

The Good News

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Lent in Zimbabwe

In her sermon on the First Sunday of Lent, Margaret Schwarzer began:

“Luke’s scripture (Luke 4:1-13) asks us to move from the lush comfort of the Jordan River to the dry and challenging landscape of the wilderness. We are asked to move from an oasis to a barren moonscape of rocky outcroppings and stunted trees. In Epiphany, we heard the text of Jesus’ baptism in the Jordan: the spirit descends like a dove, and a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my son, my chosen one in whom I am well pleased.’

“‘After his baptism, Jesus...returned from the Jordan and was led by the Holy Spirit into the wilderness, where for 40 days he was tempted by the devil.’ The Spirit brought Jesus into the wilderness to confront an arid landscape and to engage life’s darker forces. What is being tested here is Jesus’ own capacity for suffering, his ability to resist the easy and egocentric choices and his ability to endure hardship. This passage sets us up to understand that Jesus’ confrontation with the devil will carve him into a different sort of person than he was when he frolicked in the Jordan.”

In rereading these excerpts, I am reminded of the current plight of the faithful members of our sister parish, St. Luke’s in Greendale Parish, Harare, Zimbabwe, who were locked out of their church at Christmas. By way of background, there continues a so-called power-sharing agreement between Zimbabwe’s President Robert Mugabe and Morgan Tsvangiri, the former opposition leader. Among the Mugabe loyalists are the Zimbabwe Republic Police (ZRP) and Nolbert Kunonga, who was the Anglican Bishop of the Harare Diocese until he was ousted following a split in the church early last year. As described in *The Zimbabwe Times* earlier this month, Kunonga, “incurred the wrath of the majority of Zimbabwe’s Anglican community when he withdrew his diocese from the Anglican Church’s Province of Central Africa, ostensibly in protest at the tolerance of homosexuality by Anglicans in the United Kingdom and the United States.”

Kunonga was replaced by Bishop Sebastian Bakare. However, Kunonga still enjoys the tactical support of Mugabe loyalists. ZRP officers are said to be still patronizing church establishments throughout Harare and physically preventing members of the mainstream congregation led by Bakare from using church property despite a High Court order. The *Times* quoted Elizabeth Chimwe of St. Luke’s: “Our group has the support of three quarters of the people who were part of the united Anglican Church but now we have to leave a church with a seating capacity of about 200 to a group of 38 people just because we have no political muscle.”

Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams, head of the Anglican Communion, and The Most Reverend John Sentamu, Archbishop of York, discuss the oppression and suffering in a larger context. In their February 7 article in *The Guardian* (UK) newspaper entitled, “Our Vital Contribution in Zimbabwe; The Anglican Church in Zimbabwe has an uneven record. But now we are leading reconstruction,” they write:

“At the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Morgan Tsvangirai was one of those present to represent Zimbabwe, a reminder that the fragile power-sharing arrangement brokered just a year ago still survives. But it would be a brave person who took this as a sign that Zimbabwe was moving steadily towards anything like political normality or full economic recovery. Some urgent humanitarian matters have been addressed, especially in relation to the freedom of NGOs to deliver essential services. But education remains in chaos, and disease – including HIV rates and measles infection – is on the rise; last year’s cholera epidemic is over, but this year’s rains will bring new risks. The number of doctors in the country is tiny, with all routine health services seriously depleted.

“One sign of dysfunctionality and oppression is the continuing level of harassment of Anglican Christians in Harare and elsewhere. Some congregations were locked out of their churches at Christmas;

church members are threatened, attacked and beaten. The election of several new bishops with a clear and courageous commitment to the welfare of their people is provoking the disgraced and ousted former church leadership to continue the tactics of violent intimidation that led to their alienation from the wider church and eventual removal. That violence is actively supported by the police, despite court judgments in favour of the new leadership. In one diocese, the former bishop and his small group of associates still have a stranglehold on property, so that no funds are available to pay stipends for the legitimate clergy.

“But in the middle of all this – with legal costs threatening to cripple their work – Anglicans in Zimbabwe have become vital contributors to sustaining and rebuilding the social fabric. A year ago, the archbishops of Canterbury and York launched their appeal for Zimbabwe. It has so far raised nearly half a million pounds from the Church of England. This money, administered through USPG: Anglicans in World Mission, has enabled the Anglican church in Zimbabwe to increase its already extensive development work – HIV care, rural clinics, training in sustainable farming practices, feeding programmes delivered through schools, often in close partnership with local government and NGOs. The Nets for Life programme, funded by the Episcopal church in America, is widespread in the country. No less importantly, various dioceses sponsor healing and reconciliation initiatives, with drama and music workshops for young people in both rural and urban settings.

