



EASTER MESSAGE FROM THE OFFICE OF THE PRINCIPAL 2022

“Victims of Forsakenness and Hope Draped in Remembrance”

In addition to the pandemic, the wars, climate change, violence and abuses have intensified the unkindness on the victims of forsakenness around the world. We thought we have moved on, but many are still stuck in the unbearable period of forsakenness, *trapped* in the pandemic tomb, immersed in an unbearable pause between *death* and *life*, the *old normal* and the *new normal*, unable to really see and experience what resurrection feels like. In the world of forsakenness, what is unbearable is not so much the pain of living but rather the pain of being *made invisible* and *utterly unremembered* while living. The gospel of Matthew (chapters 26-28) invites us to hear for ourselves the *loud cry* of the victims of forsakenness, and to see the potential to reinvigorate hope draped in remembrance.

Jesus, the “innocent blood” according to Judas (27:4), himself became a victim of forsakenness. In the story, the voice of the forsaken (Jesus) is drowned by the sounds of violence; the stripping, the mocking, the spitting, including the echoes of being “struck on the head again and again” and “divided up his clothes” (27:28-35) incurred by the powerful and those who work for them. Today, sounds of war machines and political diplomacy easily drown the cries of the victims of poverty and violence. Just like the focus on the desperate cry for help from the many victims of the Ukraine war (and other wars) was immediately diverted to a “slap that was heard around the world” when Will Smith violently hit Chris Rock on live Television.

“*Jesus cried out in a loud voice, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me*” (27:46) unfortunately that *loud voice* of forsakenness was not enough to *turn heads* until the Earth (through an earthquake) took over and became the voice of the victim (27:51), capturing the attention of many including the highest-ranking military officer who confessed “he is the son of God” (27:54). However, it is important to remember that there were still those who “suffered a great deal” (27:19) in solidarity with the forsaken Jesus, such as Pilate’s wife and the women although their voices were also drowned.

Today every time the victims of forsakenness “cry out in a loud voice”, they are either brushed aside and forsaken or deemed to be “leading a rebellion” as Jesus said to those who arrested him in Gethsemane (26:55). West Papua, Kanaki, Maohi nui, and many indigenous peoples of Pasifika have “cried out in a loud voice” for decades regarding state-sanctioned human rights abuses, ecological exploitation, and systemic violence only to be forsaken. Forsakenness is deepened when our future, which is meant to be decided by us, is decided by a Pilate or a Caiaphas in a palace somewhere.

Today the Earth, the most forsaken victim of all, has also cried out loud through natural disasters and climate change, enough to *turn heads* but not enough to *turn hearts* which is why sometimes such a voice is nervously applauded but silently dismissed. Especially if we are obsessed with the question such as the one asked by Judas, “What are you willing to give me if I deliver him

over to you?” (26:15). A question of profit and returns that forms the basis of deals and agreements that has unfortunately turned divine-gifted green lands into tomb-like deserts, un-gifting the future generation of the gift of life they deserve.

During the pandemic people had been helplessly “watching from a distance” as the women did during Jesus’ crucifixion (27:55) while strangers bury their loved ones. The pain of the restriction to embrace is much deeper than the pain caused by the wounds of losing a loved one. However, the resurrection invites us to put our hopes again in the memory of community and relationships. The women who were “watching from a distance” were “greeted” by Jesus after the resurrection and in return the women “clasped his feet” (28:9). A sign of shifting from “watching from a distance” into “embracing the distanced.”

Remembrance is a form of self-emergence. Through remembrance we shift the crucifixion narrative from making our children recipients of an undeserved curse, “his blood is on us and on our children” (27:25) into making them recipients of unreserved grace.

Communities are constantly birthed through intergenerational memories. Jesus reminded his disciples when they shared a meal on that night to “*do this in remembrance of me.*” This is not just a sacramental axiom. It is a movement to a vision of a new community that is built on the memory of the old. “We are what we remember,” Albert Wendt reminds us. Rivers remember to create streams so they can carry the river source wherever they flow. The ocean remembers to lower its tide to remind us of what is beneath water so that we may tread carefully. Indigenous people remember to carry the land “in” them so they cannot wound it.

Easter is not just another annual liturgical celebration. It is a transformative movement of hope that finds its cadence in the yearning for new life. A framework of resilience for victims of forsakenness to be *utterly remembered*. It begins with an unreserved response to the question, do we remember the victims of forsakenness behind the façade of disregard, or do we only disregard them behind the façade of remembrance?

At the resurrection morning, the women remembered the dead. They remembered where Jesus was buried. They remembered his face. They remembered to worship him. They remembered the way to run back home *from the tomb*. They remembered to be joyful in the midst of nervousness. The disciples remembered to assemble again as a family for one last time to meet Jesus in a mountain in Galilee. Thus, the resurrection ushers in a new community based on the audacity to remember the dead *who live*, our roots, our relationships, our way back home. It is a community that remembers others in our walk while others walk with us in their remembrance. This is hope draped in remembrance. It is one that openly and gently walks forward to the unknown by confidently walking backwards to the known. This memory will help us roll stones from tombs, produce arsenals of hope, and dream change.

Manuia le Eseta!

Upolu Lumā Vaai
Principal
11th April 2022