

Myanmar Reflections Sunday 2nd - Saturday 15th June 2024



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destroys subsistence crops. How much more? What next? Injustice seems to be in control, and as the psalms so often show us, sometimes we just need to get it all out in brutal honesty. I find myself desperately asking for explanations, for understanding, for sight of God's hand in what is happening, as in verses 3-4. But it is when the raw outpouring of rage and hurt has subsided that we find ourselves able to make an active choice to renew our trust in God (verses 5-6) and indeed can even be full of joy, despite everything: PCM church members have been establishing makeshift health centres and schools in their church buildings; they are inviting displaced people into their homes; they are providing meals for those who have lost everything. God's generosity and justice is evident in all of these acts, and many more, large and small, and also in the generous giving of a global community of friends and partners.

Our prayers of lament are not weak, or ineffective: they express an intimate relationship with God where honesty is key, where trust can be restored, and where we acknowledge God's unconditional love and generosity.

Prayer

We cry to you, oh God: how long must your people suffer?
Answer us oh God,
show us your justice and mercy.
Help us to see where you are at work
as we give thanks for your endless love. Amen

Introduction

This series ties in with an awareness - and fund-raising - campaign from the URC's Global and Intercultural Ministries, so please do look out for more information and ways to help on the website and social media.

The United Reformed Church has a long and rich history with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) (until 1989, Burma). Presbyterianism gradually came to the country during the first half of the 20th century from the people of Mizoram in northeast India, whose community had been founded by the Presbyterian Church in Wales.

The PCM was established in 1956 and constituted in 1962, making it 10 years older than the United Reformed Church. Both are active partners in the Council for World Mission (CWM). There are currently 245 congregations and around 33,000 members, many in remote parts of the country, which borders Bangladesh, India, China, Laos and Thailand. We have good personal relationships with colleagues there, having received two visits in 2023 from the new General Secretary the Revd Pek Muan Cuang, and we receive regular updates about the challenges and joys of current mission and ministry. The country – and subsequently the Church – face many challenges, particularly since the military coup in February 2021 and Cyclone Mocha in May 2023.

We have asked a number of URC and international friends and partners to reflect on their experience of the country and the church, and how we can support our fellow Christians at this time.

Sunday 2nd June Psalm 33

The Rev'd Geoffrey Roper is a former company secretary of Council for World Mission (CWM)

Ring out your joy to the Lord,
O you just;
for praise is fitting for loyal hearts.

Give thanks to the Lord
upon the harp,
with a ten-stringed lute
sing him songs.
O sing him a song that is new,
play loudly, with all your skill.

For the word of the Lord is faithful
and all his works to be trusted.
The Lord loves justice and right
and fills the earth with his love.

By his word the heavens were made,
by the breath of his mouth
all the stars.
He collects the waves of the ocean;
he stores up the depths of the sea.

Let all the earth fear the Lord
all who live in the world revere him.
He spoke; and it came to be.
He commanded;
it sprang into being.

He frustrates the designs
of the nations,
he defeats the plans of the peoples.

His own designs shall stand for ever,
the plans of his heart from age to age.

They are happy,
whose God is the Lord,
the people he has chosen as his own.
From the heavens
the Lord looks forth,
he sees all the children of earth.

From the place where
he dwells he gazes
on all the dwellers on the earth;
he who shapes
the hearts of them all;
and considers all their deeds.

A king is not saved by his army,
nor a warrior
preserved by his strength.
A vain hope for safety is the horse;
despite its power it cannot save.

The Lord looks on those
who revere him,
on those who hope in his love,
to rescue their souls from death,
to keep them alive in famine.

Help us to care.
Move us to respond.
Amen

Saturday, 15 June 2024 Prayers of Lament

Lindsey Brown is the URC's Mission Support Officer and the URC representative on the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar's Ecumenical Partners' Group

Psalm 13

How long, O Lord? Will you forget me for ever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I bear pain in my soul,
and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and answer me, O Lord my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,
and my enemy will say, 'I have prevailed';
my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

But I trusted in your steadfast love;
my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

I will sing to the Lord,
because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Reflection

Getting to know leaders and friends of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar has been a deep privilege and also the cause of great struggle in recent years. Regularly hearing of violence and disaster it feels like we run out of meaningful ways to respond. Any words inevitably seem weak and ineffective. The most common response in conversations is 'we are praying for you'. I cannot speak for others, but sometimes those prayers sound like verses 1-2 of Psalm 13: how long must this go on for, God? What more should the people of Myanmar have to suffer? Not only oppression and violence, but also a devastating cyclone, and then a plague that

and hosted him at Church House. Pek laughs easily and has a wonderfully mischievous sense of humour. Later, he spoke about the realities of life in Myanmar. Bombings and gunfire. Mass displacements. Closed schools. Cyclone Mocha. The need for medical provision. He spoke about the commitment of the PCM to stand in the breach – in so many ways – offering relief, shelter, education, and actively seeking to broker peace. We wondered how he keeps on smiling amidst such devastation.

