebels. They were burnt alive. Others were beheaded and their bodies chopped to pieces. As noted, burning our ancestors alive or dead, was written into the laws as a guide to presiding judges of Courts Martial. So why are we not disturbed when we read parable

about a slave who had an alternative vision to that of his harsh and brutal master? The message is as important as the medium of the message.

The Psalmist assures us that as human beings we are “fearfully and wonderfully made” in the image of God. God cannot wonderful and fearfully make in his awesome image and simultaneously give an approval for our bodies to be tortured, raped and violently abused. Any theological and biblical metaphor, imagery or word that normalizes degradation of the human person ought to be called to account in Barbadian context.

As people of God, we have been called to be priests, pastors, prophets, ambassadors and aroma of Christ. Our history, our experiences and ongoing intergenerational trauma has demonstrated to us that any form of normalisation of language of slavery should not be tolerated, we owe this prophetic task not only to ourselves but to the wider Church. Let us open a new resurrection chapter where violence has no place!

Questions For Discussion

- ❖ What are your initial reactions to the parable of the Talents?
- ❖ Are there imageries in Jesus’ parables that evokes memories of trauma in our history and experiences in Barbados?
- ❖ Could slavery imageries in the Bible be manipulated, misinterpreted, abused and misused for political, social, economic and racial purposes in human history?
- ❖ In what ways could we engage, critique and use imageries in the parables that resonate with painful memories and experiences within Barbadian context?
- ❖ How do we reclaim these painful imageries for forgiveness, healing, and posttraumatic growth?
- ❖ What messages emerge from the parables that empower us as Barbadians to speak truths about our history and experiences and to “speak truth to power” with grace?

A Meditation on Words, Freedom, and Healing

Leader:

Take a deep breath, beloved, and gently turn inward. Come within and rest in the sacred space of your heart. If it helps, place one hand or both upon your chest, feeling the rise and fall of your breath. As children, we were taught to clasp our hands in prayer, often resting them at the center of our being – perhaps without knowing, we were already drawing near to the heart-space where the Divine dwells.

Now, breathe deeply once more. Let the breath fill your belly, expanding with life as you inhale, releasing all tension as you exhale. Feel the sacred rhythm, the gentle movement of Spirit within. There is no rush, no need to strive – simply be here. Present. Open.

Resting in this awareness, we set aside the familiar, the rehearsed, the words spoken without reflection. We make space for a new message. We allow the unseen to emerge, the unheard to be

spoken. We look through a different lens, a wider lens, stepping back in our awareness to see what we have not seen before, to make connections that have long been hidden.

Words matter. Words shape our reality, forming the structures of our thoughts, the depths of our understanding, the inheritance we pass from one generation to the next. Too often, we use words without thought, repeating phrases that have been handed down, unaware of the weight they carry.

Let us pause. Let us listen again. Let us reclaim the fullness of meaning in the word slave — not as a metaphor, not as something distant, but as a truth that bears the weight of suffering, of history, of injustice. Let the word sink into our awareness, not only as remembrance of our ancestors but as a call to awaken to those who are still denied their freedom. Not only those bound in chains but those trapped in systems that devalue their labour, their dignity, their humanity.

What does it mean to be free? Freedom is more than escape from bondage. Freedom is more than survival. It is the right to choose — to choose to serve, not out of fear or coercion, but out of love, creativity, and the sacred responsibility of being part of the ongoing creation of a just world. Freedom is knowing that service is not sacrifice but participation. It is not the loss of self, but the full realization of self — offering gifts, ideas, and work for the benefit of all, including oneself. And so, we remain mindful. Mindful of the words we speak, even in jest. Mindful of the ways we diminish others or ourselves without knowing. Mindful of the unconscious conditioning that lingers in our language, shaping the way we see and treat one another.

Let us be open, awake, and intentional in ensuring that our words reinforce the equality and dignity of every human life.

Let Us Pray

**Source of All, in whom we live and move and have our being,
without whom not one of us can exist,
we pray for greater sensitivity to the inheritance we have received.
Grant us the wisdom to question — to see clearly what we have been given
and to name where it has failed the sacred dignity of every human being.
Give us the courage to change,
to release the words and ways that continue to wound.
We declare, in Your presence, that no one is free until we all are free.
We offer forgiveness for those who have acted in ignorance,
and we declare our intention to no longer walk the same path.
O God of justice and renewal,
may we become creators of a new way,
where dignity is restored,
where words heal instead of harm,
where freedom is known by all,
where the day of the Lord is made manifest,
when no one must teach, for all will know the One.
May that day come quickly. Amen.**

Chapter Five

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord? Our Calling to Embody and Proclaim Gods Kingdom (Bible Readings: Psalm 15:1-5; Matthew 13: 3-7, 24-33)

Psalm 15:1-5

LORD, who may dwell in your sacred tent? Who may live on your holy mountain? The one whose walk is blameless, who does what is righteous, who speaks the truth from their heart; whose tongue utters no slander, who does no wrong to a neighbour, and casts no slur on others; who despises a vile person but honours those who fear the LORD; who keeps an oath even when it hurts and does not change their mind; who lends money to the poor without interest; who does not accept a bribe against the innocent. Whoever does these things will never be shaken.

