

UNIVERSAL ACCESS AND HUMAN RIGHTS



World AIDS Day Liturgy 2009

“Keep the Promise”

Introduction

World AIDS Day, observed on 1 December each year, is an important opportunity when governments, national HIV and AIDS programmes, faith and community organisations and individuals around the world bring attention to the global AIDS pandemic and emphasise the critical need for universal access to essential care. Churches have an important role to play on this day through intentionally planning to reflect on these issues.

The global theme for 2009 and 2010 is “Universal Access and Human Rights”, chosen by the World AIDS Campaign. The theme encourages us to deepen understanding, develop partnerships and challenge discriminatory laws, policies and practices that stand in the way of access for all to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

Faith-based organisations and churches have a special responsibility to reflect and work to promote human dignity and respect, and protect the human rights of people living with or affected by HIV, or those who are vulnerable to infection.

The campaign is based on the knowledge that all churches are living with and affected by HIV and AIDS. People who live with HIV and who die from AIDS related illnesses are our family and friends, our teachers and neighbours, our pastors and priests. The pandemic continues to be measured in alarming statistics around the world, and churches and people of faith everywhere must take up their pastoral and prophetic role to overcome stigma and discrimination, to care for body and spirit, and to advocate for universal treatment and effective forms of prevention.

HIV transmission is preventable and HIV and AIDS are treatable. And yet for every two people starting on antiretroviral treatments, five more become infected. As people of faith, close to the lives of communities and their members, we are ideally placed to engage with issues of HIV prevention. Too often, our prevention messages have been ambivalent, moralistic, stigmatising or divorced from the realities of people’s lives. What is it about HIV prevention that causes us to spend more time disagreeing with each other than developing sensible, achievable responses? What can we do about it?

Background

Since the identification of Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS) in 1981, Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) – the virus that can lead to AIDS – has affected over 55 million people and led to the deaths of 25 million all over the world. But while we know how to treat the disease, and we know how to prevent people being infected, HIV is still spreading. This disease feeds from our areas of deepest discomfort and from the grossest inequalities and fundamental societal ills that are easier to ignore than address.

But because we don't talk about HIV and AIDS, we perpetuate myths about the disease – how people get it, who it affects and how it can be treated. Our silence is the real tragedy of AIDS because if people don't learn about the disease then we don't change any of its root causes. The added tragedy is that often when we do speak – especially as religious communities – our language implies shame and judgment, and that makes those infected and affected by HIV and AIDS isolate themselves even further.

AIDS is not something that happens outside of the church and our families. Too many stories and statistics on the epidemic's spread and impact demonstrate that everyone is affected by HIV and AIDS. And while churches have been at the forefront of caring for those affected by HIV, we need to challenge ourselves further. As church leaders it is our duty to help people in churches to talk openly, accurately and compassionately about why HIV spreads and what we as individuals and communities can do to help stop it in its tracks.

KwaZulu-Natal is regarded as the epicentre of HIV in Southern Africa. HIV prevalence data suggests that the epidemic is levelling off at just above 31% in this province. The history of HIV and AIDS in South Africa is perhaps the most controversial of any country. It is littered with examples of government inaction and harmful interference, pseudoscience, and conflict between politicians, AIDS organisations and scientists. The after-effects of some two decades of counter-productive policies are still being felt today in a country that has the world's largest HIV epidemic.

Though the difficulties presented by a denialism-embracing government are behind South Africa, the response to the epidemic is far from satisfactory. The country has over 5 million people living with HIV, and there are major issues with providing treatment on such a large scale. Patients often receive treatment far too late, and national treatment guidelines have been heavily criticised.

The history of HIV and AIDS in South Africa should be a lesson to the world in what not to do. For the sake of everyone affected by HIV, South Africa's mistakes should never be repeated.

This liturgy is offered as a resource to focus our attention on the issues as discussed, and to inspire us, as people of faith to action. Keep the promise!

Order of Service

Theme: Universal Access and Human Rights

Call to Worship (all responses are in **bold**)

Leader: O God, we lift our hearts to you today,

Response: We come to worship and to pray.

Cleanse our hearts from sinful thought,
May we praise you as we ought.

We turn our thoughts from selfish greed,
To face a world in desperate need.

