

**The Bishop of False Bay
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Blessing of Oils 2020

Message to Clergy

Psalm 89:21-27 James 5:13 -16 Mark 6:7-13

Called as Servant Leaders to a Suffering, Scattered Church

Psalm 89:21-27

We have been **Called** and **Anointed** to be **Servant Leaders**.

James 5:13-16

James is writing to a **Suffering Church**; to a Church **scattered** after the death of Stephen. We are **scattered** and not **gathered** today because of the Corona virus. Through technology we have been **messaging, meeting and maintaining** that sense of **belonging**.

We are in day 14 of the national lockdown declared by our State President, the Honourable Cyril Ramaphosa.

God is in **solidarity** with us and **bringing consolation** and **wholeness** into **Holy Week**.

The Author of the Epistle is James, the brother of Jesus (not to be confused with James the apostle, brother of John). James calls himself the **Servant** of God and the Lord Jesus (James 1:1). Today God is inviting us to **recommit to Servant Leadership**, to a life of prayer. Pray for a spirit of gentleness and inner peace amidst the **insecurity** of our context. James calls us to be **faithful in prayer**. We do not know what tomorrow will bring. We do not know when the lockdown will end.

The **Prayer of Faith** will help us to give our people **Hope**. To tell our people that God has never let us down, so why will God abandon us now. Prayer is **powerful and effective**.

Mark 6:7-13_– **MISSION AND MINISTRY OF JESUS.**

Today, **Servant Leadership** of Jesus is to be **exercised through** us, His followers, His deacons and priests. The **Spirit** of the Lord is **upon us and in** every person in all of creation – the good, the bad and the ugly. The Corona virus **crisis** is about all of us, not just some.

During this period of social distancing, we cannot lay hands on anybody; we cannot **touch** them physically or even **anoint** them with oil. For now, we cannot be dependent on these **external symbols** to heal and bless our people. In no way does it take

away the **sacrament** of anointing which is an outward and visible sign of an inward and **spiritual grace**.

What is grace – give yourself a refresher course on the catechism in An Anglican Prayer Book (APB).

As clergy we should be living lives of **graced awareness** – in this Corona virus crisis we are hopefully **developing a reflective habit of mind** that is **constantly attuned** to God's **presence**. **Graced awareness** is to be **responsive to God's leading**.

Our calling is to help a **suffering, scattered** Church to see that God is present in our human experience. Our task is to help people to find God, on the journey with them. **Tell** them that the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, God's mercies never come to an end. Let us help our people to live with **hope and expectation**.

My dear clergy there is no turning back. Our people are in trouble, our people are in need of healing. Our people are feeling fragile and insecure.

The Theme of our Diocese is:

'I am, because we are, because God is...opening hearts to heal God's world.'

What a prophetic Theme we chose in 2017, guided by the Youth Synod.

I do want to thank you for your **true commitment** to your call to servant leadership, for opening your hearts to heal God's world. The scare of the Corona virus has trapped our people in fear and fright, in frustration, in doubt, in uncertainty.

Now is **not** the time to shake the dust off your feet. Now **is the time** to reach out in the way that you are *via* social media, daily devotions, Facebook and YouTube services, zoom meetings, passing food parcels through the window of your car, praying for the elderly and the terminally ill over the phone. **Lessons** we have learnt from this lock down, is how God has gifted our clergy with so many resources and tools to use in God's service.

We have also discovered how many challenges in ministry we have left unattended or taken for granted. For ourselves, our Ordinands, our Post Ordination Clergy we will theologise, think and reflect upon what lessons are to be learnt from our present situation? How do we hear God's voice in this time of crisis, how do we interpret God's voice in our various contexts? I can see a few doctorates growing out of the reflections of the context of this pandemic.

On Good Friday, we remember that Jesus cried out from the cross:

'my God, my God, why have you forsaken me'

Today we cry out:

'my God, my God, why have you accepted me'

Then Jesus bowed his head and gave up his spirit. That spirit is in you, in me. Jesus gave it to us for **servant leadership**. The spirit of the Lord is upon you, upon me.

My clergy, as servant leaders, we need to **disturb the silence** around gender-based violence, homelessness, discrimination, poor service delivery, bullying....

We cannot shake the dust off our shoes and leave people trapped in hunger and poverty.

I will be addressing some of these issues on Easter Sunday.

Today, I want you to know that I deeply appreciate your servant leadership, your prophetic voice, your preaching of the scriptures, your administering of the sacraments, your shepherding of God's people, your administration, your work of healing, preparing people for death, consoling the bereaved, your teaching ministry.

Whether you are still finding your way as a deacon or priest, or whether you are long retired, your Bishop and your Diocese needs you to be around for a long time still.

Stay well. Stay strong. Be safe.

'I am, because we are, because God isopening hearts to heal God's world. AMEN

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Margaret" with a small cross symbol to the left. The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal line.

BISHOP MARGARET B VERTUE

Bishop of False Bay

9 April 2020 – Day 14 of Corona Virus Lockdown