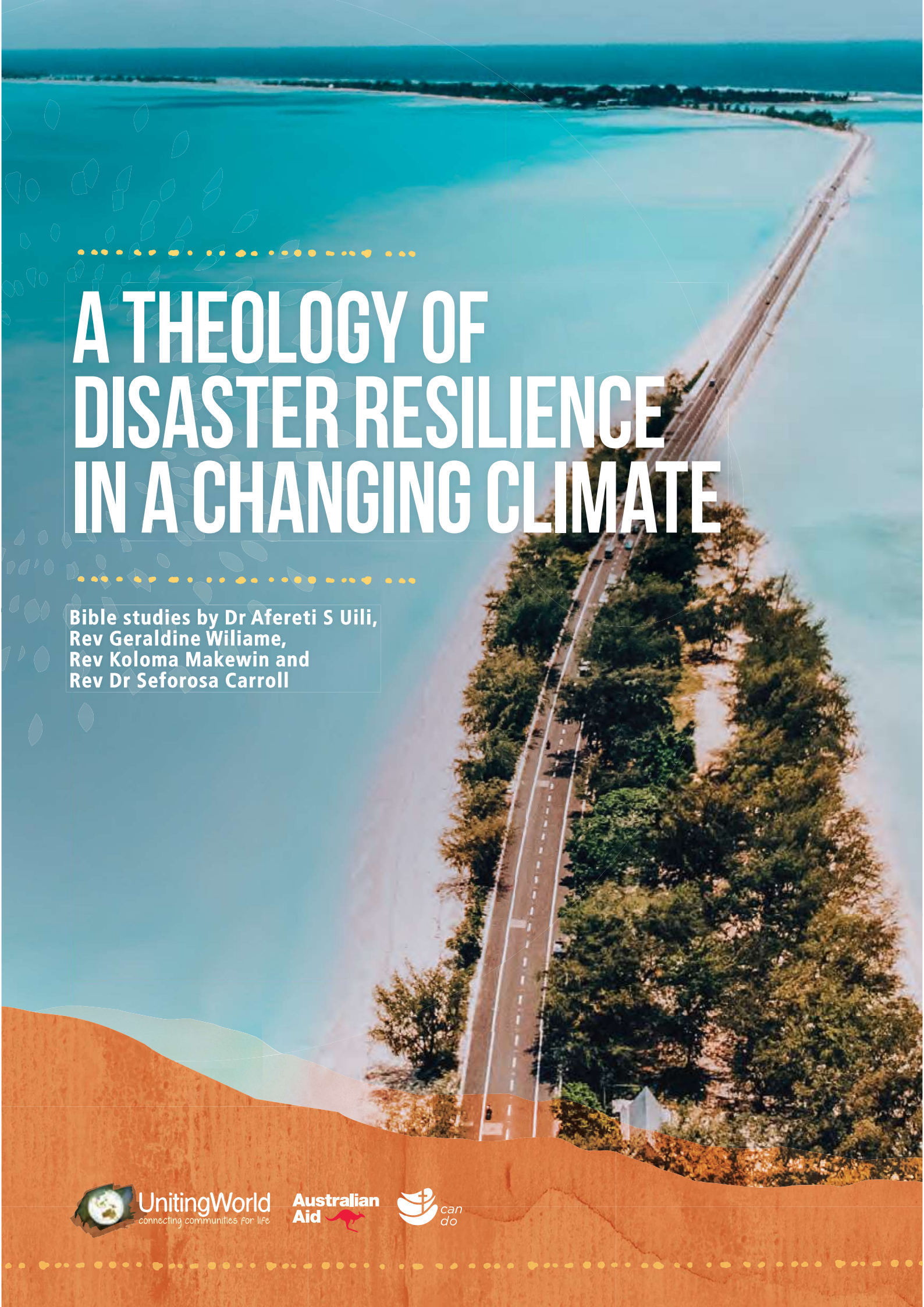

A THEOLOGY OF DISASTER RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Bible studies by Dr Afereti S Uili, Rev Geraldine Wiliame, Rev Koloma Makewin and Rev Dr Seforosa Carroll

