

JESUS' PRAYER FOR UNITY: THE HOPE FOR A BETTER KENYA

JOHN 17: 6 -17 especially verse 11&12.

The New Year sermon, January 1, 2008. Kinoo Parish

HIT BY DESPONDENCY: Since Independence, nothing, other than the August 1, 1982 attempted coup, has ever thrown Kenya into such limbo of disarray, uncertainty, doubt and anxiety as the inconclusive results of the just ended general elections. This is similar to the despondency and anxiety that befell the disciples when Jesus all of a sudden disclosed to them his imminent departure. Even after Jesus told them not to let their hearts be troubled but to believe in him and also in his Father, and that he was going to prepare a place for them (John 14), serious questions still lingered in their minds about the interim time when he was not going to be with them. "Some of his disciples said to one another, "What is this that he says to us 'A little while, and you will not see me, and again a little while, and you will see me?'" His going away threatened their collective faith and unity. They felt the inability of continuing with their faith without Jesus' physical presence. The disciples had pegged their faith and unity in the physical presence of Jesus Christ so much that they did not see how these could continue after he insisted on going to die on the cross.

According to Jesus (John 17:11-12) while he was with his disciples they had no problems with their **faith** and **unity** as the foundations of any family, community, nation or Church. Their only problem was that their faith and unity were based on false conception and perception of the Messiah as Jewish liberator who would miraculously liberate them from their Roman oppressors, rather than God's servant who came to save the whole humanity. When Jesus healed, fed and taught them, and raised their dead, he confirmed their misconception. The disciples mistook Jesus' presence as that of a Jewish son who was going to defeat for them the sons of the Gentiles, while for Jesus all people are the sons and daughters of one God the Father, and therefore sisters of one another. Jesus told them, while I am not the way you think about Raila, Ruto, Kalonzo, Kibaki or Balala, you can be a follower of any of them, be a Railaist or Kibakian, but that is not God's license to burn yourself or other innocent people. The same misconception exists about Raila and Kibaki as Messiahs who would deliver one tribe from domination by the other, rather than God's servant for serving the whole humanity. Nothing threw the disciples into such great despondency as to hear Jesus telling them, even before accomplishing their liberation, that he was about to go to the Father. The disciples felt so much like orphans that he had to assure them of his continued presence in the Holy Spirit.

INCONCLUSIVE DECEMBER 27, 2007 ELECTIONS: Hence, Kenya is undergoing a crisis of inconclusiveness like what the disciples felt when Jesus talked about his going (John 13:31). Their false notion of the Messiah started crumbling under their feet. They

panicked and fell into uncertainty, anxiety and doubt similar to what Kenyans started to experience due to delays in and announcement of the **inconclusive** elections results. **My prayer is for the new Parliament to convene as soon as possible. The Attorney General to table the bill on constitution amendment on the Bomas Draft, the section that creates the posts of the President and of the Prime Minister. According to that amendment let Kibaki remain president and let Raila become Prime minister and then as Prime Minister Raila nominate to Parliament the names to form the cabinet and the President to appoint them.**

When the disciples heard Jesus bid them farewell, they had all the reasons to feel despondent. Jesus stated some of their reasons as “When I was with them, I kept them in my name...I guarded them and none got lost (John 17:12).” The pervasive despair of the disciples, that Jesus planned to leave them without physical protection and Jesus’ assurance are the subject of the subsequent chapters 14 to 17. Jesus comforts his disciples by letting them listen to his prayer discourse with God the Father in answer to questions asked by

- Peter as to where Jesus was going (John13:36),
- Thomas about the way to where Jesus was going (John 14:5),
- Judas on why Jesus would not inform the whole world about himself and his departure.

Some of Jesus’ prayer informed the disciples that like Jesus they are in the world but not of the world (John 15:19, 17:4&15), and therefore his leaving the world was not end of everything (The mishap of an election does not spell the end of Kenya).

The life, faith and hope that came to the disciples after Jesus death and resurrection is an example of the way to go. There is great hope for Kenya even after its most hallowed Messianic institutions, including the Electoral commission, have proven to be not what we expected of them. The responsibility reverts back to us as Kenyan citizens not to burn ourselves, or more significantly not to burn our neighbors simply because somebody decided to crucify our false and idolatrous notions of the messiah.

There are many children who after building their confidence in their parents fail to build confidence in themselves. Similarly a nation that puts too much confidence in its politicians may jeopardize its capacity to out-survive them. Jesus wanted the faith and unity of his disciples to outlive his physical presence. Each genuine leader, even if he were to be crucified should wish the same for his nation.

The Gospel of John talks about Jesus praying for his disciples to be preserved, not to have to be crucified. Every parent wishes the same for her children, that they should be spared of the pain and death they may have to undergo. If parents found their children worried about what would happen if the parents died they would make a similar prayer as Jesus made for his disciples. The first thing the parents would pray for is the integrity of their family; that the family would not degenerate or die after their departure.

Were they undergoing crises of change from disciple identity to apostle identity? The disciples thought that they would always be with Jesus to protect and keep them together but it seemed that without his physical presence their transition from discipleship to apostleship might fail. They were scared of what would happen to them, their unity and identity without Jesus historical presence.

Jesus' prayer starts with Jesus telling his disciples not to let their hearts be troubled as long as they believe in him. Jesus noticed that their concerns were not so much to do with lack of jobs, for they could go back to their former jobs; fishing, tax collecting and politicking, but to not being able to form the Church.

Jesus concern as to whether or not the disciples would survive to found the Church is the present concern for Kenya. The breakdown of an election is not the end of Kenya. The death of Christ was the not the end of his life, there is life beyond a broken election, even beyond the grave. This summarizes what I want Kenyans to know. If the departure of Jesus physical presence did not stop the disciples from founding the Church this electoral fiasco and debacle cannot stop our lives, individually and collectively from birthing a better Kenya.

ULTIMATE RESPONSIBILITY: My question is, is there a unit, concept or person greater than Kenya such that without it, Kenya cannot continue to exist? Did the election campaigns remove faith in ourselves and in God and placed it totally in the hands of the institutions and individuals that have let us down? If this is the case then Kenyans are guilty of collective idolatry and might as well be excused to burn themselves in their own hell fueled by their own fury. It is such suicidal despondency that wrecked Somalia.

First and foremost let me state that doubts exist about the integrity and validity of how votes were tallied but at the same time no human institution or concept, be it democracy, religion or state is larger than life, for God made them for people but not people for them. What I appeal to the people is for them to preserve life because even though Kenya began as a slave and a colony it lived to become independent. When this independence collapsed into a one-party dominance, the country still lived to be the multiparty system. Given this record Kenya will live to become truly just and democratic.

The faith, integrity and survival of Kenya are not pegged on any one single electoral flaw or failure, but pegged on God and in the right of every person to live. *Kuvunjika kwa mwiko siyo mwisho wa kupika.* The people of Kenya are as dissimilar and disparate as the disciples whom Jesus called to the unity of purpose in doing God's will,

- By being the community of all where the good of one becomes the fulfillment of all;
- By guarding the integrity and survival of their nation as Jesus exemplified;
- By living, reconciling and building life-giving relationships with one another as children of God where God overrides any particular interests.

- Taking into account that God minds that before you are a Railaist, Balalaist or Kibakian you were God's child and that is to you alone that God has given the responsibility to secure your life together with the lives of fellow human beings;
- Knowing that being a law enforcement officer makes you more responsible to God for life's preservation than an ordinary person.

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