I can't imagine life in Myanmar – but I am marked by my encounters with these 3 individuals, negotiating a reality faced by millions there. And I know that these, too, are part of the Body in which we have our being; the Body in which the suffering of one is the suffering of all.

But now we can help. The PCM needs our prayers and our action to continue and grow its life-giving ministries, seeking to overcome evil with good. (How) will we respond?

Prayer

God, in whom all are united,
Sometimes we feel so separate
And separated.
Life 'over there'
Completely removed from the reality
We know.
And yet, we are one Body,
Called to share each other's laughter,
And feel each other's pain.
Remind us
That the stories which no longer make it
Into our newspapers
Are still the lives being lived
By real people -
With names and families,
And hopes and dreams.

Our soul is waiting for the Lord. We trust in his holy name.
The Lord is our help and our shield. May your love be upon us, O Lord,
In him do our hearts find joy. as we place all our hope in you.

The Psalms: An Inclusive Language Version based on the Grail translation from the Hebrew © 1963, 1986 The Grail (England) GIA Publications

Reflection

The British Museum, just a few steps from my home, recently presented an exhibition From Burma to Myanmar which they billed as 'a story of trade, faith and empire at the crossroads of Southeast Asia' but also '1,500 years of connection and isolation'. I found the beauty and craftsmanship displayed in gold, ivory, wood, ceramics and textiles truly wonderful. I want to ring out to the Lord (and to you) my joy and praise at the skill and rich spirit evident in these treasures. It's a territory relatively unknown to us: almost all we receive through media these days is negative. An older generation were imprinted with deeper impressions: 'the Road to Mandalay' (then the capital city), the Burma Road (linking with China), the Burma Railway (to Thailand), with its bridge over the river Kwai. Tragic wartime memories, selective recollections.

'A king is not saved by his army, nor a warrior preserved by his strength'. 2024 marks 75 years since the nation broke free from (Britain's) colonial control. The country took its place in the quest for international peace, contributing U Thant for the role of United Nations Secretary-General throughout the Sixties. More recently this peaceable nation has been distorted by a dominant military regime.

I met and was impressed by the previous general secretaries of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar.

Some Daily Devotions in June will be guided by those engaged in the URC's worldwide partnership in mission through CWM. 'From the heavens the Lord looks forth, he sees all the children of earth ...he shapes the hearts of

them all'. Let us take the hands of fellow-Christians in Myanmar, hold them in our hearts, be encouraged by their perseverance and pray with them to our gracious Lord this Sunday.

Prayer

Our soul is waiting for the Lord.
The Lord is our help and our shield.
In him do our hearts find joy.
We trust in his holy name.

Our sisters and brothers in Myanmar
opened their churches hours ago; already their prayers and praises
rang out to the Lord with joy. We join in the praise of the universal Church,
penitent,
patient,
persistent,
prayerful,
peaceable yet passionate,
pleading for people - those whose needs we know, and those whose
situation we can hardly imagine.

Grant us, loving Father, solidarity and sympathy with those who come in
faith to you far away; strengthen our hearts with awareness of our
communion with them in Jesus Christ our Saviour.

[Monday, 3 June 2024 Psalm 46](#)

The Revd Andy Braunston is the URC's Minister for Digital Worship and a
member of the Peedie Kirk URC in Kirkwall, Orkney.

Reading Psalm 146

Praise the Lord!	I will sing praises to my God
Praise the Lord, O my soul!	all my life long.
I will praise the Lord as long as I live;	

Let love be genuine; hate what is evil, hold fast to what is good; love one
another with mutual affection; outdo one another in showing honour. Do
not lag in zeal, be ardent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be
patient in suffering, persevere in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the
saints; extend hospitality to strangers.

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them. Rejoice with
those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Live in harmony with one
another; do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly; do not claim to
be wiser than you are. Do not repay anyone evil for evil, but take thought
for what is noble in the sight of all. If it is possible, so far as it depends on
you, live peaceably with all.

Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Reflection

I have very limited knowledge of Myanmar. I guess that is true for many
people reading these Devotions.