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BACKGROUND

A THEOLOGY OF DISASTER RESILIENCE IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

CORE STATEMENT: PREPAREDNESS IS AN ELEMENT OF DISCIPLESHIP FOR A RESILIENT PACIFIC EARTH COMMUNITY

The earth and everything on it belong to the Lord. The world and its people belong to him. (Psalm 24:1)[1]

In August 2018 ten theologians and practitioners from Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tuvalu, Vanuatu, Aotearoa and Australia met in Suva to explore and consider what a context specific theology of Disaster Risk Management might look like for the Pacific. Prior to the group meeting baseline surveys were conducted by independent consultant Alice Banfield in Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu with church leaders, communities and other stakeholders by independent consultant Alice Banfield.[2] The purpose of the baseline surveys were to provide data to inform the theology of Disaster Risk Management and to test the assumption that theological beliefs underpin people's responses to natural disasters, climate change and the environment.

Drawing from the baseline survey results carried out by and through intense robust theological discussions over the week the following core statement emerged: *Preparedness is an element of discipleship for a Resilient Pacific Earth*[3] *Community.* It was agreed that this statement will frame the development of the framework paper and the accompanying bible studies. The theological notion of Preparedness is understood here to underpin the four stage cycle of the Disaster Risk Management process: mitigation, preparation, response and recovery. As churches, and as part of our active discipleship and custodianship[4] of creation and the resources available to us, it is our responsibility as Christians to be prepared to respond to and mitigate the impact of disasters. Preparedness does not mean a lack of trust in God. In James 2:17 & 26 we are reminded that *'faith by itself, if it has no works is dead'*. We are required to pray, discern and act. Preparedness embodies prayer, discernment and action and is to accompany the four stage cycle of the Disaster Risk Management process.

It was also agreed that rather than using the terminology of Disaster Risk Management that the more positive term of Disaster Resilience should be used here. It was argued that Disaster Resilience better conveys and reflects the strength and ability of Pasifika people and communities to mitigate, prepare, respond and recover from disasters.[5] A Christian understanding of Preparedness was identified as the basis for Disaster Resilience. In practical terms, the resilience of Pasifika communities is grounded in faith and trust in God and strengthened by reengaging and reclaiming the traditional wisdom of our elders in their ability to relate, read the weather patterns and

1 All biblical references are from the New Revised Standard Version (NRSV) unless specified otherwise.

2 Four individual reports of the countries surveyed were complied by Alice Banfield under the titles "Theology of Disaster Risk Management: Baseline Study: Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu." Sydney: Church Agencies Network Disaster Operations (CAN DO), 2019.

3 The inclusion of the term 'earth' in the core statement signifies a commitment to reconnect Pasifika understanding of 'community' as interconnected and inclusive of creation and people.

4 Custodianship rather than stewardship is preferenced here as it better captures the relationship and partnership between human beings and creation. Custodianship conveys our human responsibility to care for the creation entrusted to our care by the Creator.

5 Resilience also better captures the implications for pre- and post planning and continuing community recovery planning and has positive, enabling and empowering implications. The concept also integrates a theological or faith perspective that is grounded in the resurrection.

live in a respectful and mutual relationship with the environment while embracing new technologies such as mapping and warning systems.

The theological resources (framework paper and bible studies) are a practical response to the questions and challenges of understanding why natural disasters happen, of where and whether God is present in suffering, our relationship with God within Creation and our responsibility and response to God's Sovereignty through our ongoing discipleship in sustaining and maintaining, in this instance, a Resilient Pacific Earth Community.

Rev Dr Seforosa Carroll
on behalf of the Theology of Disaster Resilience Working Group

1. INTRODUCTION 1.1-1.5 SIN, SUFFERING AND DISASTERS

Disasters often raise questions about God and the meaning of life. People ask questions such as: Why has this happened? Is a disaster God's punishment for sin? Why would an all-powerful, loving God allow disasters to happen? Where is God when disasters happen? Has God abandoned us? These are questions that have been raised and debated by theologians and philosophers for many centuries. At the heart of these questions lie the fundamental question about the nature and character of God. What then can disasters teach us about God, our relationship with God, our relationship with God within creation and our relationship with our fellow human beings?

