

May We Show Up

By: Edith Chemorion

June 28, 2020. Guest preacher Edith Chemorion talks about the lessons we can learn from our readings today, and how we can show up with love, care, and compassion for a community in need.

Readings: [Jeremiah 28:5-9](#), [Psalm 89:1-4, 15-18](#), [Romans 6:12-23](#), [Matthew 10:40-42](#)

*** Transcript ***

It's good to be here today. I hope you can hear me. I'm so glad this morning that we can have a few things to reflect about in the world in which we live today. But I'll begin with a small story of where I come from. I come from the western part of Kenya, a place called Mount Elgon. And Mount Elgon is on the border between Kenya and Uganda. And between 2006 and 2008 the community had intraclan conflict. The community which comprises of one ethnic community fought amongst themselves. And this was because of the issue of a historical injustice that the government did not resolve for many years — for more than forty or forty-five years. And the young people who are the great-grandchildren of the parents who had been given land, as people who are supposed to benefit from land from the mountain, had not been given.

So the young people are agitating for their right to access the land of their great-grandfathers. But they did not receive hearing from the government. So out of anger, out of frustration, the young people mobilized themselves and said, "We will do anything we can to get the land which our ancestors were supposed to get." So they mobilized themselves and renamed themselves, gave themselves a name called the Sabaot Land Defence Force. And now this was a threat to the government. The government was so annoyed, because how can we have another defence force within the country? Did that imply they wanted to oust the government? That was not the reason why! But they were mobilizing themselves, and they wanted to get a share of the land that belonged to their great-grandfathers, their fathers, and now them, having married and with families. And they were still living as squatters. So they decided to fight, and they began doing nasty things. And they mobilized all young people to make sure that the men came up and they were armed with guns, to make sure that they fight the government.

But it didn't work well because those ones who did not have sons. For instance, my son was very young at the age of nine. And they were recruiting young boys go to the forest to fight. So I did not, and they threatened. So people were supposed to give money to the Defence Force, or else they come and attack you in your home. So they fought and they attacked people aimlessly. And at the end of the day, they hurt the community inasmuch as they were fighting for the community. What happened was, many men — young men — were killed, they were beheaded, they were forced into the forest and they were beheaded. And we also had young women who were abducted and taken to the forest to cook for the Defence Force. And of course they were out to hurt them. We had some of the young girls who were raped.

And out of that the government realized no, they had to do something. So they sent the army with helicopters. They sent the army with all types of ammunitions to make sure that they sent peace to the mountain. This did not work very well to the community. Many women were hurt, because they were raped by the army again. And the food was burned down and the men who had remained in the community, the elder men, were beaten up by police. Most of them died. So at the end of the day we have these young women with children. Some of them are school dropouts, so they did not go to school. But then they have to take care of their families. We had over 30,000 people who were killed

during the ambush. To make sure that they bring peace, the army had to intervene.

How could we respond? As a pastor I had a very hard time to respond. First of all, I had to look for the best ways to get food and non-food items to the internally displaced people. I had young mothers and young girls who had been raped. They ended up being pregnant, infected with a disease. But they had to be taken care of. So my husband and I had to be alternative family to the children born out of rape during the 2007–2008 conflict that was in the mountain. There in a center we provide food, we provide clothing, we provide literacy training for the young mothers, and some elementary education for these children — because the community say no, we cannot have children who do not belong to our sons. So these children born out of incest, born out of rape, did not have a place to belong. But we belonged. That was the little way we could respond to the need of the mountain then.

Reading from the text we read today, Paul is speaking from a context where the Roman world was full of many things that were all wrong. This is where the church was situated. And the Roman church was also experiencing moral decay, because the issue of compromising. Others were saying they followed, but still there were sins which the members of their congregations were committing. We had false teachings, and the teachings the people were telling people made them to be compromised, because they did not remain as Christians who were baptized, who had been taught by Paul and other disciples. But they were compromised, and they ended up behaving like any other person in the Roman community. Paul, in the text that we read — Romans 6:12-23 — is talking about the issue of lack of understanding amongst the Christians. They had the limited capacity to understand who they were as Christians, because as Christians they were not supposed to sin. Because the sin they had before joining Christianity was dead in them. They had new life. They had a new identity. They had to behave according to their identity, but they did not behave like that. They just behaved like any other member of the community. They hardly recognized that they were a different people who had been set apart from the community to be children of God, with a new standing in society to influence the community in a positive way. Paul had to remind them. Because of the false teachings that were present, he had to teach them and to have them to understand what they did not know. They did not know that they were no longer supposed to sin because they were Christians. Teaching a congregation is very important, because out of that it clarifies some of the misunderstandings that people may have, or maybe falsehood that may exist. And people need to understand.