In 2020, I had brief email exchanges with the Revd Ram Thanga, then
General Secretary of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM),
regarding a proposed Nurse Aid Project. Before we could release the
requested financial support, the military coup took place, and we had no
choice but to put the plans on hold. We hoped and prayed it was a
temporary situation. I don't think anyone imagined things would be where
they are today.

Since then, I have twice been seated beside a PCM representative at
Council for World Mission gatherings. When I asked what we could do to
help, he said 'Nothing. Just pray!' He spoke of terror. Uncertainty. Rage.
All in a voice barely audible, such is the trauma he was experiencing.

In 2023 the Revd Pek Muan Cuang, the new PCM General Secretary, twice
visited the UK. I was part of a URC delegation which met, shared meals,

fingers. There is something alarmingly amiss in the human psyche when it comes to dealing with strangers, the 'Other', people from other tribes, and those with different skin colours or religious beliefs. Perhaps it is a holdover from our evolutionary past bubbling up into contemporary reality: we protect our 'tribe' no matter how awful the cost for others.

Jesus was keenly aware of our tendency to Other others. 'You have heard it said love your neighbour, but I tell you...love your enemy.' Wow! What a way to challenge the early evolutionary brain: even our enemy is to become our Beloved.

Christ's exhortation is deeply rooted in the Hebrew experience of oppression, starting in Egypt and extending through multiple empires including Rome. Each of us knows the struggle of being the outsider, the other. We are called as Christians to practise this love of the stranger so that we might be in a position to invite all persecutors, including the Myanmar government to love, and not to hate.

Prayer

God, give us the grace to welcome strangers, to love others even as we love ourselves. Bring peace and reconciliation to every corner of the earth, especially in places where persecution has prevented the practice of love. Amen.

[Friday, 14 June 2024](#) [Just Pray!](#)

Karen Campbell is the URC's Secretary for Global and Intercultural Ministries

Reading Selected verses from Romans 12

For as in one body we have many members, and not all the members have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another...

Do not put your trust in princes, in mortals, in whom there is no help. When their breath departs, they return to the earth; on that very day their plans perish.	The Lord sets the prisoners free; the Lord opens the eyes of the blind. The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down; the Lord loves the righteous. The Lord watches over
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Happy are those whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the Lord their God, who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them; who keeps faith for ever; who executes justice for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry.	the strangers; he upholds the orphan and the widow, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.
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The Lord will reign for ever,
your God, O Zion, for all generations.
Praise the Lord!

Reflection

On a trip to London a few months ago I, like Geoffrey Roper, visited the exhibition at the British Museum *From Burma to Myanmar*. Intrigued by the history, amazed at Myanmar's art and resources, and saddened by its situation I learned a lot. Between 1825 and 1885 there were three Anglo-Burmese wars fought between the British Empire and the Konbaung Dynasty. The last such war involved the annexation of Burma and its transformation into a British colony. Conquered by the Japanese in the Second World War, then by the Allies, there was a brief period of settled post-war independence before a coup in 1962 led to a military dictatorship. Unrest in 1988 gave way to a multi-party democracy two years later but the military refused to cede power. Ongoing strife between different ethnic groups continued, a transition to civilian rule in 2011 left the military with significant power. After the 2020 General Election the military seized power again. Rich in natural resources, Myanmar has suffered from instability, coups, colonial exploitation, and ethnic tensions; over 3 million people are in dire need of humanitarian assistance. Even the country's name is contested with many political and ethnic opponents

of the regime rejecting the change. The plight of Rohingya Muslims has been particularly severe denied citizenship and self-determination.

We don't know the social context of the Psalmist - we do know that this ancient poet didn't have much time for princes! Knowing that all earthly rulers will let us down, the Psalmist exhorted us to trust in the God who executes justice for the oppressed and gives food to the hungry, who frees prisoners, gives sight to the blind, lifts the bowed, upholds the rejected and ruins the wicked. Of course we might wonder why the Lord tarries in Myanmar! Over the next two weeks we'll hear voices from within and outwith that troubled country. We pray for God to act - remembering that God acts through His people.

Prayer

Rise up O God and bring justice to Myanmar!
Rise up O God and bring peace to that troubled country.
Cast the mighty military from their thrones,
bring relief to the displaced and oppressed,
give wisdom to those seeking to build a better society,
and bless your Church in Myanmar,
that they may be signs of your love,
witnesses to your justice, and a blessing to others. Amen.

[Tuesday, 4 June 2024 Conquest and Chaos](#)

The Revd John Proctor is a retired minister and a member of Downing Place URC, Cambridge. He was General Secretary of the URC from 2014 to 2020.

