

**PASTORAL CHARGE TO CONFERENCE 2023 – BAKAU METHODIST
CHURCH**

THEME: CONNEXIONALISM AND PEACE: the way forward

Text: JUDGES 6 VERSE 23

Introduction

On my Consecration in February 2022, I came to the Cathedral with a lot of mixed feelings. To an extent, I was a bit disappointed, angry and maybe on the brink of reacting. On another level, I was humbled to see such a great crowd of witnesses and the echos of joy streaming all across the global as my Facebook pages, what's app platforms and telephone and emails were flooded with messages of Good will and prayers. I was equally encouraged to know that, maybe for the first time in my life, my whole family – nuclear and extended, were gathered under one roof to celebrate God's goodness to their son of mean birth and status.

In the midst of these varied emotions, I had to appreciate that the call, mantle and responsibilities associated with being a Shepherd has been approved by God, his peoples and the time is now. It's real. It has happened. It is recorded as part of history forever that the Methodist Church The Gambia has endorsed the Rev'd gentleman that had been labeled with various nomenclatures.

In my 'confused, perplexed, emotional and happy' state of being, my spirit was elated with the words of the Methodist Hymn 812 - God is working His purpose out...

1. God is working his purpose out,
as year succeeds to year;
God is working his purpose out,
and the time is drawing near-
Nearer and nearer draws the time-
the time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with
the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.
2. From utmost east to utmost west,
wherever foot hath trod,
By the mouth of many messengers
goes forth the voice of God:
Give ear to Me, ye continents-
ye isles, give ear to Me,
That the earth may filled with the glory of God
as the waters cover the sea.
3. What can we do to work God's work,
to prosper and increase
The brotherhood of all mankind-
the reign of the Prince of Peace?
What can we do to hasten the time
- the time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with

the glory of God as the waters cover the sea.

4. March we forth in the strength of God,
with the banner of Christ unfurled,
That the light of the glorious gospel of truth
may shine throughout the world:
Fight we the fight with sorrow and sin,
to set their captives free,
That the earth may be filled with
the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.

5. All we can do is nothing worth,
unless God blessed the deed;
Vainly we hope for the harvest-tide,
till God gives life to the seed;
Yet nearer and nearer draws the time-
the time that shall surely be,
When the earth shall be filled with
the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea.

This hymn has summed up the first year of our episcopate in many respects. It also seeks to define that God is leading us in. The scriptural text for this conference, Judges 6:23, can also be paralleled in many respects with the hymn 812. Today, in our Conference, I charge you all – laity and clergy, to reflect with me on this story especially as it relates to our Beloved Church and Nation.

The Context of Judges 6 verse 23.

An exegesis of this text must be premised on the whole chapter of Judges 6. I would encourage all to critical study this text at home, in our various study units, classes/discipleship units, retreats and congregations. The chapter begins with the words, ‘ the Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the Lord...’ (verse 1).The consequences thereof are spelt out in verse 2 to 6. In our day and age, our context and geographic space, we seem to have a great deal of commentators, reviewers, theologian and experts on social norms and values as reflected in the many debates, discussions and social media platforms. We equally seem to have a lot of very articulate and objective discusses as well as some levels of ignorance that can be very alarming to say the least. Notwithstanding all these varied positions in our discourses on matters of importance, my question still stands – what is evil in the eyes of the Lord?

We can choose to be philosophical or social/contextual in our approach to this question. We can equally choose to the theological or economical in our response to this question. What ever perspective we choose to relate this question on, evil is not an abstract notion but a very existential position that is feared. As a perceived religiously inclined society and context, evil is, in my opinion, any word, action or thought, that doesn’t promote the well-being our our neighbour – immediate and otherwise. Evil is that which doesn’t promote humanity but sectarianism. Evil is that which hampers growth and development both on a personal or community levels. Evil is turning a blind eye to wrongs to safeguard our positions or statuses at the expense of truth. Evil is having a

form of godliness but denying the power of God . Evil is doing the very things our consciences trouble us about. Evil is not obeying God Almighty (verse 10).

