



**World Council
of Churches**

Ecumenical Water Network



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**Lenten campaign “seven weeks for water”
Ecumenical prayer service on the eve of Ash Wednesday
Chiang Mai, Thailand
5 March 2019**

A pilgrimage of water justice in Asia

Reflection by Rt. Rev. Arnold c. Temple

President – All Africa Conference of Churches

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Co-chair – International reference group

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Text: Isaiah 55. 1

Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters...

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John 4. 7 Jesus said to her, “will you give me a drink?”

Please accept my greetings in the name of the Blessed Trinity – The Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. I feel sad that I am not able to be with you as a result of the challenges connected with issuance of visa and flight schedule. Nevertheless, I feel I am with you in spirit even as we celebrate and reflect together.

The importance of water in our lives cannot be overemphasized. No individual or community can survive without water. Scientists tell us that water makes up about sixty percent of our bodies and is essential for all of our bodily functions. If our food should properly digest and if the body temperature should be properly regulated, the intake of water should be adequate. Every organism needs water to survive. It is with water that our bodies flush out poisonous contaminants and regulate temperature to aid our metabolism. In fact, without water, life on Earth would have never begun. In Genesis 1. 20 we read, "...Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life..." The sequence of creation presented in that story seems to suggest that without water, there is no life – and that is scientifically so – without water, life does not exist. **Water is life.** Take water away from any community and that community is wiped out. Without water we cannot engage in

agricultural pursuit and produce food. We cannot grow our crops, we cannot rear our livestock.

Let me refer to the text of Isaiah 55 verse 1. As the period of the Babylonian exile drew to an end, the Prophet Isaiah, in our text, used the symbol of water to offer consolation to Israel and upholds the integrity of the covenant and the faithfulness of Yahweh to it. The invitation is to material and physical wellbeing and to spiritual blessings. The invitation is not limited to the Jewish covenant but a universal call - **'everyone'** – no exclusion; “everyone who thirsts’ come to the waters.” Yes, water is used symbolically here, representing the grace that God offers. However, this invitation calls on us to reflect on our world today where commercialisation of water is current. Water is a gift from God and it is for the general good of God’s people and should not be monopolised by greedy individuals.

The story of Jesus and the Samaritan woman is a very interesting episode. Jesus had to pass through Samaria and was alone and was thirsty. He was a stranger and he was vulnerable. Not too many Christians would like to talk of Jesus being vulnerable. Many prefer the powerful Jesus – the miracle worker who commanded nature. But whether you like it or not, we see here a vulnerable Jesus. And again, it is not always that you come across a woman in a position of power. It may shock you that I want to present the Samaritan woman in a position of power. In her position of power, she played on the vulnerability of Jesus. In his vulnerability, Jesus was alone and without help because his disciples were on assignment. He was both tired and thirsty yet with no means of drawing water from the well. Jesus opened up a conversation with the woman: **“will you give me a drink?”**

Usually, it was taboo for a Rabbi to talk to a woman in public. Friends, give it what interpretation you want – vulnerability knows no bounds – it knows no taboo. So we see the woman in the position of power, playing on the vulnerability of Jesus. She first played the political card – the ethnic card and even the gender card: “You are a Jew and I am a Samaritan woman. (Strong emphasis on **'woman'**). How can you ask me for a drink? The question asked by the Samaritan woman is very impactful. It plays on the prevailing political and social situation – the hostility of the Jews towards the Samaritans. She said in effect ‘If your race is so superior, why are you looking so vulnerable

and making a request to me – not only of an inferior race, but a woman for that matter? She drew attention to the fact that the well was deep and Jesus had no bucket. She was the one with the bucket – she was the one with access to water and the vulnerable Jesus was at her mercy. It was up to her to satisfy the thirst of Jesus or not. “You are not one of us, how can I share the water of my community with you?” We all know that the story went beyond that and present another twist with the woman discovering the expected Messiah in the vulnerable lonely traveller.

But many, like the Samaritan woman, would lose the opportunity of sharing that scarce resource of water, even with visitors and pilgrims. But water is meant to be shared – it is for the good of all – the common good.

The vulnerable Jesus in the story represents the millions of vulnerable people in our world today, who do not have access to portable drinking water. Jesus, our Great High Priest, experienced vulnerability and stands in solidarity with the vulnerable millions in our world today and calls on the Church to share in that solidarity.

Jesus must be seen in the millions of thirsty people in our world today – what else could Matthew 25:35 mean – **“I was thirsty you gave me drink...?”** In this passage Jesus warned that salvation is relational and one of the measuring rods is water to quench the thirst of the vulnerable – “I tell you the truth”, Jesus said, **“whatever you did (or did not do) for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did (or did not do) for me.”** (Matthew 25. 40 & 45).

The millions of vulnerable people in our world today represent the vulnerable Jesus. Again, I say Christ calls for a Church in Solidarity with the vulnerable and that’s why we are here to reflect on water justice as we start the season of Lent so that we can strategize and take action for the benefit of the vulnerable people in our world, so that water may become again a shared commodity and be seen as God’s gift to humanity so that they may have life and have it in abundance.

The vulnerability of Jesus was again displayed on the cross, at the offering of the supreme sacrifice for the salvation of humankind. There Jesus expressed

being thirsty – “**I thirst**” (John 19. 28 – 29). It was no pretense. Jesus was truly human. Thus it was natural that going through the intense suffering he went through he was thirsty. He went through a whole night of trial and beating and was on the cross at the high noon. He had lost a lot of blood and liquid and was dehydrated.

The human body is always in need of water. The body, my friends, does have its needs that must be attended to. Can any suffering be greater than that of Jesus on the cross? It was an inhuman treatment of our Lord. Is it any surprise that he was thirsty? His thirst was not news. But what makes it news was the fact that it was a cry coming from one who is the ‘**Water of Life**’ and in whom “**anyone who believes will never thirst.**” He said to the woman at the well “if you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water...whoever drinks the water I give will never thirst again.” (John 4.10-13). The Living Water of Life himself passed through a dry and thirsty land.

We, as Christians, are called to stewardship of water – to preserve it and make it readily available in its pure form to the next generation. Presently, there is a tendency towards abuse of water. We devastate our rain forests, our streams and rivers and swamplands, etc. In our stewardship of life we are called to conserve water. We are not masters of creation; rather we are servants and stewards of creation. Matthew 25 reminds us that we have to give an account of our stewardship – even our stewardship of creation. We must be careful in our utilisation of the earth’s resources, especially water.

When we fail to be good stewards of creation, when we are destructive to nature, disasters follow – floods, landslides, hurricane, global warming, etc. We sometimes refer to these catastrophes as ‘acts of God.’ in my opinion, that is blaspheme. It is not God’s will that the earth is destroyed. We the creatures, we who are supposed to be Stewards of creation, are unjustly self-destructive. The underlining factor in that self-destructiveness is greed – our desire to have all for ourselves – to satisfy our own interests at the expense of the common good. God gave abundant water to our world. The world’s water should be adequately shared. But governments neglect the common good and encourage commercialisation and commodifying of water. We destroy rain

forests, sell land and build along water ways. We project false concepts of development at the expense of large communities and when disasters occur we blame God –‘act of God’. Are we being fair to God?

As we continue to reflect on God’s gifts and graces towards us, let us go from here and resolve to serve God among the vulnerable people that have difficulties in adequately satisfying their thirst and in doing so, hear the voice of Jesus saying to us, **“I was thirsty, you gave me drink.”**

Let us hear God’s call to all – **“Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat” and drink.**

I wish you a blessed time of reflection during this season of Lent. God bless you all.
