

**BREAK THE CHAINS OF INJUSTICE**  
**Sermon for Opening Worship**  
**CANAAC/CANACOM Assembly**  
**St. Andrews Kirk, Georgetown, Guyana**  
**February 25, 2008**

**Scripture Lessons: Isaiah 58: 1-9a**  
**John 10: 7-10**

- I. “This is the day that the Lord has made. Let us rejoice and be glad in it!”
  - A. Grateful for the warm welcome by churches in Guyana (cold where many of us come from!). In our prayers – a vital part of our fellowship.
  - B. Great occasion – CANAAC and CANACOM coming together in joint assembly
  - C. Two great impulses of Reformed tradition - unity and justice and partnership in mission. Belong together – like hand and foot in body of Christ.
  - D. Critical theme for our time together: break the chains of injustice
  - E. Very important on this “Day of Mourning” in Guyana in response to the recent violence – important time to reflect on God’s word of peace and justice as our hearts go out to our brothers and sisters in Guyana.
  
- II. This theme and focus on justice not new for Reformed Christians – part of our DNA
  - A. Calvin 500 years ago. Laboratory in Geneva. Sovereignty of God. Sanctification. Faith and life.
  - B. Journey in WARC
    - 1. Ottawa – apartheid as heresy

2. Seoul – JPIC
3. Debrecen – Break the Chains of Injustice (voice of global south)
4. Accra – slave castles (never again!) – Covenanting for Justice in the Economy and the Earth/Accra Confession

### C. Critical issue for North America and Caribbean

1. Where 1<sup>st</sup> world meets 3<sup>rd</sup> world
2. Imbalances of rich and poor –within an between countries
3. In the belly of the beast

III. Our region has many parallels to what Isaiah found in Judah after return from exile.

- A. Experiencing a religious revival – mega churches in every city, prosperity gospel, politicians claiming religious values – all the while injustice rampant, no connection faith and life, violence and oppression a daily reality.
- B. Isaiah very clear that this religious revival not something to be praised, but contrary to God’s will.
- C. Called instead for a different kind of fast – one that would deal with the systems of injustice and the compassionate ministry of the people of God.
- D. Called on people of Israel to break the chains of injustice, to lose the yoke, to let the oppressed go free – to take prophetic leadership to change the systems that cause so many to suffer
- E. But to not only deal with principalities and powers, but also to feed the hungry, house the homeless, care for the destitute – to combine compassion and justice as to sides of the same coin.
- F. Clear that these were vital elements of true religious revival – and God’s plan for our life.

- G. This kind of religious expression key to living out Christ's promise that all might have life in fullness. (God's ultimate promise – sealed in Christ's resurrection/vision of Rev. 21)
- IV. Much in common between situation in Judah and Caribbean/North America – and God's word through Isaiah is God's word to us.
- A. Time to reclaim breaking chains of injustice as core calling
  - B. Time for Reformed churches – with a great tradition of being God's agents of transformation to take the lead.
- V. Sometimes easier to see how important this core calling is in a situation different from your own. Harder to see realities at doorstep with which you have grown comfortable.
- A. Had such an experience earlier this month – asked to lead delegation to Kenya – tipping point situation to disaster. (explain situation)
  - B. Important to have Reformed leader – Reformed churches so prevalent (Rift Valley one of most Reformed regions in world!) and Reformed people part of problem – Presbyterian and Reformed killing one another.
  - C. Incredible experience – met churches, political leaders, interfaith, women, most of all people who suffered and angry.
  - D. “About as easy to understand as Northern Ireland”
- VI. At one level problem was clear – tribal/ethnic conflict. In reality a symptom of much deeper problems
- A. Flawed elections – both sides claimed others more abuses. Political leaders for whom ends justified the means – lack of integrity in public life.
  - B. Colonial – favored Kikuyus with land. Need for land reform.

C. Rich/poor gap one of largest in world – deep injustice at the heart of the crisis.

D. Churches organized and at home along ethnic lines – part of problem

VII. Problems not much different from our own. Wake up call for Kenyan churches – and for us!

A. Clear for Kenyan church that if future for people, churches must take prophetic leadership for integrity, justice and reconciliation. Same for us!

B. A Kenyan, who knew PCUSA well, remarked being called to “be a living demonstration of what God intends for all humanity.”

C. Failure to be about breaking chains of injustice has put things at the “boiling point” in Kenya. Not much beneath that for us, and Kenya is an important warning to us of the consequences of waiting too long for our churches to be about ministries of integrity, justice and reconciliation.

D. This was Isaiah’s message to Israel, and God’s message to churches in Kenya and to us in CANAAC and CANACOM and our churches.

VIII. God is calling us to proclaim and live the good news of the gospel:

- That in Jesus Christ all might have life and have it abundantly
- That in Christ there is no Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, but that all can one
- That God intends food for the hungry, a cup of cold water for the thirsty, and a world filled with compassion,
- That in the power of God’s love even the chains of injustice can be broken and swords can be beat into plowshares and spears into

pruning hooks and the world can know peace.

IX. May God's richest blessings be with us as we seek to be faithful to that high calling!