A theology of disaster resilience acknowledges that there are no easy answers to why disasters happen or why suffering exists. The bible records many kinds of different disasters. Some disasters are declared as God sent or divine judgement for sin (Noah's flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the plagues on Egypt). Often these disasters occur for a specific reason and after several warnings have gone unheeded.

The bible also records many other disasters in which there is no claim on God having caused them such as the famines noted in the stories of Abraham, Elijah, Joseph, Naomi and Ruth, and David. The bible does not claim that the hand of God is responsible for every disaster. Sometimes the bible gives an explanation for disasters, at other times it does not. We may never know why something happened. Consider Job and the Psalms, the question of 'why?' is asked but no answer is given. Similarly, Jesus' cry of abandonment on the cross 'my God, why have you forsaken me?' is not met with an answer but silence. The bible does not provide easy explanations for the causes of disasters or suffering nor guarantees that God will remove or prevent suffering. Instead, the bible speaks of faith that offers confidence that God can be trusted in the midst of suffering even if much remains unclear and uncertain. This trust is based on God's character – that God is loving, faithful, compassionate and just.

Disasters are natural and human made. The current ecological crisis is a reflection of our broken relationship with God, each other and the creation. We have failed to be good custodians of the earth. We have failed in the proper care of the earth and in our care for our fellow human beings. We have lost sight of how creation is God's abundant gift and how interrelated, interdependent and interconnected we are. This negation has been to our and nature's detriment. We are now living in a time of ecological crisis. Creation is groaning (Romans 8) under the effects of climate change around the world on the Earth Community (creation and humans is evident). Collectively we are currently living the consequences of our actions.

The present time calls for faithful Christian Response and Practice. Our discipleship in Christ calls forth a faithful, loving, active and compassionate response and action. We may not always be able to identify or understand why disasters happen but it is an opportunity for us to respond with hospitality, compassion and love to those around us.

2. THEOLOGY OF DISASTER RESILIENCE

The primary objective of disaster resilience from a Christian perspective is to strengthen, empower and enable individuals and communities to build and maintain communities of sustainability and resilience in the face of disasters. Critical to building, developing and maintaining communities of resilience is the Christian concept of Preparedness. A theology of Disaster Resilience has at its core the premise that *Preparedness is an element of discipleship for a Resilient Pacific Earth Community.* A theology of Disaster Resilience calls forth Faithful Response and Faithful Practice. Faithful Response is demonstrated through our faith and trust in God's unwavering love and is expressed through Christian Discipleship, Resilience, Love and Hope. But this is only a part of the equation of trust in God. Faithful Response must also be lived through Faithful loving Action.

2.1 FAITHFUL RESPONSE

Faithful Response is demonstrated through our faith and trust in God's unwavering love and is expressed through Christian Discipleship, Resilience, Love, Faithfulness and Hope.

2.1.1 PREPAREDNESS: AN ELEMENT OF DISCIPLESHIP

Building a sustainable and resilient community requires preparedness. As churches, and as part of our active discipleship and custodianship of creation and the resources available to us, it is our responsibility as Christians to be prepared to respond to and mitigate the impact of disasters. Preparedness does not mean a lack of trust in God. In James 2: 17 & 26 we are reminded that 'faith by itself, if it has no works is dead' (NRSV). We are required to pray, discern and act. Preparedness embodies prayer, discernment and action.

2.1.2 PREPAREDNESS: A MARK OF RESILIENCE

Resilience in the light of disasters is developed, nurtured and strengthened through Preparedness. The basis or the foundation of Christian resilience is grounded in the resurrection of Christ. The resurrection of Christ models the possibility of overcoming suffering and traumatic events. Death did not have the final word. Christ's resurrection speaks of hope and new life in the midst of suffering, trauma and death. Our Pasifika knowledge, spiritual, cultural and indigenous wisdoms are also a rich source we can turn to, to help us navigate and manage our resources.

2.1.3 PREPAREDNESS: A SIGN OF FAITH AND VISIBLE HOPE

Preparedness is both a proclamation of hope and a visible mark of faith in a world that is already possible but is yet to come.