Help us by your Holy Spirit,
To pray and work to bring you merit.

We are as empty vessels now,
Fill us with your love and power. Amen

Greeting: (The leader holds up a branch from a shrub or tree.)

Leader: A righteous branch is springing up

Response: Surely coming

Leader: Fulfilling the promise

Response: So all living with HIV may have access to health care and live in safety.

Leader: And this is the name by which they shall be known

Response: The Lord is our righteousness.

Leader: We worship God, faithful and sure

Response: Coming with hope, dwelling with us in love, executing justice and righteousness in our land.

Hymn: O Come, O Come Emmanuel

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive
Israel, That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of
God appear.

Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Wisdom from on high, who orderest all things
mightily; To us the path of knowledge show, and teach us in her
ways to go.

Refrain: Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.

O come, Thou Rod of Jesse, free Thine own from Satan's tyranny;
From depths of hell Thy people save, And give them victory over the grave.

Refrain: *Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, Thou Day-spring, come and cheer our spirits by Thine advent here;
Disperse the gloomy clouds of night, and death's dark shadows put to flight.

Refrain: *Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, Thou Key of David, come, and open wide our heavenly
home; Make safe the way that leads on high, and close the path to
misery.

Refrain: *Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

O come, Thou Root of Jesse's tree, an ensign of Thy people be;
Before Thee rulers silent fall; all peoples on Thy mercy call.

Refrain: *Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O*

Israel. Or

Come Thou Long Expected Jesus

Come, Thou long expected Jesus, born to set Thy people
free; From our fears and sins release us, let us find our rest in
Thee. Israel's strength and consolation, hope of all the earth
Thou art; Dear desire of every nation, joy of every longing
heart.

Born Thy people to deliver, born a child and yet a King,
Born to reign in us forever, now Thy gracious kingdom
bring. By Thine own eternal Spirit, rule in all our hearts
alone;
By Thine all sufficient merit, raise us to Thy glorious throne.

First Reading: Jeremiah 33: 14-16

The days are surely coming, says God, when I will fulfil the promise I made to
the house of Israel and the house of Judah. In those days and at that time I will
cause a righteous branch to spring up for David; and this branch will execute
justice and righteousness in the land. In those days Judah will be saved and
Jerusalem will live in safety. And this is the name by which it will be
called: "God is our righteousness."

Prayer of Praise

Leader: God, you're Father, Mother, Spirit, Son;

Response: We praise you for how much you've done.

Leader: You formed us in our mother's womb,

Response: And care for us until the tomb.

Leader: Each human life has special worth,

Response: You carefully ordered each one's birth.

Leader: Christ Jesus, you are one of us;

Response: Your coming makes us glorious.

Leaders: Your birth and death and resurrection,

Response: Have made the way for our perfection.

Leader: You feel our pain and shed our tears,

Response: Increase our joy and calm our fears.

Leader: There is not one whom you ignore,

Response: However weak or sick or poor.

Leader: You have a heart to understand,

Response: And no one plucks them from your hand.

Leader: We offer you our love and praise,

Response: And rejoice to follow in your ways. Amen

Second Reading: Psalm 139:1-18 - The Message (Eugene Peterson)

A Psalm of David

God, investigate my life; get all the facts firsthand. I'm an open book to you; even from a distance, you know what I'm thinking. You know when I leave and when I get back; I'm never out of your sight. You know everything I'm going to say before I start the first sentence. I look behind me and you're there, then up ahead and you're there, too - your reassuring presence, coming and going. This is too much, too wonderful - I can't take it all in!

Is there any place I can go to avoid your Spirit? To be out of your sight? If I climb to the sky, you're there! If I go underground, you're there! If I flew on morning's wings to the far western horizon, you'd find me in a minute - you're already there waiting! Then I said to myself, "Oh, God even sees me in the dark! At night I'm immersed in the light!" It's a fact: darkness isn't dark to you; night and day, darkness and light, they're all the same to you. Oh yes, you shaped me first inside, then out; you formed me in my mother's womb. I thank you, High God - you're breathtaking! Body and soul, I am marvellously made! I worship in adoration - what a creation! You know me

inside and out, you know every bone in my body; you know exactly how I was made, bit by bit, how I was sculpted from nothing into something. Like an open book, you watched me grow from conception to birth; all the stages of my life were spread out before you. The days of my life all prepared before I'd even lived one day.

