

September 2011: SD Website

CHRISTIANS WORLDWIDE

Fellow Pilgrims:

Have you ever seen *The Bible in 50 Words*? I ran across this during a Cursillo Retreat when I was one of the Spiritual Directors. It pares the rhetoric down to the bare essentials. It says, *God made, Adam bit, Noah arked, Abraham split, Joseph ruled, Jacob fooled, Bush talked, Moses balked, Pharaoh plagued, People walked, Sea divided, Tablets guided, Promise landed, Saul freaked, David peaked, Prophets warned, Jesus born, God walked, Love talked, Anger crucified, Hope died, Love rose, Spirit flamed, Word spread, and God remained.* How would you express the Bible and our common faith if you lived in Africa, Asia, or the Middle East? After all, we are all children of God through faith in Jesus Christ (Galatians 3: 26-29). Our normal societal distinctions no longer matter.

Years ago, when I was the Director of Adult Education at First Presbyterian Church in Glen Ellyn, we used an African Creed at worship for a few Sundays. We wanted people to think more deeply about our faith and creeds. I hope that these prayers and creeds from our brothers and sisters in other lands will help us look at our faith and Savior with new-refreshed eyes.

The African Creed reads as follows: *We believe in the one High God, who out of love created the beautiful world and everything good in it. He created man and wanted man to be happy in the world. God loves the world and every nation and tribe on the earth. We have known this High God in the darkness and now we know Him in the light. God promised in the book of His Word, the Bible, that He would save the world and all the nations and tribes. We believe that God, made good His promise by sending His Son, Jesus Christ, a man in the flesh, a Jew by tribe, born poor in a little village, Who left His home and was always on safari doing good, curing people by the power of God, teaching about God and man, showing that the meaning of religion is love. He was rejected by His people, tortured and nailed hands and feet to a cross, and died. He lay buried in the grave, but the hyenas did not touch Him, and on the Third day, He rose from the grave. He ascended to the skies. He is the Lord. We believe that all our sins are forgiven through Him. All who have faith in Him must be sorry for their sins, be baptized in the Holy Spirit of God, live the rules of love and share the bread together in love, to announce the good news to others until Jesus comes again. We are waiting for him. He is alive. He lives. This we believe. Amen.*

Here are some sample prayers I have found through the years that speak to my heart and are from Christians worldwide. The prayer of an African girl reads, *O great Chief, light a candle within my heart that I may see what is therein and sweep the rubbish from your dwelling place.* A Xhosa Christian from South Africa prayed, *You are the great God—He Who is in heaven. You are the Creator of Life. You make the regions above. You are the Hunter Who hunts for soul. You are the Leader Who goes before us. You are He*

Whose hands are with wounds. You are He Whose feet are with wounds. You are He Whose blood is a trickling stream. You are He Whose blood was spilled for us.

Our brothers and sisters from other lands may give their prayers a slant that is new to us and may help us to rethink our own language. I believe God does not cookie-cutter Christians who look and sound alike. All confess Jesus as their Lord and risen Savior, but in a multitude of ways.

Chandran Devanesen from India prayed, *O Tree of Calvary send your roots deep into my heart. Gather together the soil of my heart, the sands of my fickleness, the stones of my stubbornness, the mud of my desires, bind them all together, O Tree of Calvary, interlace them with your strong roots, entwine them with the network of your love. Do we not desire the same?*

Consider the prayer of a Muslim convert, Mustafah, who prayed, *O God, I am Mustafah, the tailor, and I work at the shop of Muhammed Ali. The whole day long I sit and pull the needle and the thread through the cloth. O God, You are the needle and I am the thread. I am attached to You and I follow You. When the thread tries to slip away from the needle, it becomes tangled up and must be cut so that it can be put back in the right place. O God, help me to follow You wherever You may lead me. For I am really only Mustafah, the tailor, and I work at the shop of Muhammed Ali on the great square.*

I want to end with a piece of the Service of Holy Communion from *Our Modern Services: Anglican Church of Kenya*. One of the ending blessings involves the entire congregation. The minister says, *All our problems* and the people say *We send them to the cross of Christ* while they make a throwing motion with their arm toward the cross at the front of the church. Likewise with M: *All our difficulties* P: *We send them to the cross of Christ* and M: *All the devil's works* P: *We send them to the cross of Christ*. Then the minister says, *All our hopes* and the people say, *We set them on the risen Christ* while having both arms stretched out to the cross and pulling them onto their chests. The minister then says, *Christ the Sun of Righteousness, shine upon you and scatter the darkness from before your path: and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you, always*. Think of the power of acting out the words and gestures at the end of worship.

Never forget that, *For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave, nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* (Galatians 3: 27-28) We are blessed so that we may bless others. My prayer for you is that you live in such a way that those who know you, but don't know God, will come to know God because they know you. Amen.

In Christ's love,
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