

## DIAKONIA COUNCIL OF CHURCHES GOOD FRIDAY SERVICE

**“Do not fear! Stand Firm!”**

*A sermon preached on the occasion of 33<sup>rd</sup> Ecumenical Good Friday Service  
Held at Durban Exhibition Centre, Durban  
On 30<sup>th</sup> March 2018 at 05:15am*

**Scripture Reading: Exodus 14: 13-14**

**Preacher:** Rev Thulani Ndlazi – SA Synod Secretary  
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Prophetic Pastoral Professional

## **1. GREETINGS**

- The Chairperson of the Diakonia Council of Churches, Rev Ian Booth
- The Director of Diakonia Council of Churches Ms Nomabelu Mvambo-Dandala
- The ministers present and their spouses
- The premier, MECs, mayors, councillors and all dignitaries present
- Sisters and brothers in Christ, friends and guests present...I greet you all in Jesus's name

## **2. Prayer: let us pray**

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer (Psalm 19:14)

**SCRIPTURE READING: Exodus 14: 13-14**

**“Do not fear! Stand Firm!”**

## **1. Introduction / biblical context**

The passage that Diakonia Council of Churches chose for us to reflect on this morning is part of a very interesting historical narrative. It is a story of captivity and liberation. It is a story about freedom and faith. Exodus is a book that narrates how the children of Israel who had been oppressed as slaves in Egypt got liberated from slavery through negotiations that were led by Moses and his brother Aaron.

Some of you would remember Moses being asked by God to go and negotiate with Pharaoh for the release of the children of Israel. Moses felt he was not good enough to do the job but God convinced and assured Moses that "I shall be with you". You would remember the story of the burning bush and Moses's stick that turned into a snake.

Then Moses goes and recruits his brother Aaron to accompany him and to meet Pharaoh. After some long negotiations, persuasions, Pharaoh finally agrees that the Israelites may go. Some emotional and psychological preparations are made by and for the children of Israel before they depart Egypt. Passover feast becomes a necessary ritual to convince themselves that indeed we are leaving. I mean liberation after 400 years of oppression would take a lot more than just saying okay you are now free to go. So they left Egypt. A place of oppression but familiar place. They began a journey to the promised land but unknown to them. Remember none of this generation lived as free and all they knew was oppression.

I can imagine how some of them were still questioning, "are you sure about this Moses?" I can imagine others being excited about prospects of living their lives as free people. God was with them. God led them and assured them. God manifested His "permanent presence with his people in a pillar cloud" that guided them by day and "a pillar of fire" that guided them by night (13:21-22). The book of Exodus will end with same cloud, the symbol of God's presence, hovering over the Tent of Meeting and signalling when his people are to march and when they are to halt on their long journey to the land of Canaan (40: 34-38).

In spite of all of these signs and strong presence of the Almighty, the people of Israel quickly loses faith and hope when faced with imminent danger. They replace hope with hopelessness and above all replace faith with fear. You cannot blame them though. All of a sudden, they realise that the Pharaoh's soldiers are following them and assume that they will be slaughtered. We understand that Pharaoh's heart had been hardened. We also understand that he had lost large part of the labour force, which obviously had a huge negative impact on the economy and bruised his ego. But based on Pharaoh's words in chapter 14:5 it does not seem like he intended to kill the Israelites. It seems like they wanted them back as slaves:

*"When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, Pharaoh and his officials changed their minds about them and said, "What*

*have we done? We have let the Israelites go and have lost their services!"*

So the Egyptians caught up with Israel by the sea in a situation that seemed like a trap. The Israelites were trapped between the ocean in front of them and Egyptians behind them. They have good reasons to believe that they were going to be killed. There were 600 best chariots along with all other chariots of Egypt. Such a huge force would look impressive to the Israelites. Remember Moses also once threatened Pharaoh in 10:28 "the day you see my face you will die".

The Israelites started to cry out, not only in fear but also in rage and incomprehension directed against Moses. This is the first occasion when we see the ungratefulness of the Israelites that would characterise the people throughout the long crossing of the desert. God has just stressed the importance of memory in chapter 13 but people have already forgotten God's spectacular actions on their behalf.

Instead of entertaining people's lack of faith Moses tried to calm the people down and he said "Do not be afraid" (14:13a). He assures the people that God will fight on their behalf because God is bigger than the army. Then Moses said something, which is very important. He said the Egyptians you see today, you will never see them again" (14:13b). This statement is also contracting what Pharaoh said to Moses "the day you see my face you will die".

*"Do not fear! Stand firm!"*

## **2. Contemporary context**

Sisters and brothers in Christ we also as South Africans have faced many challenges. We have gone through oppression, both under colonialism and apartheid. Like Moses and Aaron negotiating the freedom to the Israelites we also had our CODESA. We may not have had to throw a stick on the ground and turn it into a snake but we did have had our fair share of showing God's miraculous presence.

We flipped what could have been bloodshed revolution into a peaceful process into democracy. We put a stop on the black on black violence that left many women being widowed and children being orphans. We may not have had a snake but we did have long snake like queues of people going to cast their vote for the first time in their lives and by doing so ushering in a new dawn of democracy.

We knew right there and then that our God was with us. We knew that the God of Chief Albert Luthuli, Rev John Langalibalele Dube, Rev Rubusana, Victory and Griffith Mxenge, Bishop Hurlly, Mr Archie Gumede, Mrs Jean Farre Hill had delivered us from the yoke of oppression. We knew that when Chief Luthuli said let my people go, it was God who had spoken through him. But then when the demons of the past continued to haunt us we began to lose hope. We started to replace faith with fear and hope with hopelessness.