Matthew 13: 3-7, 24-33

Jesus told them another parable: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop – a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. Whoever has ears, let them hear." Jesus told them another parable "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field. But while everyone was sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. When the wheat sprouted and formed heads, then the weeds also appeared. "The owner's servants came to him and said, 'Sir, didn't you sow good seed in your field? Where then did the weeds come from?' " "An enemy did this," he replied. "The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' " "No," he answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest. At that time, I will tell the harvesters: First collect the weeds and tie them in bundles to be burned; then gather the wheat and bring it into my barn.'" He told them another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches." He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into about sixty pounds of flour until it worked all through the dough."

Our Imageries of God's Kingdom

For many of us, when we hear the word "Kingdom" we immediately picture majesty and a certain degree of "pomp." Those of us who dare to think about God's Kingdom through Jesus' parables, we spiritualized our interpretations. These spiritualized interpretations of the Kingdom parables make us paint a picture of grandeur with "streets of gold," where God displays his imperialistic power. But is the Kingdom that we are called to embody and proclaim a grandeur and pomp with "streets of gold," and an emperor with and imperialistic power? The answer is simply no! The imageries of mustard seeds, weeds, rocky, patchy thorny and fertile soils and yeast do not display this pomp.

Jesus taught God's Kingdom values through parables. These parables appear as poetic, figurative expressions, metaphors, allegories, symbolisms, similes and ironies. Why? Jesus used these imageries to create vivid pictures in our heads. For example, the Parable of the Sower gives a vivid picture of a farmer walking along with a bag of seed, taking a handful and tossing it as he slowly walks along his field. But this vivid picture raises many questions in our minds that challenges our assumption of the Kingdom being a display of pomp and streets of gold. Farming activities are ordinary human activities which in the end the results are both within and outside the farmer's control.

As the Parable of Sower illustrates, the farmer has the responsibility of sowing the seeds, but he has no control over the natural elements such as the rain, the soil and the pest that could affect the results of his efforts. We might even ask in a context where agriculture comes with special difficulty because of the dry climate, why would a farmer whose livelihood probably rests on the amount of crop he is able to produce would plant so carelessly, throwing his precious seed on places where it will either be eaten by birds or be completely wasted.

Besides, the Parable of the Sower does present a sharp contrast to the popular imageries and expectations of the Kingdom of God. Jewish popular imaginations perceived the Kingdom of God in the nationalistic terms with notions of God's judgement for other nations, with the re-establishment of Davidic dynasty with pomp ceremonies at Zion. But Jesus' parables - the Sower, the Yeast and Mustard seeds challenge this popular nationalistic, imperialistic, ethnic, racial and religious exclusivist assumptions underpinning the popular imagination of the Kingdom of God.

Jesus' parables of the Kingdom of God - the Sower, the man who sowed good wheat seeds and his enemy came to sow weeds among the wheat while everyone was asleep, the mustard seed and the yeast all make it clear that the Kingdom of God is not a place where there are streets of gold with an imperial ruler. Jesus' vision of the Kingdom of God through these parables calls on his followers to embody and proclaim God's ongoing activities within our routine political, economic, social, cultural and religious contexts and how we choose to respond to these ongoing activities.

Throughout the Scriptures, God is shown not only as the King of heaven but also as "the King of all the earth" (Ps 47:7), "the King of all the peoples of the earth" (Dan 4:34), "King of the nations" (Jer 10:7). The New Testament refers to him as "the great King" (Matt 5:35), as "King of the ages" (Rev 5:3), as "the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God" (1 Tim 1:17) and as "the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords" (1 Tim 6:15). Jesus' focus on the Kingdom is on God's present activities in the world and how each of us participate in these activities. Hence "the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit" (Romans 14: 7).

In the parable of the Sower there are four kinds of sowing conditions - pathway, stony soil, thorns and good soil. Also, there are secondary factors - the birds, the heat and the thorns - that affected how the primary factor (the land) receives the seeds. Jesus explains the parable of the Sower to his disciples (Matt 13:18-23), identifying the seed as 'The word of the Kingdom' (Matt 13:19).

Hence it is clear that there is a direct link between the Sower (Jesus) and the seed (the “word of the Kingdom”) as well as the different kinds of responses (different Christian responses) – the pathway, the stony soil, the thorns and the good soil – to the word about the Kingdom values.

In the Parable of the Sower, different responses to the seeds depended on the nature of the soil and secondary factors that affected the seeds. Some seeds fell on a path where the seeds were quickly snatched by birds, some seeds fell on rocky soil where they grew quickly but without roots, some seeds were choked by weeds, and some seeds which found good soil did bear plenty fruits. In this parable of the Sower, the imageries of the weeds, thorns, and rocky soils are aspects of our lives we all must struggle to bring under control – the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth that choke the seeds of the Kingdom values making them unfruitful; and it points to the determination, resilience and discipline required to face persecution and other unexpected storms of life so that we embody the Kingdom of God.