2 Kings 25:22-30

[The king of Babylon] appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan as governor over the people who remained in the land of Judah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had left. Now when all the captains of the forces and their men heard that the king of Babylon had appointed

your prayers and support.

Prayer

Lord, could you please bring an end to the destruction of life in Myanmar and bring liberation and fullness of life through our friends and colleagues there? Help us always take up those divine opportunities for good. No matter how feeble they may seem to us in your hands they can make a difference. In Jesus' name, Amen.

[Thursday, 13 June 2024 Outsiders and Insiders](#)

The Revd Kevin Synman is the Programme Officer for URC Global Justice & Partnerships

Leviticus 19:33-34

Suppose an outsider lives with you in your land. Then do not treat them badly. Treat them as if they were one of your own people. Love them as you love yourself. Remember that all of you were outsiders in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.

Reflection

After decades of persecution thousands of Rohingya people fled Myanmar's Rakhine State following government-backed armed attacks littered with atrocities. Many fled for weeks through jungles then making the dangerous sea journey to reach Bangladesh. Almost a million people have found refuge in the Cox Bazar's region in what has become the world's largest refugee camp. The United Nations has described the Rohingya as "the most persecuted minority in the world." Their plight has been described by aid agencies and human rights experts as 'Ethnic Cleansing' and 'Apartheid'.

Ethnic Cleansing, Apartheid, and persecution seem to be rather too popular at the moment. Although, we should not be too quick to point

Reflection

Myanmar needs our urgent solidarity and action. As you may have seen on the news things are moving quickly as the blood stained military rule looks to come to an end.

A few years ago I was introduced to Swam Yee, a civil servant with the Myanmar Ministry of Labour. After the coup in February 2021 he joined the Civil Disobedience Movement. Like so many, he had to flee to the jungle for his life as democracy leaders were killed and imprisoned. There are now over 350,000 Civil Disobedience Movement workers who need help.

In Galatians, Paul reminds us to remember the poor but also to take up the opportunity to work for the good of all. I knew we had to respond. It didn't seem much but what we did have was seedbeds.org with experience in social enterprise and community development alongside good will from churches. Therefore, we began to work with the Civil Disobedience Movement to design, and start, what became The Change Incubators programme in April 2022. This included online and in-person enterprise training and the opportunity to pitch ideas for change to a seed-funding panel.

We have been inspired by the work of our participants and their role in change and are working to help create new markets for their products and services. Many have emerged as leaders who have a key role to play as the legitimate National Unity Government prepares to rebuild Myanmar. Small investments in care, time, and seed-money have seen these remarkable people create all kinds of new freedoms.

I'm excited that we have 107 participants for the third cohort starting next week but feel a bit daunted too! It's double what we had last year. It feels like there is hope that freedom could grow in Myanmar over the next 12-18 months. These new participants could well be the national rebuilders. I look forward to being with them in person in June and would appreciate

Gedaliah as governor, they came with their men to Gedaliah at Mizpah, namely, Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah son of the Maacathite. Gedaliah swore to them and their men, saying, 'Do not be afraid because of the Chaldean officials; live in the land, serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you.' But in the seventh month, Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama, of the royal family, came with ten men; they struck down Gedaliah so that he died, along with the Judeans and Chaldeans who were with him at Mizpah. Then all the people, high and low, and the captains of the forces, set out and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans.

In the thirty-seventh year of the exile of King Jehoiachin of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, King Evil-merodach of Babylon, in the year that he began to reign, released King Jehoiachin of Judah from prison; he spoke kindly to him, and gave him a seat above the other seats of the kings who were with him in Babylon. So Jehoiachin put aside his prison clothes. Every day of his life he dined regularly in the king's presence. For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king, a portion every day, as long as he lived.

Reflection

I visited Myanmar in February 2020, to help Christians there progress an old property dispute. It struck me as a land with a rich and resourceful mix of cultures, but a difficult history too. Since then fresh disasters have cascaded in: Covid, a coup and military rule, civil wars, cyclone and floods. Many able and public-spirited people, mostly young, are dead or imprisoned, or have left home to join the resistance. There are about two million internal refugees – quite apart from the ugly expulsion of almost a million Rohingya in 2017. Education, health care and economic life have largely collapsed. People are not flourishing.