2.2 FAITHFUL PRACTICE

A theology of disaster resilience is lived through faithful and loving practice. A theology of Disaster Resilience hinges on five key principles and accompanying practices that have at its core the care of creation and care for people throughout the disaster preparedness and resilience process. The five principles and accompanying practices are:

2.2.1 EARTH COMMUNITY

- **Principle:** The Earth Community is made up of the human and non-human creation. We are all members of God's Oikos, God's household. We are all equal and valued members of the earth community.
- **Practice:** Mutual custodianship and service

2.2.2 INCLUSION

- **Principle:** We must respect the human dignity of all people and the integrity of creation. All are created equal and worthy of respect.

- **Practice:** Include and respect everyone without bias in all aspects of the process.

2.2.3 ACTIVE DISCIPLESHIP IS PREPAREDNESS IN ACTION

- **Principle:** Christian Preparedness is prayerful, active and discerning action
- **Practice:** Informed inclusive disaster preparation

2.2.4 PASIFIKA KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

- **Principle:** All our Pasifika cultures have traditional knowledge and wisdom that are integral to disaster preparedness and resilience process and climate change custodianship
- **Practice:** Integrate Pasifika cultural understanding and practices into Disaster Risk Management whenever possible

2.2.5 PROPHETIC VOICE

- **Principle:** A theology of disaster resilience must address issues of climate injustice. Disaster resilience and climate justice are interrelated.
- **Practice:** Advocacy and awareness raising in church, local government and global spaces

3. CONCLUSION

A theology of disaster resilience acknowledges that there are no easy answers to the problem of suffering. However, a theology of disaster resilience rests on the conviction and trust that God through Christ is present in the Spirit in the midst of disasters, suffering and despair. Preparedness as an element of discipleship is critical in building and maintaining resilient Pasifika communities. Finally, resilient Pasifika communities can be built and sustained through engaging a Christian understanding and practice of preparedness.

THE BIBLE STUDIES

A GUIDE FOR LEADERS

There are six bible studies that accompany the framework paper. The objective of each bible study is to encourage exploration of the texts, to make room for asking questions about suffering, disasters, climate change and the role of faith. Each bible study demonstrates at least one or several Faithful Practice principles of the theology Disaster of Resilience.[6]

BIBLE STUDY METHODOLOGY[7]

There are five steps in the bible study methodology. The studies are written to be accessible for everyone and to accommodate all levels of biblical and theological knowledge. The bible study leader is best situated to access the knowledge and competency levels of her/his community and as such can prepare and adjust the delivery of the material accordingly. It is recommended that the bible study leader is familiar with the biblical texts and study material and is encouraged to do further reading and research of the texts as necessary and is required.

STEP 1 Welcome and Introduction

Welcome and invite participants, declaring that the space in which everyone meets is a safe space to explore the biblical texts, ask tricky and even taboo questions about God and faith. Introduce participants to the objective of the bible study and the text being studied. Explain how the bible study relates to the Faithful Practice principles of the theology of Disaster Resilience.

STEP 2 Invitation

Introduce the bible text being studied. Participants can either read the text together or someone or several people can be chosen to read. Once the passage is read, the leader can invite initial discussion from participants about their first impressions of the text such as their understanding, knowledge and experience of the text. This step is an invitation for participants to share what they know and their experience of the text.

STEP 3 Exploring the text

In this step the bible text is explored in depth. After each relevant cluster of verses or verse is explored, one or several questions are posed to encourage participants to engage with the text and also to prompt new questions or insights and to guide them into new meaning making. The role of the bible study leader will be critical in guiding and leading participants to engage the texts as well as to draw new insight, meaning and wisdom from the texts.

STEP 4 Applying the text

In this step the leader is encouraged to guide participants to make connections between the new meanings/interpretations of the text to Action relating to Disaster preparedness/resilience. There are questions at the end of this step. Further questions to consider could be around the following:

- What does the text mean for today?
- What does the text say about inclusive evacuation? Why is it necessary to be inclusive?

6 A summary of the lessons gleaned from the bible studies and its relation to the Faithful Practice principles is contained in the Summary for easy and further reference.

