

GOD IS CALLING US TO RECONCILIATION!
Healing for Renewal and Growth!

I am very happy I spoke to you last Sunday on “Living in Faith and Living in Love” – Two sides of one coin – The Christian Life.”

If anyone has not heard it or read it, there are copies available in church. In that sermon, I have summarised an important element of being a Church. And I would want all of you not to be stuck on any one favourite idea but to be open to the Spirit of God who wants to lead us forward to new horizons.

That is why January 24th is so very important for us as Church. It is a “God-send” and a providential blessing from the Lord. But, I would want all of us to be spiritually well prepared for that day.

There are important things that we ought to remember as we approach January 24th. Being members of the present Church Family we have a special and loving responsibility to welcome those who come on January 24th with an open heart and to make all of them completely at home. We must take that extra step, walk the extra mile, to make sure that each one meets each one especially during the service and later at the fellowship meal.

Over the years we have become complacent as a Church, considering ourselves a friendly Church but actually that may not be the case. We might, and sometimes do, be putting off some people by our wrong or incomplete idea of the Church.

The church is no one’s monopoly or property. It belongs to God. It belongs to All. Everyone has a right to belong to the church. The Church is not a “club”; in fact we have probably become something of a closed, exclusive club over the years. We hardly reach out into the community. We may have become like an island. Not even our neighbours who live across the road bother to come inside.

That is why 24th January is God’s way of telling us – “Come on folks! Open your eyes! Change direction! Be a renewed, revived, loving Church. Light a big bonfire of love and let it burn high and warm all those around!”

Let us not just care for each other only, but let us look out to reach out to others so that they feel at home with us. 6 months have passed since I challenged you to bring one other person along with you! How many have succeeded in doing that? (Raise your hands!)

It is very important we celebrate January 24th well as God wants us to.

So permit me to offer you some guidelines:

1. Please ring around and inform and invite those you know to come and celebrate with us this day of Reconciliation and Thanksgiving.
2. Pray! Pray! Pray! We can only prepare the ground; it is God who blesses! “Unless the Lord builds the house, in vain do the builders labour!”
3. January 24th is a big day for all of us to have a “new mind and a new spirit”; *it is a day to begin to see the Church in a new way – as a place of healing, reconciliation,*

peace, hope and as a place of “mission” – to proclaim the “good news” of God’s love and forgiveness.

4. **Reconciliation with the Earth.** God in Christ has reconciled the world to himself in Jesus Christ! *We must serve God’s plans and purposes for the Earth.* We must respect the earth, life, plants, air, water and the elements. We must do all we can to respect all life and reduce pollution of the environment and secure the future of our earth which is our home and the home for our children and grand children.
5. **Reconciliation with ourselves.** Each of us carry within our hearts life stories that only we and God know, some sad, some tragic, some painful, some happy, but mostly difficult. *January 24th is a time to forgive ourselves, to accept ourselves, that we are loved and forgiven by God, that God cares for us individually as persons* and it is time we live according to the precepts of God as Prophet Micah writes: *“Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God!”*
6. **Reconciliation with Others.** *Christianity is all about relationship and restoration.* It is about love and forgiveness. You may not like a person but you need to love that person in Christ. *Love is patient, kind, is not rude and does not remember wrongs* ((See 1 Corinthians 13. 1-13). So, *we must reach out to that brother and sister and sincerely offer not just the hand of friendship but a heart of love in Christ.*
7. **Reconciliation with God.** January 24th is above all about reconciling yourself with God. *It is about turning back to God. It is about going on a new path.* Each of us has got used to using God like as if he is some kind of useful hobby or something. January 24th is a day for us to turn to God and say with Peter, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of everlasting life!” Or like Thomas who at first doubted the resurrection of Jesus, but when he put his hands in the wounds of Jesus exclaimed, “My Lord and my God!” The more we receive forgiveness from God repeatedly (because we keep falling again and again!) the more we are able to share that forgiveness with each other.

There will be an opportunity for those who want to talk to a priest or member of the Healing and Prayer Ministry team. We’ll have limited time. So, please be the first to make use of the opportunity to seek a prayer, a blessing or to make a confession. I’d ask you to show example and to move fast so that those who come may be encouraged to do the same.

Please remember January 24th is the beginning for SMAAA to walk a new path and be a healed Church – a reconciling, a healing, a praying, a loving and servant Church, a Church that wants to offer hope to people. Please prepare yourselves well by prayer, fasting, mutual encouragement and support.

It has been so providential that the Lord inspired us to study the Letter to the Ephesians for the Home Groups at this time.

Chapter 1-3 of the Ephesians tells us of what God accomplished –

- (a) **Our salvation in Christ** (Chapter 1) through his blood that was shed on the cross and the grace, peace, redemption, faith, hope and love we have received in Christ. ‘We belong to God and to one another’ in the Christian community, the Church, the Body of Christ, God’s Temple.

(b) **Transforming salvation in Christ** (Chapter 2) different from the world. *It is not just faith that saves but unconditional love and grace in Christ!* This is an important message for us here at SMAAAA! Let us remember this message of Saint Paul to the Ephesians!

(c) **Inclusive salvation in Christ.** “Christ died for all!” “The Father cares for all!”

Chapter 4-6 speaks of what God imparts to us in Christ.

(a) **Unity** (Chapter 4. 1-32) – once again, we see here that although salvation is personal, it is not individualistic but is corporate, for example, ‘bearing with one another’ (4.2); ‘unity of the Spirit’ (4.30); ‘One body’ (v.4); ‘God’s people’, ‘the body of Christ’ (v.12); ‘held together’ (v. 16); ‘members of one body’ (v. 25); “be kind to one another”(v. 32)

The sins which are mentioned in this chapter are those which mar good relationships (for example, 4. 25-32). Believers in the Church are urged to put off their former life of ignorance, hardness, callousness, immorality, greed (vv. 18-19) and put on (vv.22-24) the new man of Christlikeness and godliness.

(b) **Love** (Chapter 5. 1- 6.9) – Christ-likeness – Life of love (chapter 5). The source of our love is Christ; Love’s standards challenge us. “If love reigns unhelpful things will be put away!”; love’s song is gratitude to God; love’s submission creates the home to be a haven of love and finally love is service of the other.

(c) **Courage** (Ch 6.10-24) The closing verses of the epistle reflect the theme of warfare. There is need for strength as well as compassion. We are soldiers as well as servants. The bible and prayer are indispensable aids to victory. The magnificent ‘little words’ of the gospel – peace, love, faith, grace – bring this superb epistle to a close. (cf. RB, 202-204)

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