The last half-chapter of 2 Kings is a sad, chaotic, confusing slice of text, a tangle of names, conflicts and tragedies. It does not match events in

Myanmar exactly. But it does show a land conquered, subdued, ravaged and ransacked, by a fierce and well-armed power. Many people have been exiled, or have chosen to leave. Some are willing to serve their rulers. Others would rather strike a blow for liberty. Command and control are contested, blood flows easily and life is cheap. A man who might have led the nation spends decades in jail, and ends his days without really being set free.

2 Kings stops here. History has hit the buffers. This piece of scripture invites us to feel the heavy weight of sorrow, anarchy and utter futility that has fallen on Judah. There will be no quick return to the life people once knew.

Yet God has not given up. Even exile will end. Faith will have the resilience to stay alive in foreign lands. Prophets will speak once more. Temple and city walls will rise again. Grace has not signed off in Judah. Nor in Myanmar.

Prayer

God of hope and purpose, we pray for Myanmar:
you know the many people who love that land,
who seek and long to serve its good.
So we pray that hurt may turn to hope,
poverty to promise, and fear to trust.
We pray for our church friends in Myanmar,
that they may be steady in faith, hope and love,
For Jesus' sake. Amen.

[Wednesday, 5 June 2024](#) [We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed](#)
The Revd Dr Jooseop Keum, General Secretary of the Council for World Mission

Reading 2 Corinthians 4:8-10 ESV

“We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven

Christmas was drawing near, I read the narratives of the Nativity again and again, and realised that like us, the Holy Family once fled their homes with fear, when they fled to Egypt. So I found that Jesus was also a refugee, just as the people of Myanmar are; but not only that - he is also Emmanuel, “God with us.”

Jesus himself once fled and experienced life in fear of a brutal and violent ruler. Because of this, he knows how to comfort the displaced people and refugees of Myanmar. He is ‘our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble’ as the Psalmist proclaimed.

Rome, or its rulers of the first Century, are not the agents of God that bring the welfare of the community or individuals, but Jesus alone. He is the one who saves his people from their sins and delivers from fear. The sovereignty of the world is not of the emperor or his subordinates but it is Jesus in whom all sovereignty is given. We Christians are very much blessed and privileged to have Jesus in all aspects of our lives.

Prayer

Lord, thank you for giving us perseverance and resilience;
Give us strength to witness to the Good News of Jesus in our daily life.
Lord, be with those who struggle for freedom,
And also with victims of the revolution in Myanmar.
Lord, keep the Church leaders in your arms,
And bestow them wisdom to guide and serve their members.
Lord, in your mercy, Amen.

[Wednesday, 12 June 2024](#) [Divine-given times to act](#)
The Revd Dr Ash Barker leads seedbeds.org and is the Minister of Lodge Road URC, Birmingham

Reading Galatians 6:10

So then, whenever we have an opportunity, let us work for the good of all.

no matter what may come their way.
We pray that this oppressed nation
will come to understand that
nothing shall separate them from the love of Christ.
We pray that the global community
continues to care and share with the oppressed in Myanmar
for such a time as this. Amen.

[Tuesday, 11 June 2024 Always on the Move](#)

The Revd Ram Thanga, Immediate past General Secretary, Presbyterian
Church of Myanmar

Reading Matthew 2:13- 15

Now after they had left, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him." Then Joseph got up, took the child and his mother by night, and went to Egypt, and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfil what had been spoken by the Lord through the prophet, "Out of Egypt I have called my son.

Reflection

Since the military coup took place in Myanmar, fear and anguish has overwhelmed its people. Those who are there to protect the people have become persecutors; those who claim to be defenders have turned into murderers; and people feel unsafe and vulnerable. People feel as though they have no future, but have to schedule daily routines with uncertainty, having in mind that an unwanted fate is imminent. In this situation, being a Church leader is very challenging.

I moved to my new pastorate in May 2023 at Khampat in Tamu District. Within seven months, our church members fled 3 times to other villages to seek refuge. During this time I also fled twice with my family. Finally, God graciously brought us back home just before Christmas 2023. As

to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies”

Reflection

Our world is currently filled with life-threatening forces. Driven by greed, self-centred motives, corruption and much more, life-threatening forces are trying to steal and destroy life and peace from the face of the earth. Consequently, we are witnessing numerous forms of destruction, including military conflicts, climate crises, and social, political and economic inequalities. These create divisions and destabilise communities in order to dominate and rule over the poor and oppressed - hope gives way to despair and cynicism.

However, Christians are resurrection people. “If Christ has not been raised, then empty is our preaching, empty too your faith” (1 Corinthians 15:14). Given our human mortality this is something that can never be underestimated. Yet the experience of resurrection hope pertains not only to death but also to life. Death and resurrection is a lived experience in Myanmar today. As the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies” (2 Corinthians 4:9-10).

