



## The Gift of Sacrifice

The first thing that I would like to say is thank you. As you may know we recently held a service of thanksgiving for retired Bishop Henry Cuir Riak who sadly died in early March. Bishop Henry was the first Bishop of Wau diocese and through his hard work and personal sacrifice firm foundations were laid that I am now able to build on and develop. Bishop Henry made many sacrifices for his faith so I would like to say thank you to him for that.

Really it is a feature of the ministry of the whole Episcopal Church in South Sudan that people give their talents and time sacrificially to bring the love and teachings of Jesus to everyone. It is a thing that many cannot believe when I tell them if I go to stay in another country. I am so proud of all my priests, pastors and lay workers, especially with the extra work that I know they will have done through Lent and in preparation to celebrate Easter. Bless you and thank you all.

Lent has been a busy time for me this year and a time of great worry. Busy because I have been tasked by Archbishop Daniel to coordinate his peace making initiatives in Warrap state and this has meant training and conference days. I am very pleased to say that the CNHPR initiative is working very well but I am worried by the bigger picture of politics in our new nation. Beginning at the Christmas of 2013 we saw terrible violence in Juba that spread quickly to the very horrible situation of civil war based on ethnic lines in places such as Bor and Malakal. It lasted all through 2014, even now we are caring for refugees that have come to Wau Diocese for shelter.

I was pleased to see that the group called IGAD who called together President Kiir and Riek Machier for peace talks in Addis Ababa so that this terrible situation could be stopped. We have seen too much bloodshed and devastation in our country. But I see that now even after three rounds of talks no peace deal has been made. I cannot understand this, it is not a game, our country needs peace. After a year of fighting and destruction it is quite clear that neither side can win through violence and I cannot really see what winning means if you destroy the thing you are fighting for.

Really how many times will the international community sit down with us as adults and take us seriously if our leaders behave in this way. I think it is shameful and embarrassing. We have been a country for less than four years, we need development and infrastructure, we need education and healthcare. We need help from people such as China and the United States of America, but will these people be willing to spend their money in a country that will only destroy itself? I see that a Chinese company is rebuilding the Khor Hajar bridge in Western Bahr el Ghazel, but if it was destroyed in fighting who would rebuild it? Truly it is the same people that we appeal to for help that are so upset at the actions of our countrymen and leaders. Please do not think that the world does not know what goes on.

As ever it is not the leaders that suffer in this crisis but the ordinary people that are killed and made homeless. It is ordinary people whose crops are destroyed and cattle slaughtered. If we cannot run our own country in peace we should not be very surprised if the international community takes power away from us. Jesus teaches us a parable about a fig tree you can find it in the Gospel of Luke Chapter 13 from verse 6

6 Then Jesus told this parable: "A man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard, and he came looking for fruit on it and found none. 7 So he said to the worker who tended the vineyard, 'For three years now, I have come looking for fruit on this fig tree, and each time I inspect it I find none. Cut it down! Why should it continue to deplete the soil?' 8 But the worker answered him, 'Sir, leave it alone this year too, until I dig around it and put fertilizer on it. 9 Then if it bears fruit next year, very well, but if not, you can cut it down.' "

I tell you that I worry South Sudan is like the fig tree and it is not bearing fruit. But unlike the kind gardener I worry that we will be cut down not tended to any more. Both president Kiir and Riek Machier have a responsibility as leaders to bear fruit for South Sudan, the fruit is peace and this cannot be done without some sacrifice. Both leaders must make sacrifices to get peace and show the world that we are more than just Africans that know fighting. These people are politicians and should be accountable to the people that they represent which is us. Really I think that it insults the memory of the many people of South Sudan who made the greatest sacrifice of giving their lives to secure the freedom that we now have from Sudan. President Kiir has had his term of office extended because as a country we cannot have proper elections, this is very sad. Perhaps we would be better to have a new government made from the people that were formally detained at the start of this whole event.

This season of Easter is all about sacrifice and making peace. Jesus sacrificed his life to tell us all about the wonderful love that God has for all of us. Every moment of his life from the second that he was baptised by John at the river Jordan Jesus devoted to this mission. You can read it in the four Gospels of the Bible and I really urge you to read them, there is much good teaching there. For three years Jesus travelled and gathered Apostles, he performed many miracles and taught many people in crowds and at synagogues. But this was only part of what Jesus was doing. This was a sacrifice of his time. Time is precious, more precious than money or gold because you can always have more money but time you can have only once. God had called Jesus to do a very special thing and that was to be an offering of peace, a sacrifice to pay for the sins of all mankind.

We are all sinners in one way or another, none of us are perfect, no one ever was. But God loves us and forgives us our sins because of the great deeds of Jesus done at Easter. Jesus allowed himself to be arrested and humiliated, he was beaten and finally crucified. These events took place on the day that we now call Good Friday and you can read about them in the Gospel of Luke from chapter 22 onwards. Crucifixion or being nailed to a cross is really an awful way to die and Jesus knew that he would have to die. This was the sacrifice that he had to make to pay for our sins. So that we could be at peace with God and forgiven Jesus made this great sacrifice. Please understand that this was not an easy thing for Jesus to do. We can read how Jesus pleaded in the Garden of Gethsemane in Mark's Gospel Chapter 14 from verse 35:

“Going a little farther, he threw himself to the ground and prayed that if it were possible the hour would pass from him. 36 He said, “Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will.”

So you can see it was not the easy choice that Jesus made but the right one. We can see in the book of Isaiah Chapter 53 from verse 4 the words of prophecy that he Isaiah made:

“But he lifted up our illnesses, he carried our pain; even though we thought he was being punished, attacked by God, and afflicted for something he had done. 5 He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins; he endured punishment that made us well; because of his wounds we have been healed.”

Our God is a God of love and the proof of this was shown three days after Jesus had died on the cross when he was resurrected back to life. Mary had gone to the tomb where he had been laid and found that it was empty. We can read about this in the Gospel of Luke from Chapter 24 verse 1:

“Now on the first day of the week, at early dawn, the women went to the tomb, taking the aromatic spices they had prepared. 2 They found that the stone had been rolled away from the tomb, 3 but when they went in, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. 4 While they were perplexed about this, suddenly two men stood beside them in dazzling attire. 5 The women were terribly frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, but the men said to them, “Why do you look for the living among the dead? 6 He is not here, but has been raised!”

So the sacrifice that Jesus made was repaid in faith. God always repays our faith with an abundance of goodness and healing is what we need as a nation. We very much need to be healed from blind hatred and the ignorance of using violence to get our own way. What I would like to say to both President Kiir and Dr Riek Machier is that if you love our nation you will make the necessary sacrifice to bring peace to it now. Continuing to fail and carry on fighting shames us all, but to bring peace would be a great gift that would secure the future of South Sudan.

To everyone I would like to say think about how you live your life so that you may live in peace, this is what God wants of us. We can read this in many parts of the Bible but here is one passage that I like, it is from Hebrews Chapter 13 from verse 15:

“Through him then let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips, acknowledging his name. 16 And do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for God is pleased with such sacrifices.”

When you hear the words “He is Risen” at Easter, remember that Jesus has risen from the sacrifice of death for our sins and by faith in him you too can do the same. This is the great gift that our God gives us.

I wish you all a peaceful and joyful Easter celebration. Every blessing *+Moses*