



CABSA



DIACONIA
Gee van jousef

Guidelines for World AIDS Day Worship Service

First Sunday in Advent: 29 November 2020

Focus text: Isaiah 64:1-9

Global Solidarity. Shared Responsibility

Background and Preparation

The 1st of December is World AIDS Day and throughout the world this day is used to increase awareness about HIV and AIDS and to encourage communities and faith communities to move closer to the epidemic and be part of the solution. CABSA and our partners, Diaconia and Western Cape Synod for Gender Justice

And since this pandemic has been in our midst for over 40 years, it has become fairly easy for many people, including people of faith, to ignore the pandemic.

This year the whole world were traumatized by the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and it became almost impossible not to notice how also this pandemic runs on the fault lines of our societies. This means that the already vulnerable are even more vulnerable in the face of this pandemic. And this is off course also true of the HIV pandemic.

This year the UNAIDS theme for World AIDS Day is: **Global Solidarity. Shared Responsibility.**

As faith communities who are called to love our neighbours as ourselves and to seek community with one another. It also reminds us that we have a responsibility for the well-being of not only our immediate neighbours, but especially also the poor, the sick, the elderly, strangers and other vulnerable people.

Liturgy Guidelines

Greeting

Psalm 80:1-7^[a]

For the director of music. To the tune of “The Lilies of the Covenant.” Of Asaph. A psalm.

¹ Hear us, Shepherd of Israel,
you who lead Joseph like a flock.
You who sit enthroned between the cherubim,
shine forth ² before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh.
Awaken your might;
come and save us.

- ³ Restore us, O God;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.
- ⁴ How long, LORD God Almighty,
will your anger smolder
against the prayers of your people?
- ⁵ You have fed them with the bread of tears;
you have made them drink tears by the bowlful.
- ⁶ You have made us an object of derision^[a] to our neighbors,
and our enemies mock us.
- ⁷ Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

Welcome

To God the Father, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who became human and was born in a humble stable, and God the Spirit, who lives in us and turns our hearts towards You and who reminds us of the true living hope brought by Christ's death on the cross: To Your name be the praise, the honour and the glory. For ever and ever. Amen

Dear Sisters and Brothers, we welcome you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ. Today, on the first Sunday of Advent we remember Jesus' birth in a manger, and we enter this time of Advent in anticipation, not only in the build-up to Christmas, but also because we remain in anticipation of Jesus' Second Coming.

On Tuesday, the 1st of December it will also be World AIDS Day and literally thousands of other faith communities and organisations worldwide, will reflect on the theme: Global Solidarity. Shared Responsibility. This theme urges us as faith communities to ask ourselves if we do live in solidarity with one another and more important, how can we take shared responsibility for a world that is carrying the heavy burden of multiple pandemics? Though we focus on HIV and AIDS today, as a global community we are all faced daily with the COVID-19 pandemic and its devastation on not only people's lives, but our livelihoods and social fabric. But in the shadows of this year's headlines remain the ever present pandemics of poverty, gender based violence and also HIV...

- ⁷ Restore us, God Almighty;
make your face shine on us,
that we may be saved.

Worship

Sing Christmas hymns.

Candle Ceremony

Invite a young teenager to light the Advent candle.

Invite an adult to tie a red ribbon around the lit candle.

Call to Worship

Dear God

With Christmas Carols and decorations everywhere, we are reminded during Advent about your gift to us, Jesus Christ who came to earth to reconcile us with you. During this time of anticipation and celebration we are also aware that HIV is having a devastating impact on the lives of many people, families and communities.

Today we pray for all communities that are making a difference to end the HIV epidemic. We pray that our own faith community becomes an agent of change. We give thanks for the incredible work of faith communities, faith-based organizations (FBOs) and churches that have addressed health challenges and injustice, also in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We celebrate the equal, inherent dignity and value of every human being. We affirm the potential and reach of equipped faith communities to bring about change by creating platforms for dialogue and collaboration among people.

We pray for those of us living with or affected by HIV and for our loved ones. We pray to receive strength and courage to fight injustice, inequalities and stigma and discrimination within our faith communities.

Forgive us, if we do not always stand up against a system that perpetuates injustice. Show us how we can serve all of your children and be a community that truly embrace everyone in our midst, but also people who might feel left out.

As we give thanks for what has been achieved, we commit ourselves anew to doing all we can to make sure no one is left behind.

Amen

Scripture Reading 2

Focus Text: Isaiah 64:1-9

Sermon guidelines

These guidelines are based on the sermon guidelines developed by Rev Johan Pieters. Texts used from the NIV.

This reading in Isaiah starts with a pleading prayer that God should become visible and intercede in the destiny of His people, that He should give him a sign to show that He understands their need and will intercede. It is followed by a confession of guilt, a second plea consisting of a confession of faith and a plea that God hears their lamentation and respond. It can therefore be seen as a confession of guilt that is surrounded by prayers that God should appear to save His people. The people collectively confess their guilt, in order to reconcile themselves to God, and heal their relationship with Him.

Two important moments are important in our text: The acknowledgement that God is their Father (64:8) and the people of God's practice of communal confession of guilt.

The first perspective is the realisation that God is their Father. We read this in vs 8: '*Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.*' The people feel so strongly about this, that they even distance them from their forefathers, Abraham and Jacob. They don't make an appeal on their descent, but on God. They recall the time of Moses, when they were delivered from Egypt, when God also interceded. The first four verses confirm that, even in the midst of disillusionment, God is still

their Father. Because they know God's story with them, His people, they know that they can look critically at Him and the situation, and survive.