As we have seen, many Christians in Myanmar are subject to great adversity. Still, the joy and hope of the resurrection define their experience. “In all these things,” protested Paul, “we are more than conquerors through him who loved us” (Romans 8:37). In the midst of the deepest darkness in Myanmar, there are people of faith, people of hope - the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM)!

The gospel of the reign of God challenges the world that keeps the status quo of the hopeless situation. Although, the PCM is small in number, it is

taking courage to empower themselves and the people who are oppressed and suffering. The Church dares to witness God's love, justice and peace in the society under the military junta. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden." (Matthew 5:14)

Prayer

Ivy

At times, when we feel that

it is a wall, just a wall,

then

without a word, ivy climbs up the wall.

At times, when we say that

it is a wall of despair

with no drop of water, where not one seed can survive,

unhurrying, the ivy advances.

Hand in hand, several together,

it climbs on, a span's breadth at least.

Until the despair is all covered in green

it grasps the despair and will not let go.

At times, when we lower our heads, saying that

the wall cannot be climbed,

one ivy leaf at the head of thousands of ivy leaves

finally climbs the wall.

by Do Jong-hwan (A Korean Poet)

Thursday, 6 June 2024

[Give ear to my words, O Lord; give heed to my sighing.](#)

The Revd Phil King is Global Mission Director, Presbyterian Church of Aotearoa New Zealand

Psalm 5:1-3

Give ear to my words, O Lord; give heed to my sighing. Listen to the sound of my cry, my King and my God, for to you I pray. O Lord, in the morning you hear my voice; in the morning I plead my case to you, and watch.

perspectives from the PCM leadership, we understood that the ongoing political turmoil in Myanmar continues to be the most important challenge for the global Christian Church. When the new mission support project proposal reached the CWM Secretariat three months later, it suggested that our small acts of accompanying PCM did spark progress. Beside mission support initiatives, in collaboration with our global partners, CWM continues to stand in solidarity with the PCM and the Tahan community in tangible ways by resourcing the relocation of PCM Agape Hospital.

The ethos of accompanying churches in mission calls us to promote justice for all. In the Old Testament the references to social justice and how God brings justice to the oppressed are summarised in caring and standing for the "widows, orphans and foreigners" (Isaiah 1:17). In the New Testament, Jesus continues this call in Matthew 25:31-40 where Jesus depicts "the righteous" as those who care and share with the strangers and prisoners who are without clothes, food and shelter. Clearly, the Biblical concept of righteousness is not just about doing what is morally right, but it calls us to be hospitable, compassionate, and generous.

The February 2021 military coup brought about escalating aggression in Myanmar. Villages are frequently attacked by air and on the ground. The UN estimates there are 1.95 million people currently displaced within Myanmar and thousands have fled the country.

We can accompany PCM in many small but significant actions. Each one of us can pray for the people of Myanmar, be an advocate — tell a friend about the situation in Myanmar and give generously.

The oppressed in Myanmar are our siblings. What is your response?

Prayer

God of love, we pause and remember our siblings in Myanmar.
Grant them your sustaining grace and peace
that they may stand firm in their faith

if these laudable aims can be achieved.

On Monday I suggested that the Lord works through his people; maybe the Psalmist raised these ideas into our consciousness that we might act. Might a different world be possible? Perhaps, these certainties will remind us of our responsibility to change our world so that the poor are rescued from their distress.

Prayer

Good God we're uncertain when faced with certainty,
unclear if poetic rhetoric is really truth,
unsure if political aspirations really can be met,
unconvinced that your Kingdom is really coming.
Give us wisdom, dear God,
to see how we can transform our world,
to change the harsh realities we live with,
and to reconstruct our politics
so that children will no longer grow up hungry. Amen.

Monday, 10 June 2024 Small But Significant Actions

The Revd Sim Joo Yee (Julie) is Mission Secretary for Mission Programme and Partnership in the Council for World Mission

Isaiah 1:17

...learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow.

Reflection

In August 2023, the Council for World Mission (CWM) facilitated a mission consultation for the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) in Yangon to discuss the way forward for their Mission Support Programme project. Implementation of this has stalled since the military coup. Listening to the

Reflection

New Zealand is one of the first countries in the world to greet the new day. So when I wake up, I often find emails and messages that have come in overnight from different regions of the world, where others have been working while I have been sleeping. In recent times, these have included messages from Myanmar that make me ask the question, "How do I deal with this, now that I know about it?"

