

**Bishop Ambrose Moyo's Sermon  
November 9, 2008  
Good Shepherd Lutheran Church  
11:15am  
Matthew 25:1-13**

Grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

I want to begin by bringing greetings from your sister parish in Zimbabwe at Mnene, and also from Annie. They know I am here today and that I am preaching to you, and that we will be talking about them, and about our relationship with one another. They have said to me, "Please convey our greetings. We are aware that they are celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary; let them know that we rejoice with them. Let them know we are praying for them, even if we are far away. Through the power of the Spirit we are together; Christ will journey with us together." Annie in particular says that she remembers very fondly her visit and her stay with you here. She enjoys the memories of friends, brothers, sisters during her stay here; and she said I must greet you. I also should greet you on behalf of the Bishop of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, who is aware that I am here, also, and is very much appreciative and grateful of the partnership in ministry between you and the Mnene Parish.

Well, when they heard I was coming here, the people at Mnene said, "Well, take the time to share with them our joys, to share with them our situation." And I said, "Yes, I will." And so I'm grateful for the opportunity; and as I read through these texts, right through the Gospel which concludes saying *keep awake therefore for you know neither the day nor the hour*. The question is, in the situation in which we, the people at Mnene find ourselves, and the people in Zimbabwe as a whole find ourselves, how do we keep awake? How do we keep focused...focused on those things that do matter in the eyes of God? In the midst of the pain, in the midst of the hardships, in the midst of the hunger and the starvation, in the midst of the deaths that we are experiencing on a daily basis, how do you keep awake, how do you remain focused?

Well, it's possible even to slumber even when you are celebrating, because you can easily focus, you know, on the wrong thing, and forget actually the foundation and the basis upon which you have all that joy and that celebration.

I was invited this afternoon to a celebration for the election of your new President. I said, "Yes, I will come with you. I will celebrate with you." Well, what will we celebrate? I said, "Your democracy is working." You know, I went to bed the night of your elections. I had to make a decision whether I'm going to stay glued to that television, to CNN, or to BBC, or even to Al Jazeera—everywhere, wherever you went, it was the American election. Then I said, "No, I need to go to work the following day; but I will get up right in time to learn the results, when hopefully they will summarize them." And when I got up, it was just the time when McCain was delivering his concession speech. And it was wonderful. And the question we all had was, "Is Mugabe watching this?" You know, in our situation you don't concede defeat. You refuse to leave. But where are we not learning from others—graciously conceding defeat and pledging support. I

said, "That's something to celebrate!" Even if you voted for McCain, that's something you can celebrate for, you can thank God for. But in the midst of all that celebration, it's possible to lose focus. You know, somebody said to me, "Obama is probably going to be one of the most powerful Presidents that the United States has had." With all the Congress, the Senate, it's possible to lose focus, and the Americans can lose focus.

And you know from experience, you have also at times lost focus. So how do we stay focused, how do we stay awake? And the people at Mnene are saying, How do we stay awake, how do we stay focused? ( in a situation where) right here at Mnene with a big hospital , a big high school, a big primary school,— there is a mission farm—but what do we experience at Mnene? People going hungry, no food. And it's not just at Mnene, it's throughout the country. And you start to say, "What has happened to Zimbabwe, which used to be called the bread basket of the region?" Hard-working people, being able to produce their own food, and to share it with others. But today reduced to a country where people are just starving.

You walk in the hospital—today you will see few patients. Not that there are not people who are sick. This is a hospital that is a District Hospital, a referral hospital. I was with a doctor, the medical superintendent, just before I came here, of Mnene Hospital. She was saying, "We can no longer afford to keep patients in our wards, So we are discharging people who actually should be kept in the hospital. Why? Because we have no food. Why? Because we have no drugs. Even painkillers, we just don't have any." She says "The last time we were in the operating theater was three months ago." How do you operate without anesthesia? How do you operate without the necessary tools that you need to use in that theater—without even the gloves—they're just not there. So the result is people are dying who actually should not be dying. They are dying of starvation helped by a poor, collapsed health system.

You go to the school—a lot of schools have had to close down because children are coming to school hungry, collapsing. You know, we just had a consultation with the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe—the leadership from the church, the schools, the hospitals, the pastorate—and all of them told stories of their experiences. We heard stories of sisters—nurses—in the hospitals fainting because they have not had anything to eat. You are not just talking of children. We have heard stories of teachers leaving their schools to go and spend days looking for food.