When we read Jeremiah, Jeremiah was dealing with a situation where the Israelites had been exiled. But then we had the prophets coming up with information. And one of the information they relate was about the oracles of God, what God was speaking to the communities. But Hananiah comes in the context in which Jeremiah is conveying the message to us, pretending to be better than Jeremiah and other prophets, with false information about the context of the exiles. And he spoke, and Jeremiah noticed that he did not spoke with mandate from God, that he did not even depend on Yahweh. He was speaking out of what he only wanted people to speak, because Jeremiah said if it is a prophet of God may it be so, that what he speaks about peace be realized. But when we read further in Jeremiah, the text that we read, we find that after two to three days after speaking that, Hananiah died because he was a false prophet.

The psalmist, in the text that we read, talks about lamenting about a situation where there's defeat of the nation. After having been defeated, the psalmist talks about some of the negative things, but at the same time remembers that God is still good. Talks about the steadfast love of God. Talks about the strength of God, and an encouragement to ask, for instance in the context in which we are or we find ourselves in.

The gospel that we read, Matthew, talks about how we could or we should as Christians relate with other people. I like what Pastor Meagan said: we have to be intentional in our relationship. In our justice we have to be intentional. In our actions we have to be intentional. So that it's not just doing it for the sake of it, but we are doing something out of good intention, and we are doing that at the back of our mind, we're doing a service to God and service to humanity.

As we speak today, we find ourselves in the world as the exiles. We are exiled now — the entire world because of the COVID-19 context. But in our context we hear many voices. Voices that are true, and other voices that do not bring a clear meaning to how best we can understand the situation in which we find ourselves in. We find ourselves in compromised situations. For instance, in the exile in which we are, the homes that we live in, it was very surprising when I read that in Ethiopia that some fathers — a hundred fathers — violated their own girls. They impregnated their own, a hundred girls. This is within the home. It's supposed to be a safe space for the girls. We also find that in Uganda more than 89 girls are now expecting, because of the moral decay in society. We also find that in Kenya, where I come from, in one community, one county, we have 2,789 girls who are expecting now. What do we make of this in the exile? Is it gendercide? Is it something that is positive to the girls? No, I wouldn't say it's positive, because they will become mothers at the age of 14, 13, and 15. I'll say it's also interfering with their education; they will not move on.

But the context in which we find ourselves, we find ourselves reacting in anger. We have bad relationships with others. We find ourselves hating other people for no good reason. For instance, you find people passing by, but inside you feel so bad about the people. We are hostile to one another. We are hostile to ourselves, to an extent of even ending our own lives. The exile we find in ourselves, we find that there is a lot of greed going on. People want many things for themselves. Is that what Paul would recommend for our church today? No, absolutely not. Because this is not in line with the will of God. God wills that we have things that promote life. And in the newness that we have as members of our church, we shouldn't have broken relationships. In the newness that we have as a church, we should have a spiritual connection with our God, so that out of the connectedness we have with God then, that can flow to the next person who is near us. We do not have to be a church and witness all that is going on without coming up like Jeremiah did, without saying something like the psalmist, without uttering something like the gospel. We have to show up. And how can we show up? We can show up in our intentions, in our relatedness, in our ministries, in our prayer life, so that we make a difference as members of the Christian church.

Three things we can learn from the message of today, as I conclude: the Bible, from the book of Romans, the letter to the Romans, Paul is telling us not to sin anymore because sin does not reign. We should not have anger. We should not be frustrated to an extent of hurting other people. We should not be arrogant in the way we relate with other people. We should have total allegiance to God, because the grace of God gives us power over sin. And when we conquer sin we become the children of God with a new identity.

The second thing we are supposed to learn from this lesson is, we understand that we are new. When we are new, we give out new life. The old is gone. When we remember our baptism and the vows we made at baptism, we are supposed to remain committed and give our loyalty and allegiance to God and Jesus Christ, so that out of the newness we can breathe newness in the society which is hurting, in the society which has bad relationships.

The third thing we can also learn is to remain realigned to God. How can we remain realigned if we have things that have been wrong with us? Let us repent of the things that make us have a broken

spiritual relationship with God. Let us repent so that we can receive through the grace the power to live on and influence the surrounding that we have, from within ourselves to the families that we meet in, so that we can transform and liberate — through love, the love of God — so that we can transform and liberate through our outreach as a church, through the care and also the material support, in the patience that we're supposed to have, the endurance with others, the concern we have over what is happening.

Let us show up. When we show up with love, with care, with compassion, it will bring a difference. And I know that as a church we have been doing a lot. We shouldn't stop. Because we are doing, we should even add more. Because when we have abundance of love, we have the abundance of care. When we have sound judgment, many things will go right. We remain rooted in Christ and depend only on God, so that our negative passions which become sin in us are conquered.

I believe that today, as we go out in the community, God will help us. May he help us that we go out in the community to show up for ourselves when we need people too, or shoulders to lean on. May we show up for those that are marginalized, those that need shoulders of the church. May we show up, those that are in dire situations, so that out of the gifts that we share that it can bring transformation and newness of life. May we give life that is affirming. May we give life that is God-glorifying.

In the name of God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

*** Keywords ***

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