But the second perspective that allows them to look critically at God and at themselves is because they have a faith practice that makes this possible, communal confession of guilt and sin. The importance of this is that it prevents them from projecting the disillusionment and bitterness they experience on God, or to blame each other for the situation in which they find themselves. They are in the situation together, they must accept responsibility together for what happened, and they have to accept together how this will influence their future with God. It is not me or you – it is us that are in a crisis and it is us that have to accept responsibility for it.

The lamentation continues in vs 9, accepting the forgiveness does not mean that sin has been erased. It shows however that the moment in which God turns His face back to the people, and reclaim them as their own, a new relationship comes into being.

It is good to be reminded that the reformed tradition, other than often thought, is one in which we read and understand the Bible anew in each new context and situation. To be reformed means that every time our context and life situation changes, we need to again hear the unchanging news about Christ, and to understand it anew.

Which images we in the 21st century can identify with can we construe from this text? How does this text help us to think about the HIV and AIDS pandemic? Which questions do the realities of AIDS and the reality of faith in Christ ask of each other? And if you have never thought about these questions before ... perhaps when we think of the realities of COVID-19 that affected all of us on different levels, could you perhaps also see HIV in a different light?

In the text we hear emotions of disillusionment, disappointment, hopelessness and bitterness.

What lies behind these emotions? Why do dreams not become reality? Even if we believe that it is in God's plan, why does our dreams not realise? Why do we struggle when we reacted with such hope to what happened to us? The message of a lamentation is exactly that we are not in charge.

Behind the text we find a neglected community. They feel that God has forgotten them en they have enemies who spread rumours about them (stigma, according to Nehemiah). They are opposed and their enemies have a negative effect on their growth and development. Stories are also told about people living with HIV, they are also prohibited from living life to the full.

The people who are praying and lamenting are people who have been disappointed and disillusioned by the lack of shared objectives and vision of their leaders. This also happened with people with HIV in our country and other parts of the world – government failed them in the past, and church leaders remained mainly silent.

We can think of people's experience when things change, and also do not really change (like when the Israelites returned but still actually remained oppressed in their own city), because it happened with us. I wonder how many marginalised people were invited to a church service, felt positive and hoped to be accepted. But, as time passed by, their expectation that they would be accepted was disappointed again. This of course often happens unintentionally.

The moment of tension is the question if God does not perhaps change – and if He will not maybe stay away forever, and disappoint us.

But in the lamentation we also see hope. We can hope, because we know how God acted in the past. The hope of the people of God is not in their ancestors, not in the fact that they descend from Abraham or Israel, but in the fact that God is their Father (64:8). The lamentation and confession help them not to project their negative feelings against the leaders on God. And it is this subtle discovery that creates space to respond to their situation in hope. He is after all their Father!

Then we get to the point of communal confession of guilt. And we have to ask ourselves: Have we as faith communities and people of faith contributed to the epidemic and the challenges it brings? And we will have to admit that our passiveness and denial contributed to stigma. Have our actions and example not contributed to the silence around HIV, the reluctance to be open about an HIV positive diagnosis?

We often talk in accusing ways about a crisis in society. HIV and AIDS is one of the issues of which we talk in this way with and about each other: 'It is their way of life that caused it.' But where do we stand? Do we not contribute to the spread of HIV, or to the fact that people living with HIV become ill or eventually die of AIDS related conditions?

We do, because we contribute to stigmatising the disease. We whisper about it, we don't talk about it, we don't make sure that we have accurate information – all this contributes to HIV being a 'disgrace-disease'. Because we do this, others are also silent, they carry their pain and bitterness alone. We blame others – just like Adam and Eve!

But true communal confession does something different – it focuses our hope on God and makes it impossible for us to escape our own responsibility any longer. And this is our invitation from the Spirit. And in this invitation there is a reminder of God's work.

If our congregation realises that God is still our Father and are able to honestly look at God, ourselves and the HIV epidemic, then we will have the courage to carry on, break the silence and become involved in the epidemic, with vulnerability and compassion and a deep understanding of our shared responsibility for one another.

How can we become involved in the HIV epidemic today by accepting our shared responsibility? How can we ensure that people with HIV have access to health care services and medication? How do we create space where silence and stigma can be broken down?

Commitment:

After the sermon the preacher invites the congregation to be part of the last movement of the liturgy:

- The congregation stands and together confess the extract below from the confession of Belhar;

- Optional: congregation is invited to each collect a candle as they leave the church, which they then light from a few lit candles at the exit. This serves as confession that we do not always care for the 'lights' of others, but also a commitment that we choose to be representatives of the Light we carry to a world of darkness

Confession of Faith (From Part 4 of the Belhar Confession)

We believe

that God has revealed himself as the one who wishes to bring about justice and true peace among men;

that in a world full of injustice and enmity he is in a special way the God of the destitute,

the poor and the wronged and that he calls his church to follow him in this;
that he brings justice to the oppressed and gives bread to the hungry;
that he frees the prisoner and restores sight to the blind;
that he supports the downtrodden,
protects the stranger,
helps orphans and widows and
blocks the path of the ungodly;
that for him pure and undefiled religion is to visit the orphans and the widows in their
suffering;
that he wishes to teach his people to do what is good and to seek the right

Hymn

**Congregation sings “Ubi Caritas” or a similar hymn while they leave the church, lighting
candles as they leave the church**

Blessing: While we eagerly await the return of Jesus, let us as faith community commit
ourselves to live in the Light, to be transformed by the Light and to learn to know what it
means to be a welcoming and safe sanctuary for all of community.

Prepared by CABSA

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- Please consider a donation or church collection to support the services CABSA offer to churches and faith communities.
- To register for a weekly Bible Message on HIV write to Meloney, admin@cabsa.org.za



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