“The church's record in Zimbabwe has been uneven, especially in the shameful period of uncritical support for Mugabe from leaders like the former bishop of Harare. But things have changed. Last year, the churches jointly offered a framework for confronting and dealing with the buried traumas of many decades in a country that has seen more than its share of violence and corruption. And in October 2009, the Roman Catholic bishops' conference of Zimbabwe published a pastoral letter on national healing which gave an impressively comprehensive analysis of the country's ills and spelled out what the churches could provide. Anglican churches in particular have been at the forefront of establishing counselling centres where people can speak about their sufferings, and education programmes that open new possibilities. (Editor: See the article below on the Zimbabwe Artists Project to learn how one man is making a difference.)

“Unless government adopts something like this framework, Zimbabwe is doomed to another round of trauma and destitution. There are still those who say – as some of the discussion about aid for Haiti has shown – that churches are not the best vehicle for delivering aid, because they have an "agenda" to advance. This is nonsense – and dangerously unrealistic nonsense. In societies where the main civil society networks are closely bound to the life of the churches, it is self-defeatingly foolish to bypass their systems. The "agenda" of the churches in contexts like this is simply the restoration of human dignity and stability in a deeply damaged society. No one else is there to do it.

“A year on from the launch of the archbishops' appeal and a year on from the power-sharing agreement, Zimbabwe still suffers acutely. We in the UK need to be clear about the urgency of supporting those working for basic human dignities and struggling to build social capital for the future through their work in counselling and reconciliation.”

Zimbabwe and the Anglican Church are being put to the test, just as Jesus was and just as we are during Lent. Schwarzer instructs us that “Jesus' confrontation with the devil will carve him into a different sort of person than he was when he frolicked in the Jordan. This story, with its temptations of hunger, power and security, is an archetypal moment for both Jesus and our own human condition. Here, Jesus struggles with the limits of his own humanity, as do we, when we contend with our own hunger, and our own longings for control, power and security.” It is also an archetypal moment for Zimbabwe, the Anglican Church and the parishioners of St. Luke's.

Let us pray that we may find new ways in this season of Lent to support our brothers and sisters in Christ in Zimbabwe, and that the country and the Anglican Church can be reconciled and reconstructed to provide a future of hope, peace, economic and political stability and a measure of prosperity. Amen

—Tim Green (with research assistance from Denise Flanagan)

The Zimbabwe Artists Project

In its literature, ZAP is defined as a non-profit organization that assists Zimbabwean artists to become increasingly self-reliant and to improve the health and quality of their lives. In reality it is the odyssey of a visionary named Dick Adams, who is an example of one man making a difference in Zimbabwe by keeping a community of female artists and their families in rural Weya afloat. Thanks to Andrea Gordon, many of us were able to meet Dick some years ago and support his program.

ZAP's business model is elegant in its simplicity. Dick travels to Weya and accumulates indigenous art, usually fabric wall hangings decorated with appliqué and painting that are designed to tell the story of the artist. He brings the art to the U.S. where he sells it at fair market value through a network of individuals and organizations that host art exhibits. When he has accumulated \$10,000 (the maximum amount of cash one can take out of the U.S.), he travels to Weya, pays the artists, many of whom are AIDS-afflicted, single mothers, and procures another inventory of art. ZAP's involvement has grown over the years to include supporting the communities in which the artists live and work, including providing school fees for orphans, textbooks for schools and helping to finance clean water projects.

The following is an excerpt from a ZAP newsletter: "In almost a decade of decline, every year has brought the question 'how much further down can things go?' This year has outdone any previous one... a harvest that has almost completely failed, giving people no clear sense of where they can turn for food; an annual inflation rate in the multi-millions of percents (which means that saving money—if you have anything to save—is the most foolish thing you can do); thousands of people leaving their jobs because their salaries don't pay enough for them to get to work; hospitals without simple painkillers or sterile tubes for taking samples....salt, cooking oil, sugar and soap available at black market rates and only in U.S. dollars." The date of the newsletter was 2008. Things have only gotten worse. For information on how to help, visit www.zimbabweartistsproject.org.

Lenten Adult Forum Series on Lent's Spiritual Landscape on Sundays through March 21 at 11:15 a.m. in the Chapter Room

In our Ash Wednesday Liturgy, our Book of Common Prayer invites us "in the name of the Church to the observance of a holy Lent, by self-examination." This year, we will live out that invitation by exploring Lent's spiritual landscape together during our Adult Forum starting at 11:15 a.m. Please join us to reflect on the theme of the week and discover its relevance for our 21st century daily living: February 28, *Yearning, Temptation and Sin*; March 7, *Prayer*; March 14, *Forgiveness*; March 21, *Practicing Resurrection*.

For those who missed the first Adult Forum, we are providing the following Executive Summary of the *Fasting and Silence* class:

Fasting does not have to feel like an ancient anachronistic relic of the Medieval Church. There are important ways for us as 21st century Christians to learn from the experience of fasting. Here are four ways to engage fasting's transformational opportunities.