Your thoughts - how rare, how beautiful! God, I'll never comprehend them! I couldn't even begin to count them - any more than I could count the sand of the sea. Oh, let me rise in the morning and live always with you!

Prayers in solidarity with a world in need of access

Adapted from Psalm 25:1-7 (*The leader reads the phrase from the Psalm. **The people respond.** The sections commencing with "I lift up..." are read by various readers.*)

Leader: To you, O God

Response: We lift up our soul.

Reader 1: I lift up Winnie from Zambia. Her mother died of an AIDS-related illness when she was seven. She was abandoned for some time by her relatives. Hurt, unsure, struggling, she said, "I would like to be treated well, to feel loved and valued and to go back to school."

Leader: Oh God, in you we trust.

Response: Do not let us be put to shame.

Reader 2: I lift up the woman in Russia, not daring to give her name, fearing at every moment that someone will discover her secret so she loses her job.

Leader: Do not let my enemies exalt over me.

Response: Do not let those who wait for you be put to shame.

Reader 3: I lift up Mary from the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya. She was raped and afterwards unable to find medical care. The camp is full of people living with HIV but she is afraid to take the test. She defends herself, "I have no friends. No one talks to me and the worst thing is that no one, no one wants to hold my baby."

Leader: Let them be ashamed who are wantonly treacherous.

Response: Make us to know your ways, O God; teach us your paths.

Reader 4: I lift up people living with HIV who are evicted from their homes in Borei Keila, Cambodia and forced to live in horrible conditions in what has become known as an AIDS colony.

Leader: Lead me in your truth, and teach me.

Response: For you are the God of our salvation; for you we wait all day long.

Reader 5: I lift up Steve Harvey, head of Jamaica AIDS Support, a group that works with gay and bisexual people affected by HIV. He was kidnapped and killed when it became known that he was gay.

Leader: Be mindful of your mercy, O God, and of your steadfast love,
Response: For they have been from of old.

Reader 6: I lift up the widow from Washington, DC, whose husband died of AIDS-related illness contracted through injecting drug use. She has hepatitis C due to unsafe needles. She pleads, "Safe, affordable, low barrier/no barrier access to needles, and treatment would save lives, and money."

Leader: Do not remember the sins of my youth or my transgressions;
Response: According to your steadfast love remember us, for your goodness' sake, O God!

Reader 7: I lift up Rajesh from Durban whose wife is positive and pregnant with their first child. Their family has abandoned them and they have no medical aid. He pleads, "Teach me how to care for my family. Teach me how to love my wife and unborn child unconditionally. We all need medical treatment and support and we need it now!"

All: Hear our prayers O God!

Prayer of Confession

Leader: O God, when the trouble's not our own
Response: We tend to leave it well alone.

Leader: Content so long as we are well
Response: We don't care much for others' hell.

Leader: Lord Jesus, you came to serve not to be served;
Response: The care you gave was undeserved;

Leader: We often put our own needs first
Response: And think our suffering's the worst.

Leader: Forgive us for our callous heart
Response: And stir us up to play our part.

Leader: Thank you for your cleansing blood
Response: By which you put us right with God.

Leader: In the new life that you give
Response: By faith we live as you would live. Amen.

Call to action *(At this time, the leader takes the branch and lifts it in silent witness. The leader looks at the people while asking the following questions.)*

Leader: What righteous branch is God raising up to confront the wantonly treacherous, to spare the targeted from shame? What righteous branch is God bringing forth in our midst, so people living with HIV can live in safety? What righteous branch is God growing in you?

Sung Acclamation

O Come, O Come, Emmanuel *(First verse only.)*

O come, O come, Emmanuel, and ransom captive Israel,
That mourns in lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.

Refrain: *Rejoice! Rejoice! Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.*

Third Reading: 1 Thessalonians 3: 9-13

How can we thank God enough for you in return for all the joy that we feel before our God because of you? Night and day we pray most earnestly that we may see you face to face and restore whatever is lacking in your faith. Now may our God, the Creator and our Lord Jesus direct our way to you. And may our God make you increase and abound in love for one another and for all, just as we abound in love for you. And may God so strengthen your hearts in holiness that you may be blameless before our God at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all the saints.