*"Do not fear! Stand firm!"*

We knew that apartheid system was not only a heinous crime against humanity but was also corrupt. We knew that language, access to decent education, health care, gender discrimination and ethnocentrism were used to divide and oppress people. We thought in the promised new democratic society such injustices will be a thing of the past. Unfortunately, the devil was not happy with us being free. Hence the demons of corruption, gender discrimination, racism and economic injustice are still following us in multitude of chariots.

*“Do not fear! Stand firm!”*

### **3. Biblical Message**

Moses had to remind the children of Israel not to fear but to stand firm. He knew that God was in charge. He knew that God would keep his promises. He knew that surrendering and going back to slavery was not the best option and definitely against God’s plan. Moses may not necessarily have been 100% sure but he knew that his only hope between the enemies and the roaring sea was to rely on God’s presence.

Indeed God made a miracle and instructed Moses to part the seas. At this juncture the bible reveals to us that that cloud that had been accompanying them was an angel. We know that the angel first revealed himself at the burning bush. So all along God had been present with Moses and then later with the children of Israel. God will never forsake or leave you.

*“Do not fear! Stand firm!”*

### **4. The charge / conclusion / message for us**

Sisters and brothers in Christ we are also reminded this morning to replace fear with faith. We are reminded this morning to lose hopelessness and keep hope burning because the enemies you see today you shall see no more.

Yes, corruption has come back to haunt us a nation. Corruption is even bigger and blatant now. We do not only see corruption in the government as some people would like to highlight but we also see corruption in the private sector and in the church. We have big companies, in very sophisticated evil ways, losing people’s monies like nobody’s business. Private companies are fixing bread prices, overcharging people for data and colluding in bank charges and how they procure contracts.

Sport people who are supposed to be role models of our children are seen cheating. Somethings have come back to haunt us again. And yet still *do not fear but stand firm!*

The demons of racism and ethnocentrism are rampant. Some people think it is only in South Africa where you find the likes of Momberg or farmers in Coligny (Northwest province) who still believe that black people are subhuman. It is not only South Africa where you see xenophobia and Afrophobia. Trust me even in the developed countries such as the United States of America (USA) we still see corruption, racism and ethnocentrism.

Black Lives Matter movement would not have been started if black people in the USA were not being killed for walking while being black and their bodies viewed as weapons.

Trust me even the victims of racism can become perpetrators of the same evils they went through. Look at how the Israeli government is subjecting the Palestinian people under suffering worse than the suffering that you and I, as South Africans, went through under apartheid. The chief rabbi called black people “monkeys”. The prime minister called black migrants “infiltrators”. These are leaders of the same people whom God once told *“The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the LORD your God”* (Leviticus 19:34).

#### *The enemies are following us*

Yes 24 years after democracy we still see black children studying in schools that do not have clean and fresh water let alone libraries and laboratories. And sadly, so some of these children drown in human faeces because their schools do not have proper toilets. Some communities still use bucket toilet system.

Black people are still treated like aliens and slaves in the wine producing farms and forced to work under inhumane conditions. The demons of the past are coming back to haunt us as we witness many people sentenced to life in poverty and unemployment.

We see black on black violence coming back to ravage our society especially here in KZN province. Like Pharaoh’s 600 best chariots the so called black on black violence has come back more sophisticated. We cannot keep on killing each other as politicians over political positions and tenders, killing each other as school teachers over principal posts or as taxi owners over routes. It has to come to an end at some point. The assassinations of politicians and business people will never lead to a better life for all. As the late Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr once said, that “we must learn to live together as brothers or we’ll all perish together as fools”

We witness women suffering gender violence and children subjected under sexual molestation. Children are abused by their teachers, school principals and coaches. Women are abused by their loved ones. Some are abused by the church leaders, so called pastors.

All of the above lead to a deficit of public trust in our church leaders, politicians, hopelessness in the family values. We may feel hopeless, desponded, discouraged and fearful. But I want to remind, encourage and inspire all those who are faced with challenges. I want you to know this morning that “do not fear, stand firm” because the enemies you see today, you shall see no more. It may not be easy to challenge, resist and overcome these enemies of our society but remember the battle is not yours; it is God’s battle. You and I are participants in God’s mission. Also remember that our beloved President Nelson Mandela once said:

“I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

Yes gender violence may be a big and scary enemy but please do not fear, stand firm. You can leave that abusive relationship. Like Pharaoh that abusive partner of yours may try to bring you back but please stand firm and do not fear.

I know there are many politicians, managers and directors of companies who are faced with corruption in their institutions. I say to you this morning “do not fear! Stand firm! And do right even when no one is watching.

So my sisters and brothers, go on:

1. Fight corruption in your little corner by all means and if needs be make use of the SACC’s “Unburdening Commission”
2. Do not fear but expose and destroy sexual abuse in your family, church, company, government etc.
3. Do not fear but expose and resist racism in your family, church, neighbourhood, company and government
4. Do not fear but go on now and stop xenophobia, Afrophobia and ethnocentrism in our communities
5. Do not fear but go on now and work harder to fight against corruption that leads to schools being under developed.
6. Do not fear, stand firm and form solidarity with other Christians in other parts of the world where are fighting against injustices directed to Palestinian people, black people in America, Brazil and everywhere
7. Do not fear but but stand firm and tell the next generations about the God of Archie Gumede, Archbishop Hurley, Rev Victory Mbanjwa, Jean Fare Hill and many others who have gone before us.
8. Replace fear with faith
9. Do not bow to the empire but stand firm!
10. Do not fear, stand firm because the enemies you see today you shall see no more.
11. May the Lord add blessing to the preaching of his word!!!! Amen!!!