Initially I thought when I saw it on television—I am based more in Johannesburg, and I travel in the region—just to see supermarkets that used to be full to the brim, just to see empty shelves, empty fridges—I said, "this is not true. It cannot happen to Zimbabwe." But when I got there I found that's exactly what the situation is.

Well, the consultation that we had in Bulawayo, in Zimbabwe, with partners from overseas—ELCA was represented, the LWF was represented, and a few other partners—we were saying to the church, "We are a world-wide Lutheran family. How can we walk with you? How can we accompany you in these very difficult days?" They shared with us their stories, very moving stories, and we ended up asking them to make an appeal. And I'm sure you will hear more about that appeal from the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe.

I have been working not only with the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, but with other ecumenical churches. And each time we have met with church leaders, the number one issue has been food. Priority number one. And priority number two we have the

medical services. And we have decided as church leaders that we have got to confront this food issue head-on. And we have said we must not allow this thing to continue, because Zimbabweans are able to grow their own food. They have the capacity to do it. But unfortunately there is no seed. We have met with the people in government about three weeks ago. In desperation, they told us very openly that, "We just don't have the seed, and we don't even have the resources to buy the seed where it is available." And they have said, "Churches, if you can help us, we would be very grateful, because you are doing a service to the people of Zimbabwe, and also to the region as a whole."

And so we decided as a priority—this is the farming season right now. Rains are falling now. Without seed, what happens? The cycle will continue. They won't be able to grow enough food. So we have taken it upon ourselves as church leaders to say, "Wherever we are, we will talk about it." You know, it's not a good thing to always talk about yourself and your situation. A lot of us are getting embarrassed and ashamed talking about Africa all the time. We think we have solved 'this' problem, and all of a sudden something else comes, another thing comes. You get to a point where even those of us who are there sometimes feel, "Let's just give up this thing! It's not working." Then we say, "We can't give up! There are people there—people created in the image of God. We have a responsibility together. We have to continue working with the people at Mnene. We have to find ways of walking with the people of Zimbabwe as a whole."

How do they keep focused? How do they keep awake? That is the question I keep asking each time I go there. And the answer I get all the time is "By grace, God's grace alone. What God has done in Jesus Christ, the victory that He attained for us keeps us going." Even in situations of hopelessness, people continue to cling on that cross. And that is why it becomes important that as Christians in America, as the Body of Christ in Europe, the Body of Christ in the entire Southern Africa region, we have to continue to be that sign of hope to those who find themselves in the situation like the one in Zimbabwe.

The cry at the moment is for seed, for food. We have done our homework and we have found that the seed is available in South Africa. It's there; we need money to buy it. We did our homework and made our calculations. The next four months are critical. We need to get seed to the people. We need to get food as well. With \$500 US dollars we can provide the seed and sustain at least a household, a family for those four months, after which they will hopefully be able to harvest if the rains do come—unless there is some intervention from above. That is our target; and we feel it's manageable. We have tried to target, to help 200,000 families, as churches, all of us together in Zimbabwe. And all of us are going to our sister churches—Methodist, Anglican, Catholics, and say that we as churches want to help at least 200,000 families, and we need \$500 for each family. We think it's possible.

When one member suffers, we all suffer together. When one member rejoices, we rejoice together. Our work as Christians is out there, because Christ carried His cross—and it is that cross which brings salvation, which brings hope. We are the bearers of that hope. That's the challenge that comes to all of us: How do we walk with the people of Zimbabwe? How do we walk with the people a Mnene? How do we express our solidarity with them? There are a lot of things we can do. It's not just money. You may not have the money; but you know where the money is. If you become advocates for those people, then you have gone a long way to sustain that hope and to keep them focused. Advocate for them wherever you are. Advocate for

**them with your government. That's what we are saying to everyone—we are saying to the churches in the region, in Malawi, in Mozambique—please be the voice of those voiceless people. Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an everflowing stream. If you focus on justice, if you focus on peace, you remain in solidarity with the suffering. You know, this is what God wants us to do.**

**Amos says, 'Hey', you can sing, you can meet in churches, blow your horns, your trumpet, offer your sacrifices; but when there is no justice in this world, as a people of God, I will not even hear your prayers. I will not even notice the smell that comes from your sacrifices. It's worthless to me. This is the challenge. Let's find ways. Let's walk with those that are calling so that we can help them to stay focused, to remain awake until the Lord comes.**

**May the peace of God which passes all understanding be with us all, now and forevermore. Amen.**