But in the parable of weeds among good seeds, Jesus makes it clear it was an enemy of the farmer who planted the weed amid the good seeds while everyone was sleeping. The emphasis is on an enemy’s influence, and this requires patience and painstaking engagement in separating a good wheat seed from that of the weed’s, as both look very similar. Patience is required in this instance. Without care and patience, the danger is that while pulling the weeds, one might uproot the wheat. So, there is the need for the weed and the wheat to grow together until the time of harvest. Can you imagine the agony of knowingly allowing both the wheat and weeds to grow together?

The point Jesus is making here may appear simplistic in scientific technological age where the concept of evil is easily dismissed. But Jesus is making the point that the weeds were not planted by accident or by the good farmer himself, rather these were planted by an enemy. Obsession with the “evil enemy” whether from the outside or from within ourselves can easily create regimes of paranoia in our communities, making people constantly on the lookout for the devil or the enemy in everything that appear suspicious to them. Thankfully, the Church has moved beyond our superstitious zeal that labelled disagreement within the Church as the product of Satan. But this does not negate forces of evil.

While we often get caught up in what the power of evil can do, it is helpful for us to remember that in the parable of weed among wheat it is not necessarily about Satan’s threat to the kingdom of God, rather it is patience, discernment and watchfulness that are required as kingdom values and these virtues are what eventually defeat enemies’ schemes.

What are required from each one of us in embodying and proclaiming the values of God’s Kingdom are patience, watchfulness and sound judgment of the reality of evil in the world. God’s Kingdom values are kindness, dignity, compassion, love and hope. These must permeate our social, political, economic, religious, and cultural institutions. Hence anywhere we see naked greed, injustices, oppression, environmental degradation, abuse of power and position that cause trauma, we have the responsibility to name the evil forces that are at play and rest them.

Both the mustard seeds and the yeast are elements that have small beginnings, yet they possess resistible force. Yeast in a dough for bread is a daily routine domestic occurrence in many households. Why did Jesus use this domestic example for such a magnificent concept as the Kingdom of God? Jesus used this regular domestic activity to demonstrate the nature and the power of the Kingdom of God as something that operate in the ordinariness of life. Similarly, the mustard seed, "the smallest of all the seeds on earth", yet Jesus portrayed it as how the Kingdom of God starts, small beginnings with unstoppable momentum.

In all these parabolic imageries - "the yeast", the Sower, "weeds among wheats," what is very revelatory as well as shocking to Jesus' listener is how the Kingdom of God is compared and related to ordinary human activities. The understanding here is that the Kingdom of God resides in our daily domestic lives and activities - our daily political, economic, educational, social, cultural and religious lives. Where do we locate the Kingdom of God in Barbados?

Let the Wheat and the Weeds Grow Together Until the Harvest

Jesus recommended the "weeds among wheats" to grow until harvest. Humans have obsession for categorisation. We want to categorise world into the good, the bad and the ugly. We want the world to be in black and white, rich and poor, light and darkness. But how do light and darkness appear in the sight of God? The Psalmist answers this question: "Even the darkness is not too dark for You, And the night is as bright as the day. Darkness and light are alike to You" (Psalm 139:11-12).

God's ecosystems are full of complexities, intricacies, diversities, multiplicities. These diversities and multiplicities are united under God's sovereignty. One of the popular Sunday School Hymnal goes: "In the dear Lord's Garden/ Planted here below/ Many tiny flowerets/ In sweet beauties grow". It is the many different tiny flowers that beautify the garden. To have a beautiful garden, there ought to be different plants. Different plants yield different fruits and flowers, some are edible and others inedible, but they are all within God's Garden.

History is very messy and complex. Equally there is God's sovereignty over history. In the parable of "the weeds and the wheat" Jesus did say that weeds were necessarily bad. The weeds were only growing where the farmer had not intended. So, the farmers attitude towards both the weeds and wheats is what is important. Our history in Barbados is painful and traumatic but it is our attitudes that would be important. As wheat and weeds grow together, so too do pain and grace, loss and redemption.

Dealing with the history in Barbados is parallel to the situation that confronted the farmer with wheat and weeds in his garden. Money and material resources are important, but these alone cannot solve very complicated history. In fact, if one is not careful one could easily and proverbially exchange one's birthright for "some bread and some lentil stew" (Genesis 24:34). What is required of us in Barbados in dealing with our complex history are patience, discernment and watchfulness. We are required to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness,

gentleness. And more importantly fight the good fight of the faith. For God is reconciling all things through Christ. In Christ all things hold together.

Our Calling to Embody and Proclaim the Kingdom

On one hand, when the Pharisees asked Jesus when will the kingdom of God come, Jesus replied, "The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst." (Luke 17:20-21). Here Jesus says to his listener the presence of God's Kingdom is here and they are now being called to participate, embody and proclaim God's Kingdom values. On the other hand, sinful human beings cannot create paradise on earth, so Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God is in the future. Hence, the prayer for the coming of the Kingdom.

