



Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
'Creation – Crucified by Greed'
Good Friday Address, Diakonia Ecumenical Service
Durban, 2 April 2010

Amos 5:7-15
Luke 23:26-34, 39-42

May I speak in the name of God, whom we remember today most especially as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer of Life.

Dear people of God, dear sisters and brothers in Christ, thank you for your invitation to join you on this most solemn day in the Church's calendar.

Today we reflect again on something that we shall never fully grasp, this side of heaven – the unimaginable extent of the love of God: revealed in Jesus Christ, who cared enough to give up his life on the cross, for the sake not only of humanity, but of all creation.

St Paul sums it up within the great poetic description of redemption that he offers in the first chapter of his letter to the Colossians.

Here we read 'through Jesus Christ, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.'

We know our understanding of Good Friday and Easter is always too small and there is always more to grasp.

But our picture of salvation is certainly too narrow if we only consider the promises of God for *humanity* – mind-boggling though these are.

The redemption won on the cross by Jesus Christ is not only for us, it is also for 'all things, on earth and in heaven'.

Jesus is the lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world, not only for cleansing the guilt of sinners, the perpetrators – which is of course what all of us are.

It is also about redeeming all the negative consequences of human failures and wrong-doings:

- of repairing the damage,
- of putting right what has gone awry,
- of transfiguring what has been marred,
- of rescuing what has been lost,
- of mending what has been broken,
- of healing what has been wounded.

Everywhere the salvation of Jesus Christ brings new life and new beginnings: for humanity, and for all creation.

This is the hallmark of the kingdom of God – the kingdom that both is, and is to come.

And though we know we shall see such redemption in all its fulness at the end of time, we are also to be part of the coming of the kingdom here and now – partners with Christ in his good news for all creation.

But the stark truth is that creation itself is a battle-ground for God's kingdom – at the hands of the most destructive elements of selfish, greedy, short-sighted, sinful humanity.

Pollution, environmental degradation, global warming, climate change ...

We are complicit in the varying weather patterns that bring worse floods, harsher droughts. We see this happening within Southern Africa.

Even more seriously, across the Indian Ocean – which laps so pleasantly on Durban's beaches – the entire nation of the Maldives is threatened with being wiped off the map, as the sea rises and covers their islands.

God calls us to be part of the solution, not part of the problem – part of the coming of the kingdom, partners in his working of redemption and salvation.

‘Seek the Lord and live ...’ says the prophet Amos, condemning greed and corruption in the exploitation of the earth’s resources and its people.

The same choice lies before us. Will we seek the Lord and the ways of life – as individuals, and also as members of the communities, society, nation, and global human family of which we are a part?

Last year the Anglican Communion called on Anglicans everywhere to reduce their carbon footprint by 5% annually.

Personally, I must admit that my travelling gives me a terrible footprint – only last week, for example, I was in the Netherlands at a conference of religious leaders on HIV and AIDS.

But I am working hard to ensure my overall trend is to meet this steady and continuing reduction.

I also want to achieve in it my home and offices in Bishopscourt; and across our churches.

We must also learn to help our communities to follow the prophet Amos’ call to ‘seek good and not evil, that you may live – hate evil and love good, and establish justice ...’

If you don’t already know the work of SAFCEI, the Southern African Faith Communities’ Environment Institute, I strongly commend them.

They have considerable resources for us – and we, by giving them our support, strengthen their voice in advocacy.

I also commend the South African Council of Churches’ work, including the excellent publication ‘Climate Change – A Challenge to the Churches in South Africa’, downloadable from their website.

We can and must make democracy work, to influence local, provincial and even national government policies, on everything from preserving biodiversity to responsible water usage and waste management.

Sometimes we must be like those whom Amos describes as ‘reproving at the gate’.

The gate-way, the entrance, of a town was where the elders sat and debated the questions of the day. It was the place of public policy making.

Our voices must be heard there, and where necessary we will ask awkward questions and offer critique and, as appropriate, criticism too.

At the moment, these are the questions I want to ask at the gate of government:

- Why is there not greater investment in renewable energy, when we have such untapped potential?
- What is being done to encourage efficient electricity consumption by large industry which has, in its secret sweetheart deals for cheap energy from Eskom, so little incentive to act responsibly? It is outrageous if domestic consumers are subsidising industry, without any accountability, or even honesty before parliament.
- What is the justification for seeking a World Bank loan for \$3.75 billion (R29 bn) loan for new coal-powered generators – described as inappropriate financing for a bad project?

We want truth, and we want justice for society and for our planet.

Without these, the life of every living thing is put at risk.

We also want our government to be fully committed to being part of the global solution, not part of the global problem – and not only in decisions around energy generation.

Our government must work for good outcomes at next December's UN meeting in Mexico. Now is not too early to begin.

This is both a moral and a justice matter.

Alongside the moral questions of harming the creation of which we are stewards, there are the justice questions of the exploitation of resources to benefit the few at the expense of the many.

Even worse, the dire consequences of climate change are disproportionately borne by the developing world.

Therefore we understand that environmental concerns should not tighten the shackles of poverty on the poor.

But this cannot be used as an excuse by government not to act boldly at home and internationally.

And we cannot tackle poverty and inequality without preserving our agricultural sector, our safe water, our food security, and so much more.

If we let climate change destroy these, we will not only harm the poorest most; we will more than reverse any economic progress that we have made.

We can also do far more to support better practice, to promote and extend recycling, to preserve biodiversity and to protect our water resources and our ecosystems.

We must raise our voices to ensure all this happens.

And yet, for all that we must make ourselves heard, sometimes we must stand up and be counted in silence.

Amos says, 'the prudent will keep silent in such a time, for it is an evil time.'

Good Friday is such a time for standing silent.

It is a day for saying 'words are not enough'.

Words are not enough for describing the human predicament – the terrible consequences that we face as a result of our actions, our choices, what we do and say, and what we fail to do and say.

Words are not enough for describing human need for God's grace, for God's forgiveness and for God's redemption, for this life and the life to come.

And words are not enough for describing God's love shown in Jesus Christ, who freely gave his life, so that we might know life, in all its abundance.

Therefore today we will walk in silence, as at the foot of the cross – overcome by the need in which we stand; and daring to try and grasp the enormity of what has been done to save us, by the one who says 'Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.'

Amen