7 This bible study methodology is adapted from Boyung Lee's 5R's method of reading and interpreting the biblical texts. See Boyung Lee, "When the Text Is the Problem: A Postcolonial Approach to Biblical Pedagogy." *Religious Education* 102, no. 1 (2007): 44-61.

- What does the text say about our relationship with creation and how we should care for it?
- How is sin now to be understood in relation to disasters?
- How does Oceanic/Pacific traditional knowledge teach and shed light on preparedness and responsible custodianship of creation?

STEP 5 **Conclusions**

In this step the key messages of the biblical text are summarised.

STEP 6 **Kaikai/meal**

Share a meal together to continue the talanoa/ conversation about the bible study.

BIBLE STUDY WRITERS

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The bible studies were written by four Pacific theologians based in Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Fiji and Australia. They bring to the biblical texts their own experience, professional expertise as both biblical and theological scholars, knowledge and insights. It is our hope that these bible studies will bring about new ways of thinking and engaging the biblical texts that bring about transformative thinking, action and changes within communities and beyond.

Gratitude and thanks to the bible study writers who undertook this work within a limited time period, finding time within their already busy schedules, family commitments and personal challengers to fulfil the task.

The original bible studies written by Geraldine Wiliame, Koloma Makewin and Afereti Uili were simplified by Catherine Taylor for accessibility and for ease of delivery in communities. This was an enormous task that Cath undertook to fulfil within a short timeframe. Thanks and much gratitude, Cath!

It has been my special privilege to undertake the writing, editing and collating of these resources. This has been a challenging, rewarding and fulfilling task.

Blessings,
Rev Dr Seforosa Carroll
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BIBLE STUDY 1: PSALM 104

GOD'S CREATION, OUR HOME

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our first study. We hope you'll learn from reading this Psalm that God is our Creator, that everything is connected and that creation (the earth) is our common home.

In honouring creation, we honour God. Unless changes are made to the way we relate to each other and the earth, we risk breaking our connection to each other within God's household. This will have serious results – not just for creation but for people. These ideas connect with stories in our Pasifika culture about creation and the way we relate to land, sea and sky. This bible study demonstrates the Faithful Practice principles of Earth Community, Inclusion, and Pasifika Knowledge and Wisdom and Prophetic Voice.

2. INVITATION

Let's read Psalm 104 together
What does it say?

Psalm 104 is a hymn of praise to God as Creator and Sustainer of the universe and affirms that God lives and acts in both the heavens and the earth. This psalm was probably originally used in Temple worship and it has some similarities to other Egyptian creation hymns from the 14th century in the near East.

While the hymn is a song of praise to God for giving and sustaining life, it's also concerned with human attitudes. The poet imagines the earth without sinners and wickedness and calls for a radical change of our attitudes:

'Let all sinners vanish from the face of the earth; let the wicked disappear forever. Let all that I am praise the Lord. Praise the Lord' (Psalms 104:35).

The first line above identifies human beings as those responsible for the disharmony on Earth. It describes the world as Oikos, our common home, and praises it in all its majesty.

But at the conclusion of this hymn, the poet shifts his focus to human self-centredness. This diversion disrupts the language of praise. It demands that traditions that promote exploitation, oppression and abuse of nature by arrogant humans be destroyed. It calls for redeeming the Oikos from all that is evil and all that brings disharmony.

Psalm 104 is therefore an Earth-affirming hymn and it asks us as inhabitants of the Earth to find ways to honour God by honouring earth.

This bible study invites us to re-think how we view the world and our place in it.

QUESTIONS

a) What parts of this Psalm stand out to you the most?

b) Do any verses surprise you?

Consider this story…
Melanesian Myth of the Coconut

Many Melanesians in the Pacific have their own beliefs about nature and their relationship to it. Consider for example this Papuan Myth of the coconut that expresses people's beliefs about God's creation and their relationship to it.