When you pray, say: "Father, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come." So, in all our liturgies we do pray for the coming of the Kingdom. Praying for the arrival of the future Kingdom, embodying and proclaiming God's Kingdom brings the past, the present, and the future together. Our lament and engagement with historical and intergenerational trauma ought to be intertwined with praying for the future Kingdom, while embodying and proclaiming God's Kingdom values in the present. This brings the past, the present, and the future together. For in Christ, with Christ and through Christ all things hold together, and God gives life to all things.

To embody Kingdom values in our communities include making public statements to illustrate acts of kindness with faith, love and hope. Hope without remembrance leads to illusion. Conversely, remembrance without hope can result in resignation. We were not there when our Lord was crucified. Yet, the crucifixion teaches us that we enter God's Kingdom by holding together the memory of pain of abandonment of God "My God, My God, Why Have You Forsaken Me?" and keeping the hope of resurrection alive within us. Our ability to hold our painful traumatic memories and the hope of the resurrections are marks of embodying the Kingdom values.

How we embody and proclaim the Kingdom of God in our Barbadian context?

What unites the message of Jesus' parables of the Sower, the weeds among the wheat, the mustard seed and the yeast are that the Kingdom of God is not simply a place with streets of gold with an imperial dictatorial ruler. The vision of God's Kingdom Jesus proclaimed demonstrate God's as present activities within our historical, political, economic, social, cultural and religious contexts and how we choose to respond.

Firstly, how we embody and proclaim God's Kingdom values depends on which of the four kinds of sowing conditions - pathway, stony soil, thorns or good soil - we choose to be. Every community has its historical, political, economic, social, cultural and religious traumas and there would always be the needs for forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and posttraumatic growth. The kind of soil we choose to be will determine whether we would be able to bear the fruits of the Spirit of love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control,

and for justice and righteousness to roll on like a river, like a never-failing stream and everyone is recognized, affirmed, respected, accepted and appreciated as a whole person.

Secondly, we proclaim and embody the Kingdom values through our public statement issues that matter. Proclamation is both political and pastoral. We cannot embody God's Kingdom values and be eloquently silent on violence against women and benign ideas that encourage systemic notions of race, gender, class, sexuality, abuse of power, and normalization of intergenerational trauma.

Thirdly, becoming a community where our faith serves as the platform for every member of the Church to work through for themselves the meaning of God's presence, absence, activity, and inactivity in their intimate network of relationships and the wider political, economic, social, cultural and religious spheres, part of living within the Kingdom values. In this sense the Kingdom values become the critique of all our political, economic, social, cultural and religious institutions, power structures, liturgies and biblical interpretations within the Church. God's Kingdom values ought to empower each one of us to fulfil our God given potential rather than disempower us.

Fourthly, God's Kingdom values in Barbados ought to be seen within the ordinariness of life. Yeast in a dough is a routine domestic occurrence. Jesus used this regular domestic activity to demonstrate the routine nature of the Kingdom of God. Similarly, the mustard seed, "the smallest of all the seeds on earth", is portrayed as how the Kingdom of God starts, small beginnings with unstoppable momentum. God's Kingdom values of forgiveness, reconciliation, healing and posttraumatic growth towards a better future where love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, and justice and righteousness in our politics, economics, religious, cultural and all other institutions would have humble beginnings; but through the unstoppable power of the Holy Spirit, we will be able to bring about changes.

Finally, we must be a force of resistance against principalities and powers. Obsession with "evil" whether from outside or from within can easily create a regime of suspicion and divisions in our communities. However, the world has witnessed the evils of transatlantic slavery, holocaust, ethnic cleansing, genocides, cultural vandalism, brutalities, and imperialism. None of these was done to promote God's Kingdom values of forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing towards a common and better future where love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, justice and righteousness reign. Without paranoia, evil must be resisted.

Questions For Discussion

- ❖ What would you say are the striking features of the parables of "the Sower" and "the Weeds among Wheats"?
- ❖ Why are the parables of the "Yeast in a dough" and the "Mustard Seeds" significant for understanding the nature of God's Kingdom in our political, economic, social, educational and cultural structure?
- ❖ In what ways can we hold together our painful traumatic memories and the hope of the resurrection that will mark the embodying of the Kingdom values?

- ❖ What does it take to embody and proclaim the Kingdom values in Barbados today?
- ❖ What does it take to allow the weeds and wheat to grow together in complex history?
- ❖ In what ways could we embody, promote and proclaim God's Kingdom values articulated in our Barbados context?
- ❖ Proclaiming and embodying God's Kingdom values include our public statement on inhumane violence. Which areas of our public lives in Barbados would you like to hear the Church's voice on?

A Meditation on Forgiveness, Healing, and Reconciliation

Leader:

Take a deep breath, beloved, and gently turn inward. Come within and rest in the sacred space of your heart. If it helps, place one hand or both upon your chest, feeling the rise and fall of your breath. As children, we were taught to clasp our hands in prayer, often resting them at the center of our being – perhaps without knowing, we were already drawing near to the heart-space where the Divine dwells.