From a young female PCM leader:

"We are not safe. Our situation is so dangerous. We can face air raids every time. The green people (Myanmar military) are targeting our village. We are never safe. We are alive with anxiety.

Sometimes we are safe and free but sometimes we are waiting for our end ... The green people already targeted Tuili school compound and village. One day they must fight. I want to move other place but there is no house. I need to build a house but we have no money for that. So I pray to God to save our family and my village.

From a PCM church leader in the Chin State:

"Some members are in a local IDP camp, and others are under the jungle and forest. These days, the military junta jet fighters are flying over rural villages and dropping bombs daily. We lost many church members including innocent children. Lives of the people in southern Chin are unsafe ... No schools have good teaching and health centres have no medicine and nurses. This is our situation.

We only need peace in the whole place in Myanmar. We humbly request that churches have every prayer for us and return to a fully peaceful future."

It's difficult to digest these messages with my breakfast. I'm grateful for

the international ecumenical community who are sharing the concerns and lifting voices in prayer. It sometimes feels like prayer is all we have. But I hold onto this – one day, when this is over, we will meet friends and colleagues in Myanmar again, and we will be able to celebrate their freedom and say: “We prayed for you.”

A Prayer for Peace

God of peace, may we become peacemakers by
feeding the hungry,
welcoming the stranger,
planting kindness and nurturing peace wherever we are.

We pray because of our love for Creation
and because of our trust in a loving God.
Above all, we pray for an end to violence,
and for peace throughout the world. Amen.

God of Justice, may we become justice makers by
sharing goodwill,
upholding the rights of all beings,
sharing our gifts and nurturing justice wherever we are.

We pray for these things with humility,
because of the hope that is within us,
and because of our faith in the ultimate triumph of good over evil.

from the Brigidine Sisters in Australia

Friday, 7 June 2024 [Christ has set us free to live a free life](#)
The Revd Dr Michael Jagessar is a retired URC Minister

Galatians 5: 1, 13-15

Christ has set us free to live a free life, So take your stand! Never again let

Many are the trials of just people
but from them all
the Lord will rescue.
He will keep guard
over all their bones,
not one of their bones
shall be broken.

Evil brings death to the wicked;
those who hate the good
are doomed.
The Lord ransoms the souls
of his servants.
Those who hide in him
shall not be condemned.

The Psalms: An Inclusive Language Version based on the Grail translation
from the Hebrew © 1963, 1986 The Grail (England) GIA Publications

Reflection

O to have the certainty of the Psalmist! What it would be to know all those things that the Psalmist asserts as truth - being set free from our terrors, the poor rescued from their distress, angels rescuing God’s people, the memory of the wicked fading, those who live with hatred being doomed. These are ideas we want to assert and rejoice in but know the world isn’t like that.

O to have the certainty of John Swinney, our new First Minister, who has vowed to eliminate child poverty which, despite some excellent policies, is still higher here than in many other European countries. This would involve tackling the scourge of cold damp houses, fighting the economic systems that drive down wages to enhance profit, and bringing down energy prices. We’d need to radically reduce pollution and up our game on the green agenda (pollution hits the health of the poorest more than the middle classes). Even all that might not make the impact that has been promised. It has been suggested only a Universal Basic Income high enough to lift people out of poverty and funded from a wealth and land tax might achieve this aim. Who knows? It’s unlikely that such radical policies would be tolerated by the wicked systems that control our world - nor by many in our governing party.

I warm to the certainty of the Psalmist and our First Minister but wonder

of Jesus’s promise of fullness of life for all peoples. Amen.

Sunday, 9 June 2024 Psalm 34

The Rev’d Andy Braunston is the URC’s Minister for Digital Worship and a member of the Peedie Kirk URC in Orkney.

I will bless the Lord at all times, his praise always on my lips; in the Lord my soul shall make its boast. The humble shall hear and be glad.	and go hungry but those who seek the Lord lack no blessing. Come, children, and hear me that I may teach you the fear of the Lord. Who are they who long for life and many days, to enjoy prosperity? Then keep your tongue from evil and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn aside from evil and do good; seek and strive after peace.
Glorify the Lord with me. Together let us praise his name. I sought the Lord and he answered me; from all my terrors he set me free.	The Lord turns his face against the wicked to destroy their remembrance from the earth. The Lord turns his eyes to the just and his ears to their appeal.
Look towards him and be radiant; let your faces not be abashed. This poor called, the Lord heard them and rescued them from all their distress.	They call and the Lord hears and rescues them in all their distress. The Lord is close to the broken-hearted; those whose spirit is crushed he will save.
The angel of the Lord is encamped around those who revere him, to rescue them. Taste and see that the Lord is good. They are happy who seek refuge in him.	
Revere the Lord, you his saints. They lack nothing, those who revere him. Strong lions suffer want	

