

Micah 4:1-5/Ephesians 2:13-18/John 16:23-33

We give thanks to God this day as we remember women and men who have served and continue to serve God's creation during times war, conflict, and peace. The world talks about Remembrance Day but the Church talks about Peace Sunday. It appears as if these are different sides of the same coin, but the Church provides clarity as to why we remember, we seek to promote peace as stipulated in one of the Anglican Church's marks of mission, **"To seek to transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and to pursue peace and reconciliation"**. This year peace Sunday is coming amid serious tension within the wider Church. Serious tension in the United Methodist over the consecration of a gay Bishop Karen Oliveto, tension the Anglican Province of Central Africa over the excommunication of Bishop Brighton of Malawi. Its so worrisome when tension rocks the gatekeepers of peace, gatekeepers turned to be the gate-breakers. Tensions where there in the Church even during the time of Paul but at least they revolve around issues of faith e.g., gifts of the Holy Spirit but now tension is largely caused by lack of love of which love is the glue that brings us together as believers. Jim Hendrix would say, **"When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace"**. It my pleasure this morning to see Gladys, one of the founding members of this Parish in this service, its my pleasure also to see my predecessors in this service. This is a reflection of the amazing love that exist in this Parish as well as the amazing grace of God.

Now, I was listening to the prophet Micah, giving Israelites a message of hope, **"In days to come the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and shall be raised up above the hills"**. Friends, this prophecy is coming when Jerusalem is desolate, is in ashes and every Israelite had lost hope but God is speaking through Micah today that Jerusalem will rise again. Just on Thursday we were formally informed that St. Chad is closing and will be joining the congregation of St. Andrew, Woodhaven. This seem to be a normal trend these days but all things being equal we want to see new churches opening and not churches closing. When we think about the future of the Church in this fast-changing secular world we would have terrible stress. But if God managed to revive Jerusalem, raising it from ashes then he will not let

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his Church die. We worship a God who makes things happen especially to those who believe in him. So, let not our faith fail; **out of the ashes another phoenix shall arise.**

How amazing is it Gladys to realize that maybe 90% of those who you were with when you started this congregation are no longer here, but the congregation is still standing? What a gracious God! **Out of the ashes another phoenix shall rise.** How amazing is it friends that some of the good priest who ministered to you are no longer here but of all the people a Zimbabwean Priest who was not even born when this Church was established is now ministering to this Parish? **Out of the ashes, another phoenix shall rise.** If we do an honest audit of our lives, you will agree with me that if it was not of God's grace, majority of us would not have been here, some of us might not have been even alive. But we worship an amazing God, a God who make things happened, a **God who rises another phoenix from the ashes.**

I guess that no one ever imagined that there would be peace in ancient Israel. It was a war zone, war after war but God is speaking through Micah this morning, **"...all these swords you are seeing will be turned into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks"**. Thinking of what is happening in Ukraine right now, we do not see Ukraine rising again and becoming a descent country. But God is amazing, **from the ashes he will rise a phoenix.**

This is exactly the message of Paul to the Church in Ephesus, to the Gentle Christians, **"...you who were once far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ"**. In chapter 2, Paul listed six ways in which Gentiles were far off. **They were without respect, without Christ, without citizenship, without covenants, without hope and without God.** But God remembered them, **out of the ashes God will rise a phoenix.** A rabbinic writer tells of an incident that explains the common Jewish attitude toward Gentiles. He mentions that when Gentiles converted to Judaism, as they sometimes did, it was called **"being brought near."** A story is told of a certain Gentile woman who came to Rabbi Eleazar, confessed that she was sinful, and told him that she wanted to become righteous. She wanted to be accepted into the Jewish faith because she had heard that the Jews

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were near to God. The rabbi is said to have responded, **“No. You cannot come near,”** and then shut the door in her face. But friends, through the blood of Jesus, through the cross, you and I have freely and unconditionally accessed God’s grace. What a gracious God, a **God who rises a phoenix from the ashes.**

Jesus continues with the same teaching to the disciples in the Gospel of John, **“The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me. I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you will face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!”** Friends, we might be facing so many challenges, we might not have peace but let not our faith fail; **out of the ashes another phoenix shall arise.** Be that as it may, as Christians we are the custodian of peace so let’s keep in mind the words of Desmond Tutu, **“Do your little bit of good where you are; it is those little bits of good put together that overwhelm the world.”**
Amen.