Now, breathe deeply once more. Let the breath fill your belly, expanding with life as you inhale, releasing all tension as you exhale. Feel the sacred rhythm, the gentle movement of Spirit within. There is no rush, no need to strive – simply be here. Present. Open.

As we turn our hearts to the wisdom of parables, we are called to hold a space of non-judgment – to witness the unfolding of life without rushing to classify, to label, to separate. We are reminded that it is not the experience itself but our response to it that determines its meaning.

Let us withdraw from the mind's tendency to divide – into right and wrong, good and evil, worthy and unworthy – and step instead into the heart's wisdom, where the tension of both/and is held with grace. In this sacred place, we recognize that healing and growth arise not from exclusion, but from integration.

Even that which seems lost has purpose.

Even that which seems opposed is part of a larger unfolding.

The seed that falls on the path feeds the birds, which in turn nourish the soil.

The yeast, though seemingly small and weak, works within the dough to bring transformation.

The wheat and the weeds grow together, each playing its role until the time of harvest.

So too, in the vast and sacred weaving of life, evil itself can call forth goodness.

Forgiveness does not deny the presence of wrong,

but offers a path through it – a path toward grace.

Reconciliation does not erase the past,

but transforms it into something whole.

To see in this way requires a letting go of judgment –

a releasing of our impulse to divide,

and a holding on to the deeper truth:

That all things are created by God, and God's goodness is in all things.

How do we learn to forgive?

Only by encountering that which demands it.

How do we learn to reconcile?

Only by facing division and choosing to heal.

As wheat and weeds grow together, so too do pain and grace, loss and redemption.

And when reconciliation is achieved, there is no longer need for division,

for all things have found their unity in Christ – the Oneness, the wholeness of all things.

Let Us Pray

O God, in whom all things exist, and without whom nothing can be,

help us to release our many battles, our wars of righteousness,

our striving to prove ourselves better than another.

Grant us eyes to see as You see –

to hold all persons in love,

to recognize in every encounter an opportunity to grow.

May we awaken to the deep truth of who we are:

not separate, but one.

Not in conflict, but in communion.

Not bound by division, but reconciled in the eternal embrace of Love.

May we, in You, become the Oneness that we seek.

Amen.

Chapter Six

Watchfulness and Cost of Embodying and Proclaiming the Kingdom

(Bible Readings: Psalms 119:33-40; Psalm 119:105-112; Matthew 25: 1-13)

Psalms 119:33-40

Teach me, Lord, the way of your decrees, that I may follow it to the end. Give me understanding, so that I may keep your law and obey it with all my heart. Direct me in the path of your commands, for there I find delight. Turn my heart toward your statutes and not toward selfish gain. Turn my eyes away from worthless things; preserve my life according to your word. Fulfil your promise to your servant, so that you may be feared. Take away the disgrace I dread, for your laws are good. How I long for your precepts! In your righteousness preserve my life.

Psalm 119:105-112

Your word is a lamp for my feet, a light on my path. I have taken an oath and confirmed it, that I will follow your righteous laws. I have suffered much; preserve my life, Lord, according to your word. Accept, Lord, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws. Accept, Lord, the willing praise of my mouth, and teach me your laws. Though I constantly take my life in my hands, I will not forget your law. The wicked have set a snare for me, but I have not strayed from your precepts. Your statutes are my heritage forever; they are the joy of my heart. My heart is set on keeping your decrees to the very end.

Matthew 25: 1-13

“At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep. “At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ “Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’ “‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ “But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut. “Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ “But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you; I don’t know you.’ “Therefore, keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

Watchfulness: Embodying and Proclaiming the Kingdom

The story of the ten virgins in Matt 25:1-13 has been subjected to varied interpretations. What is significant for our study is the centrality of the image of the lamp. The lamps are critically important in the story because the division of Ten Virgins - the five wise and other five foolish - was made on the basis that five had sufficient oil for their lamps and the other five did not. The decision was based on sufficient or insufficient oil in the lamps of the Virgins. It was having sufficient or not sufficient oil that became your passport to the marriage feast with the bridegroom. We can ask many questions about the parable. Who was the bridegroom? Where was the bride? What took the bridegroom so long? Who were the oil-merchants? The basic criterion for admission to the marriage feast was five had sufficient oil in their lamps and five others did not. So, do we have sufficient oil in our lamps to enable to watch, embody, proclaim and wait for bride

of the Kingdom in Barbados? Or do we confuse not having sufficient oil in our lamps with NOT BEING ENOUGH? We will come back to our assumptions and confusion with NOT BEING EVER ENOUGH.

We noted in our previous studies that the reality of evil exists and often manifest it ugly self in our politics, economics, religious, cultural and all other institutions. It is incumbent on those who embody and proclaim the Kingdom values to be watchful. The parables of the Sower, weeds among wheats, the mustard seeds and the yeast in dough are open ended stories which demand response from those who hear them to become watchful. How we become watchful, agent of change and resist evil forces that so easily threaten values of kindness, dignity, compassion, love and hope that ought to permeate our social, political, economic, religious, and cultural institutions depend on whether we have sufficient oil. When lamps run out of oil and we are plunge into darkness, we would not be able to see the naked greed, injustices, oppression, environmental degradation and abuse of power and position that cause trauma. To be able to embody, proclaim and resist evil, while we patiently wait for the bride of the Kingdom in Barbados, rest on having sufficient oil in our lamps.