An interesting shift in our understanding of and relationship with God is described in verse 13. Gideon, a young boy of lowly family heritage as reflected in verse 15, dares to question or reason with God in verse 13. He asks, ‘why has all this happened? Where are all the wonders that our fathers told us about? ...

This existential questions of Gideon continue to reason with most of our peoples especially in the face of contemporary realities in our jurisdictions. Why do we have to go to Court on matters relating to our schools. Why are Christian’s projected as secondary citizens in certain quarters? Why is our social and economic reality seemingly stalked? Why are the rich (and sometimes less religious) getting richer while the supposedly religious community is characterized with poverty? Why is our community of Faith seemingly stagnant in its work and mission? The questions can go on and on.

The Lord God of Host, the Lord God almighty, the God of peace and development. The Ancient of Days yet ever present in the affairs of humanity. Yahweh, Elohim, the Alpha and Omega, the transcendent immovable mover of destinies and changer of Stories, the one who moves in a mysterious way... His wonders to perform ... replied to Gideon in a very African manner. He listened to all the lamentations and then turned to him and said, ‘Go in the strength you have and deliver Israel... I am sending you!’ (Verse 14).

Ironically the one who was lamenting and raising all the questions now begins to doubt that he is the one to be used (verse 15 to 18). It baffles me that humanity has this tendency, often times, of making noise about inadequacies but when it comes to actioning the correction, we tend to back off and suggest others to do it. This tendency to which most of us are victims, will not move our context any step forward. Rather it will make us a very grammatical set of learned intellectuals. It is about time that we, together as a Conference and Nation, move from the rhetorical nature of our beings into a practical position in which we take responsibility of our actions, our future and our Church.

It is within this context of lamentations and withdrawals that our scriptural text pivots. The Lord said to Him, ‘Peace to you. Don’t be afraid, for you will not die’

As a memorial to this affirmation and position, Gideon built an alter and called it The Lord is Peace (verse 24).

Pastoral Charge

We stand on the brinks of many uncertainties. Our institutions and congregations are asking a lot of questions and are rightly worried and perplexed. Some within our congregations are yelling, ‘where is our God in whom we trust’. Others have felt discouraged and disappointed by circumstances and situations, now recorded in history. Yet others are trying to be hopeful but are circumspect as the story doesn’t seem to shift.

In the midst of these complex realities, we are called to declare hope, light and a vision of restoration, development and prosperity for all especially for the call out ones in Christ Jesus. On face value, I like many do not see it. I am sometimes discouraged about and in ourselves. I sometimes feel lonely and rejected. I sometimes wonder why am I in

this situation of Why are the same people who celebrate you today, the same that will crucify you in few days?

In this scary and bewildered paradigm, I hear and wish that you will also hear the voice of the Lord of Host –‘Peace to you. Don’t be afraid, for you will not die’. The Lord is Peace.

As ministers, evangelists, lay workers, leaders of various Organisations within the Church, national leaders of various natures – secular or ecclesiastical, civil society groups, government workers, political parties and everyone hearing my voice, let our messages anchor on the voice of the Lord God Almighty, the Lord of Peace – peace to you. Don’t be afraid, for you will not die.

Suffice to say that reactions would surface as verse 26 to 32 reflects. Suffice that those who ought to know and do better might be the proponents championing your opposition. Some will be visible and others will be faceless. Some will be reasonable while others will be overboard in their reactions and oppositions. Some will do everything humanly possible to taint, spoil or destroy your name and integrity while others will seek to permanently silence you as per African standards. This can be very discouraging and not worthwhile.

In recalling our calling, let us be reminded that ours is to do the beckon of our master, Jesus the Christ. So like Gideon, we might be tempted to ask for a sign to assure ourselves that truly God is with us (verse 33 to 40)

At present, I might not pinpoint any sign for you. I would rather refer us to MHB 511:

Begone Unbelief; my Saviour is near,
And for my relief will surely appear:
By Prayer let me wrestle, and He will perform;
With Christ in the Vessel, I smile at the storm.