Alleluia - a Song of Praise to God

Gospel Reading: Luke 21:25-36

“There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then they will see the Son of Humanity coming in a cloud with power and great glory. Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.” Then Jesus told them a parable: “Look at the fig tree and all the trees; as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the reign of God is near. Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away. Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day catch you unexpectedly, like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Humanity.”

Or Matthew 9:18-26

While Jesus spoke these things to them, behold, a ruler came and worshiped Him, saying, "My daughter has just died, but come and lay your hand on her and she will live." So Jesus arose and followed him, and so did the disciples. And suddenly, a woman who had a flow of blood for twelve years came from behind and touched the hem of Jesus' garment. For she said to herself, "If only I may touch His garment, I shall be made well." But Jesus turned around, and when He saw her He said, "Be of good cheer, daughter; your faith has made you well." And the woman was made well from that hour. When Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the flute players and the noisy crowd wailing, He said to them, "Make room, for the girl is not dead, but sleeping." And they ridiculed Him. But when the crowd was put outside, He went in and took her by the hand, and the girl arose. And the report of this went out into all that land.

Sermon Guidelines

The preacher is encouraged to explore the connections between God's love (Psalm 139) and our faith (Matthew 9).

Jesus breaks down the barriers of 'religious separation' – who decides who is 'clean' and 'unclean'? (Matthew 9) 'Wonder' along the way – looking out for opportunities along life's way to bring healing, comfort and wholeness.

There is power in all of creation (Luke 21) and its message to us today is one of justice and righteousness.

The scriptures offer us and challenge us to be agents of encouragement (1 Thess. 3) - affirming all of God's people.

Affirmation

(The branch is passed through the congregation while the following affirmation is recited. As each line is recited by the leader, it is repeated by the congregation which is invited to stand for this ritual.. The leader should try and find a strong rhythm between the call and the response by the people.)

I am somebody.

I have the right to live.

I may be HIV positive, but I have the right to essential medicine.

I may be a sex worker, or a drug addict, but I am accepted by God.

I may be an infected single mother, but I have a right to treatment.

I am God's child.

I may be poor, but I have a right to healthy food and clean water.

I may be different from you, but I have a right to be safe.

I may be dying, but I have a right to receive care and support.

I am God's child.

I can raise my head.

I can work for justice.

I may be without my legs, but in Christ,

I can stand tall, because my redemption is near.

I am somebody.
We are all God's children.
We all have a right to live.

All: Show us the leaves which tell us that your reign is at hand, so all your people can stand tall, and raise their heads because your redemption is drawing near. Amen

Prayers of Intercession

Branch of righteousness, surprise the world with a purity that allows being touched by a haemorrhaging woman,
Rather than a purity which protects itself from others.

Surprise the world with a holiness that can affirm the sex worker who washed your feet with her hair,
Rather than a holiness which does not associate with those who don't follow the standards of the community.

Surprise the world with a goodness that is able to feed the hungry on a hillside,
Rather than the goodness which accuses others of not taking care and judges their misdeeds.

Surprise the world with a spirituality which affirms the praying penitent,
Rather than the religious male leader thanking you for his favoured status.

Surprise the world with a gesture which opens your table to all who would come,
Rather than a law which declares some unclean and unfit.

Branch of righteousness, surprise your world. Show us the leaves which tell us that your reign is at hand, so all your people can stand tall, and raise their heads because your redemption is drawing near. **Amen**

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

Or

An Alternative 'Lord's Prayer'

O Breathing Life, your Name shines everywhere! Release a space to plant your presence here. Imagine your possibilities now. Embody your desire in every light and form. Grow through us this moment's bread and wisdom.

To thee, before thy passion, they sang their hymns of praise; to thee,
now high exalted, our melody we raise.

Refrain

Thou didst accept their praises; accept the prayers we bring, who in
all good delightest, thou good and gracious King.

Benediction

May the God of creation bless you and keep you. May the
Spirit of wisdom watch over you, and May the Joy of
Christ Jesus, the Son, inspire you.

**May the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the
communion of the Holy Spirit be with us now and for ever more. Amen**

Acknowledgements

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