Our Internalisation of Not Being Enough

Since our experience of the historical and intergenerational trauma that came with abhorrent evils of slavery, we have internalized the psychosis of Not Being Enough. Earlier we referred to W.E.B Du Bois observations of slave owners' assumptions about our ancestors on the plantation: "Everything Negro did was wrong. If they fought for freedom, they were beasts; if they did not fight, they were born slaves. If they were cowered on the plantation, they loved slavery, if they ran away, they were lazy loafers. If they sang, they were silly, if they scowled, they were impudent.... And they were funny, ridiculous, baboons, aping men". We have internalized these assumptions and they have become a form of psychosis. The Psychosis of Not Being Enough. We consciously or unconsciously carry this burden in ourselves and within our communities.

We are constantly mimicking, becoming other people other than ourselves. Our thoughts are other opinions, our lives are often imitations of others rather than our authentic self. All because we have internalized others' assumptions about our very lives. The idealization of light skin as the pinnacle of beauty affects self-esteem for our women of colour around the world. In many African cultures, skin colour is a social benchmark that is often used by people of colour and whites alike in lieu of race. Attractiveness, marriageability, career opportunities and socioeconomic status are directly correlated with skin colour. As a result, many men and women of colour seek chemical remedies to lighten their complexion. We have created a booming global business in bleach creams and injectables valued at US\$8.6 billion in 2020; \$2.3 billion was spent in the U.S. alone. The market is projected to reach \$12.3 billion by 2027. Why? Because we have inherited and internalized the psychosis of Not Being Enough.

As men and women, we use our excessive consumerism to cover our psychosis of Not Being Enough. We buy stuff we do not need so that we can impress people that we do not necessarily like. Consciously or unconsciously, we have become a people with a strong materialistic value

orientation. We seem to think acquisition of more money and expensive material possessions will improve our wellbeing and social standing. Paradoxically, striving for evermore money and material goods as a means of improving our wellbeing often undermines our quality of life and create anxiety.

Until we rid ourselves in Barbados of that psychosis of NOT BEING ENOUGH, and affirm that we are not totally what happened to us, we will always live in other people's shadows. We sometimes forget that in spite of all the violent rapes, murdering, intimidations and other forms of brutalities, we survived. It takes a people with powerful genes, imaginations, creativity, subtleties, robustness and resilience to survive such horrific ordeal to bear witness of what happened to our ancestors on this beautiful Island called Barbados!

WE ARE MORE THAN ENOUGH. To find inner peace for ourselves we have to stop continuously comparing ourselves with others and false societal standards. Often, trying to live up to impossible standards set by other people's visions and prejudices and the psychosis of NOT BEING ENOUGH, we as Barbadians must decide who we are and force the world to deal with us, not with its idea of us. We are more than, for we are enough.

The parable is about having the imagination, wisdom, vision and creativity that come from God and within us and to be ever watchful against the detractions such as the internalisation of the psychosis of NOT BEING ENOUGH. If we continue to internalize that psychosis, we will continue to say to others that we consider to be wiser, and have MORE THAN OURSELVES, 'Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.' And the very people who already look upon us with disdain would continue with the same old imperialistic response: "No, there may not be enough for both us and you". WE ARE MORE THAN ENOUGH to be self-sufficient without other people's condescension!

Symbols of Oil in Maundy Thursday Service

Within the Anglican tradition, the bishop blesses oil on Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday service. There are normally three jars of Oil that are presented to the bishop at different stages for their usages within Church. There is oil of the sick, oil of baptism and oil of chrism. Over the oil of the sick, the bishop prays "by the laying on of hands and anointing with this oil, and with the prayerful support of this community, may those who are sick experience the healing presence of Christ". Similarly, over the oil of baptism, the bishop will pray "Anointed with this oil, and assisted by the example of this community, may those who are to be baptized know that Christ calls them by name and makes them his own and shares with them his victory over sin and the power of evil." And finally, over the oil of chrism, the bishop will pray "anointed with this fragrant oil, may all who are baptized and confirmed, all who are ordained to the service of God's people, and this community whose house of prayer is dedicated to God's glory, fill the world with the sweet fragrance of Christ's gospel and be built up as living stones into a temple filled with the Holy Spirit" Amen.

What the Holy Thursday blessing of oil service says to us is that to be able to stop internalizing the toxicity of NOT BEING ENOUGH, to embody, proclaim and resist evil, while we patiently wait for the bride of the Kingdom, there would be the movement of vulnerabilities; and what is important is to seek the pastoral and prayerful support of our community. Besides, the oil for baptism is a reminder that each of us is called by name with unique identities that make us more than enough. Our continuous living out of our baptismal vows with the rest of the Christian community is what keeps sufficient oil in our lamps and prevent us from plunging into darkness and have the victory over sin and the power of evil.