- We are not "brains on a stick." Fasting can help to teach us that, unlike modern secular expectations, we are not meant to shovel food into our mouths with the same disinterest and boredom which we use when we are filling our cars at the gas station. We are not machines in need of fuel; we are not fleshy versions of a machine which needs to be filled in order to function. We are mammals and we are meant to engage our food. Our bodies are made in the image of God, and eating is meant to be a physical and spiritual pleasure. Eating less can remind us of more spiritual ways to consume what we do have.
- Food is meant to be delicious. Our food comes from God's good creation. Abstaining from food in a fast can invite us to remember that eating is a sensual pleasure. We are meant to feel hunger, enjoy our food and pay attention. Fasting for a day or from a particular kind of food can remind us of the simple pleasures in paying attention to what we are eating. When you eat dinner, don't forget to notice what it tastes like. Consider eating one cookie, and really noticing what it tastes like, rather than scarfing down four without

being attentive to what you are eating. We are to offer gratitude in response to the good food in God's creation.

- Food is sometimes used by us as a distraction from our own emotions, particularly emotions of loneliness or anger. If you give up something sweet – like chocolate- as I do, it might be interesting for you to pay attention to the times you crave it. Is it during a great chat with a friend, a way to add festivity to your life? Is it when you are anxious or tired, stuffing your feelings that you don't have time for with a candy bar? Is it a method of consolation when you are sad? Please be gentle with yourself. If you give up a comfort food in your life, please be kind to yourself as you sit with whatever emotions might be presenting themselves. God will have a chance to break into your life in a new way.
- Claiming God as a priority over food is a visceral reminder of who and what you value, and what their proper order of importance actually is. To fast is to find a chance to remind ourselves that food (for a day of fasting) or one particular kind of food is LESS important than our commitment to GOD. It is very obvious and simple from the head; it is very significant and meaningful—and harder—from the gut. I know that I love God more than I love chocolate, but every year for the past ten or twelve years, I have been physically demonstrating that fact to myself during Lent, and it feels significant because I live it, I don't just "think" it.
—The Rev. Margaret Schwarzer

Prayer List

Prayers are asked for Bishop Bud Cederholm, Beulah, Brian, Darlene, David, Don, Dorothy, Elisabeth, Elizabeth, Georgi, Henry, Jennifer, Jerri, Jon, Joshua, June R., The Walter Kennedy Family, Kenneth, Kurt, Liz, Margaret, Mary Ellen, Pat, Peter, Sally and Vince.

Upcoming Events

Rabbi-in-Residence Ronald Weiss will preach at a service of Morning Prayer this Sunday at 10:00 a.m.

WSM All Parish Pot Luck Dinner, Friday, March 5 at 6:00 p.m. to Feature Magician Bonaparte

Attend and enjoy renowned magician Bonaparte as he dazzles us with his unique and interactive style of magic. As a leading magician in the entertainment industry, Bonaparte is sure to amaze all of us with his unique blend of magic, comedy, balloon sculptures and much more! A favorite of children of all ages! 6:00 p.m. – Appetizers: All are welcome to come and enjoy a pre-show snack while Bonaparte meanders, creating magic wherever he steps! 6:40 p.m. – Show begins. 7:15 p.m. – Dinner served. Come early for the show and stay for dinner. Not certain your kids can stay up past 8? Come fed and in PJs and stay just for the show. If you have any questions, please contact Kathy Acuna at 781-235-5860/kathyacuna@yahoo.com, Julie Gilbert at j_gilbert@globe.com or Kathryn Quirk at quirkpr@gmail.com.

Wellesley Interfaith Food Drive for the Month of March

During the past 18 months, the Wellesley Food Pantry has seen a significant increase in demand for their services. More than 200 families are in need of help. Starting Sunday, February 28, in a town-wide effort, 12 houses of worship will be collecting designated items. (St. Mary's has been assigned vegetable oil and mayonnaise.) For more information, contact Elisabeth Comer at ewcomer@verizon.net.

Diocesan Healthcare Mission Trips Planning Meeting in Parish Hall on Saturday, April 10 at 10:00 a.m.

The diocese's *Global Mission Partnership Task Force* and *Samaritans Now*, an Episcopal medical relief program, are hosting an informational meeting for any and all healthcare professionals interested in participating in a mission trip. Planning is underway for healthcare mission trips in 2010 and 2011 to the Caribbean, West Bank and Africa. The meeting takes place on Saturday, April 10, 10 a.m., at St. Mary's. Attendance will help participants develop a vision for what is involved in this type of trip, learn more about details of participation as a member of a medical team and discern whether or not it is the right commitment for them. For more information: The Rev. Ted Gaiser, Global Mission Partnership Task Force at 617-782-1577 or tgaiser@diomass.org.

Editor: Tim Green