anyone put a harness of slavery on you....It is absolutely clear that God has called you to a free life. Just make sure that you don’t use this freedom as an excuse to do whatever you want to do and destroy your freedom. Rather, use your freedom to serve one another in love; that’s how freedom grows. For everything we know about God’s Word is summed up in a single sentence: Love others as you love yourself. That’s an act of true freedom. If you bite and ravage each other, watch out—in no time at all you will be annihilating each other, and where will your precious freedom be then? (The Message)

Reflection

The United Reformed Church (URC) and the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) has a long and solid relationship. Our 2016 renewed partnership commitment has among its affirmations, a “commitment to give and receive from each other, learn from one another, and to pray for one another as we seek to serve and walk the way of abundant life of God in Christ”. In my encounter with the PCM, I witnessed numerous enriching encounters, overflowing hospitality, and deep resilience among the leadership and members of PCM.

As we continue to accompany our PCM partners in the midst of ongoing oppressive socio—economic and political realities under a repressive regime, a local proverb comes to mind: “Though the centipede has one of its legs broken, this does not affect its movement”. The long-suffering PCM family and minoritized groups people in Myanmar remain resilient, yearning for and engaging in a long haul struggle for freedom. Whatever the cost, we must remain in solidarity with them.

Galatians 5:1ff invites us to consider such a cost given that ‘freedom is for freeing’. For, the Christian calling is towards a ‘freeing’ vocation, habit, and orientation. Discipleship lived in freedom must be a personal and collective responsibility towards this ongoing work. Hence, the imperative to grasp freedom as a vocation. Freedom in Christ is a way of living and not licence to do what we like individually or nationally, unmindful of the

effects of our actions on ourselves and others. It is liberation to be our authentic selves. This means to be for others, always working for release from all forms of enslavement, ensuring vigilance against empire's guile and cunning reach. Freedom is for freeing! This vocation/journey needs a spirituality for the long haul to nourish us for transformative work toward a different world.

Prayer

God-of-a-promised-hope-who-waits-and-heals:
may our hearts, so often floating in a sea of choppy waves,
find calm in you;
may our fevered, wounded and bruised bodies
find freedom and wholeness in your love;
may the unexpected miracles we experience this day
make us more humble to receive your grace;
and may the urge to bring hope, care and compassion
in distressing situations find sustenance in your promise
of full and flourishing life for all. Amen

[Saturday, 8 June 2024 What the Lord Requires of Us](#)

The Revd Philip Woods is a URC Minister serving as Associate Director, Global Strategy and Program, Presbyterian Church (USA)

Reading Micah 6:8

What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?

Reflection

This verse, printed on my URC membership card, has always been a powerful reminder to me of our calling as Christians. However, it is in my journey with the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar (PCM) that began in 1997 when I was the URC's Secretary for International Relations, that I

really got to understand what a lived expression of it looks like.

Myanmar has been ruled by a military dictatorship since 1962, with only fleeting moments of limited democracy. The military junta has never been willing to fully relinquish its hold on power, which is why it acted so brazenly in 2020 ending the power sharing arrangement with Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy (NLD). Even that does not describe the trials and tribulations of the people of Myanmar. Their experience of the Junta has not just been Orwellian, but arbitrary and capricious, such that I would describe my visits to Myanmar as entering a hall of mirrors, where you think you are understanding what you see until a slight movement alters everything.

Thus I have journeyed with the PCM through many crises with this latest crisis, exacerbated by the Covid pandemic and the country's descent into civil war, being by far the worst. Yet, as ever, the PCM is there for the people, taking each blow in its stride, standing with the people in their struggles and being the embodiment of compassion, receiving internally displaced peoples into its properties and members' homes. More than that, at this time and seeing the need, it is working to expand its medical services through the relocation and expansion of its Agape Hospital. This visionary church that quietly makes its transformative presence felt, journeying with the peoples of Myanmar through thick and thin continues to be a profound inspiration for me and my ministry.

Prayer

Spirit of life,
so manifest in the life and witness
of the Presbyterian Church of Myanmar,
we pray that you will continue to empower and strengthen them
to be present for the peoples of Myanmar.
May they know that they are not alone in this,
as we walk with them, companions all the way,
working and praying together for the fulfilment