Our Oil, Watchfulness, Learning and Catechism

Having sufficient oil for embodying and proclaiming God's Kingdom values are inextricably linked with our desire for continuous learning and discernment to understand God's unfolding activities within community. The Psalmist request is that the Lord will teach him/her the ways of God's decrees so that he/she may follow God's law to the end. The desire to be taught evokes the imagery and necessity of Christian education or catechism that foster understanding and inner longing to question, to clear our doubts and to gain new understanding as we pursue and proclaim God's Kingdom values with all our hearts, minds and souls.

Christian learning or catechism is not simply to prepare us for baptism and confirmation. Christian education or catechism are meant to be vehicles of transformation of our imaginations rather than the saturation of our intellect with more information. It is through the gift of learning and inspirations of the Holy Spirit that we are empowered to know that we are more than enough to be watchful and to bring our thoughts and actions in alignment with God's kingdom values. Christian education or catechism is ultimately our discipleship rather than mere dissemination of academic information however much important this is. Christian learning is more a formative than informative project. The primary objective of Christian learning is inseparable from how we think about who we are as human persons called to embody and proclaim God's Kingdom values as we turn our hearts and eyes away from selfish gain and worthless things (Psalms 119:33-40). It is only when God's word becomes a lamp for our feet, and a light on our path through the oil of learning that we know that we are more than enough despite our traumatic history. Mandela who himself was traumatised not only by racism but served an unjust imprisonment for thirty-three years for fighting against imperialism, economic degradation and dehumanisation of Black in South Africa, noted, "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world. Everyone can rise above their circumstances and achieve success if they are dedicated to and passionate about what they do with education." It is only through transformative education that we encounter God at the deeper level for perseverance and the preservation of our lives in righteousness.

The Cost of Embodying and Proclaiming the Kingdom Values

The parables as we have noted are open ended stories which demand response. The parables have multiple applications for different social, political, economic, religious, and cultural contexts. They are metaphors or similes drawn from nature or common life to provoke our minds to think about

the Kingdom values. In so many instances these parables leave hearers with shocks, anger and a sense wonder of what they have heard.

But Jesus did not only embody and proclaimed the Kingdom. It could be argued that Jesus' own life was parabolic, poetic, and prophetic rather than prosaic. Jesus' answers to questions were so frequently indirect, parabolic, and poetic with piercing truths that are very crisp and succinct that get under skin of the rich and the powerful. When Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you a king?" Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king" (John 18:37). When Pilate intimidated Jesus, with the statement "Don't you realize I have power either to free you or to crucify you?" Jesus answered poetically, "You would have no power over me if it were not given to you from above" (John 19:10-11). Eventually, these poetic and parabolic answers did lead to Jesus' tragic crucifixion at Golgotha.

Were You There When They Crucified My Lord? We were not there! We were not there when the political and the religious elites conspired to put Jesus to death. However, an imaginative reading of the gospels shows, Jesus' parabolic teachings, and values they promoted, led to his unjust and excruciating death. John 19:19- 23 gives accounts of Jesus' trials before he was murdered, the High Priest questioned Jesus about his teachings. Jesus responded "I have spoken openly to the world, I always taught in synagogues or at the temple, where all the Jews come together. I said nothing in secret. Why question me? Ask those who heard me. Surely, they know what I said."

We know these public teachings were delivered mainly through parables. As Mark puts it: "He did not say anything to them without using a parable" (Mark 4:34). Jesus' answer to the High Priest about his parabolic and poetic teaching attracted a slap on his face from a religious official with a rebuke: "Is this the way you answer the high priest?" Jesus' poetic response to the official who slapped him was a demonstration of the power and abiding truths of his methods of teaching. Jesus replied to the religious official, "If I said something wrong, testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" The religious official could not provide an answer to Jesus' parabolic and poetic question.

Jesus' parables subvert our view of the world and invite us to look at ourselves, our history and intergenerational trauma of our world differently. Jesus' parables challenge his hearers to think about how God operates, to broaden their understanding of God's kingdom so that they might begin to think in new ways. Sometimes the hearers are left puzzled and occasionally angry at being challenged to think. The parables are designed to cause reaction, to provoke questions in Jesus' audience. Parables are confronting rather than comforting stories. They are subversive of predominant worldviews. Embodying and proclaiming the Kingdom values in Barbados would come with a cost as it did for Jesus. Are we prepared to pay this cost?

In contrast to the Roman Empire or the British Empire, God's Kingdom is a reign of justice and graciousness without coercion or paternalism. The individual is at liberty to participate in the Kingdom values that inspire forgiveness, healing and posttraumatic growth. God's Kingdom values are directed towards fullness of life and liberation from burden of NOT BEING ENOUGH, our intergenerational, cultural and historical traumas. The reign of God is good news for those

who suffer and yearn for justice and outrageous for those who benefit from oppression of others. This will not be different within our Barbadian contexts.

Jesus' parables invite and challenge hearers to expand their understanding of God and how God operates in surprising ways that transcends human vision of the world and values that we place significance on. Jesus' parables start from where the people who are listening to him are, what they know from their own history, culture, religion, commerce and everyday experiences. Some of the parables draw on themes from agriculture, fishing, injustices of wages, inefficient judicial system, sense of lost and the joy of finding what is lost. Embodying and proclaiming these values could be challenging within the Church. This could cause upset for those who have always seen the Church as cushy club or warm social blanket rather than agent and prophetic voice of justice for the poor and the voiceless. Are we prepared to pay this price?

Questions For Discussion

- ❖ What are the main striking features of the parable of the Ten Virgins for you?
- ❖ It was on sufficient or insufficient oil that five virgins were or were not admitted to the marriage feast with the bridegroom. How do we keep watch and maintain sufficient oil in our lamps in Barbados?
- ❖ Do you recognise the burden and psychosis of Not Being Enough and how do we address this in the Barbadian context?
- ❖ Within the Anglican tradition the bishop prays over three jars of oil on Maundy Thursday or Holy Thursday. How could we symbolically draw on these resources to remind ourselves of the importance of having sufficient oil in Christian living?
- ❖ Having sufficient oil in our lamps, embodying and proclaiming God's Kingdom values are inextricably linked with our continuous learning and discernment. How can we initiate catechism and other forms of learning within the Church?
- ❖ Embodying and proclaiming the Kingdom values in Barbados would come with a cost as it did for Jesus. How do we anticipate this happening?
- ❖ What insights could we draw from the Jesus' parables of Ten Virgins in addressing our historical and ongoing intergenerational trauma, towards forgiveness, healing and towards posttraumatic growth?

A Meditation on Fullness, Sufficiency, and the Joy of Being Enough

Leader:

Take a deep breath, beloved, and gently turn inward. Come within and rest in the sacred space of your heart. If it helps, place one hand or both upon your chest, feeling the rise and fall of your breath. Let your breath remind you that you are here, alive, sustained.

Breathe deeply once more. Let the breath fill your belly, expanding with life as you inhale, releasing all tension as you exhale. Feel the sacred rhythm, the gentle movement of Spirit within. There is no rush, no need to strive — simply be here. Present. Open. Enough.

With each breath, feel the sense of resolve. Each breath is enough. It is sufficient to carry you into the next moment. It is the gift of life, requiring no effort, no proving, no justification. Simply breathe and know that you are held.

We have journeyed through lament and healing, through the weight of history and the power of reconciliation. Now, as we bring this sacred journey to a close, we turn toward the deep truth that we lack nothing.

Lack has shaped our story. We have known the ache of not having enough — of resources stretched thin, of opportunities that seemed too few, of lives spent in survival mode, always preparing for a rainy day. We have inherited the unspoken pressure to “make something of ourselves,” as if we were not already somebody. We have seen governments, communities, and families struggle under the belief that there is not enough — not enough land, not enough food, not enough wealth, not enough dignity.

And yet, we breathe.

And our breath teaches us a different truth.

With every inhale, we are sustained.

With every exhale, we are renewed.

With every moment, we are reminded: we are enough.

Let those inner whispers of inadequacy rise to the surface — the fears of not doing enough, not having enough, not being enough. Let them come, and then let them go. They do not belong to you.

Even those who believe they have enough are cautioned — the man who stored up his wealth was called that very night. What we are matters more than what we possess. We do not become whole by collecting more. We become whole when we rest in the truth that we are already whole.

We are beautifully and wonderfully made.

We do not need to prove our worth.

We do not need to add anything to ourselves to be complete.

We simply need to be.

So, we embrace the joy of being fully human, without reference to anything outside of ourselves.

We hug ourselves in this awareness. We stand in the truth that we are all we are meant to be.

There is no lack.

There is no insufficiency.

There is only the fullness of who we are — created, called, and held in divine love.

And when we show up fully as ourselves, the oil of gladness, mercy, and truth will never run dry.

It will flow from within, abundant and eternal.

Let Us Pray

I lift my open heart to the Source of All Things.

I give thanks that I am wonderfully made.

I ask for the courage to see in myself

the continuous unfolding of God's love for this world and for all people.

I give thanks for the inheritance received,

for the challenges and trials faced.

But I release my need to be more.

I release my fear of not having enough or doing enough.

I acknowledge, O Holy One, that in Your wisdom

You have made me as I am

and called me into deeper relationship with You —

a relationship that reminds me of who I truly am.

I am what I am.

I have what I have.

I do what I do.

For You give me breath to be me.

And it is enough.

Amen.

Closing Reflection

This is the journey:

From lament to healing.

From brokenness to reconciliation.

From fear of lack to the fullness of being.

We have named the wounds of the past,

we have held space for grief,

we have called forth reconciliation,

and now we step forward — not in longing, but in wholeness.

May we walk with confidence, knowing we are not incomplete.

May we speak with truth, knowing our words have power.

May we live with joy, knowing that who we are is enough.

And may the oil of gladness flow from wit with You —

a relationship that reminds me of who I truly am.

I am what I am.

I have what I have.

I do what I do.