Melanesians say that once human beings had no coconuts. When they cooked taro they had no coconut milk to put on it. In the early days of creation there used to be a village near the sea. The men who lived

there went fishing every morning. But they did not catch many fish except for one man who went fishing by himself. He could catch more fish than he could eat. 'This is very strange indeed,' the men said. So they had a meeting about it. While the meeting was in progress a boy stood listening and thought of a plan, and he put it before the gathering. 'Tomorrow I will follow him and see what he does.' The next day the boy did as he planned and followed the man until the man came to the sea-shore. Then the boy hid behind a tree and watched the man carefully. This is what he saw: the man put down his fishing basket and then took hold of his head with his two hands. He pulled and pulled till his head came off. He placed his head on the sand and he walked into the sea till the water came up to the middle of his body. The man then bent down till his throat was at the same level with the water. The fish came swimming in great numbers and swam down the man's throat. When he had enough he walked slowly back up to the shore. He shook the fish out and put his head back on again. The boy who witnessed all this was afraid and he ran home quickly and told others about it. The next day all men went quickly to the sea-shore to witness this for themselves. They saw the man took off his head. As he moved into the water, one of then men ran out from the trees and taking the head, he threw it in the middle of the bush. After a short while the owner came out of the water and began feeling for his head. When he could not find his head he ran back into the sea and changed into a big spirit fish. He swam out of sight. A few days later the boy who first saw the man started to think about the head. He then went into the bush to try to find it. When he came to the place where it had been thrown, he found a palm tree growing. Nobody knew what the tree was. It had nuts on it. The men who saw this then were afraid to eat them. But one of the women took a nut and ate the inner part. When others saw that she was not harmed, they ate some as well. Melanesians say if you look at the nut when the husk has been taken away you can see a face of a man.

The Papuan myth of the coconut interprets that life is sacred because by origin it was sacred. It articulates that the whole of life is spiritual. There is no dichotomy between the sacred and profane. Their cosmology integrates the spiritual and the physical, the skies above and the earth below. Heaven and Earth in Psalms 104 are the locus of God's presence and activity.

Like the Papuan myth of the coconut, many Pacific/Melanesian myths and traditional stories picture the whole of life as sacred because everything is connected. Psalm 104 teaches a similar thing. There is no disconnection between the spiritual and the physical, the skies above and the earth below. Instead, everything is interconnected.[8]

QUESTIONS

a) Do you know of similar local creation myths?

b) Do you still tell these to your children and what meaning do you give them?

c) What beliefs do your people have with regard to the land, sea, air, fish and animals?

3. EXPLORING THE TEXT

The hymn celebrates the creation of Earth in its seven wonders (1) Skies and atmosphere (verses 2-4); (2) the earth (verses 5-9); (3) waters (verses 10-13); (4) vegetation (verses 14-18); (5) Moon and Sun (verses 19-23); (6) the sea (verses 24-26); (7) Gift of Life (verses 27-30). This description emphasises that God didn't only make the Earth; God continues to be involved by relating to and sustaining it.

8 Koloma Makewin, 'The Concept of the Sacred from a Melanesian Perspective' in the Pacific Journal of Theology Series II, No. 37, (2007): 95.

Read Psalm 104:1-4

Celebrating Our Common Home (Psalm 104: 1-4)

Psalm 104 is a beautiful creation hymn, celebrating earth as a common home for all animals, fish and people. The Poet, from the beginning, describes God's majesty and splendour in building the upper chambers of *šāamayim* (heavens) and sings of God's activity in laying the foundations of the Earth.

These four verses describe Heaven and Earth as the location or place of God's Presence and reveals that Earth is not inferior to the skies or heavens. By building the foundations of the earth, it too becomes the locus for God's presence and affirms the unity of the cosmos. The psalm pictures God not simply as sitting in some other faraway place, but as part of the universe. The Psalmist pictures God creating the sky like the tent of a home and moving in the light, wind, clouds and fire around us.[9]

QUESTIONS

a) Is the idea of God's presence and activity in both heaven and earth new to you?

b) If you were going to describe God's presence and activity in 'both heaven and earth' in the place where you live today, what examples would you give?

Read Psalm 104: 6-9

God establishes the foundation of the Earth (v.6-9)

Verses 6-9 mark the transition between the building of the skies and establishing the earth. God now builds the foundation of earth and ensures its durability (v.5) The poet describes God's Sovereignty over the Earth in the image of a flood (v.6-9).[10] Metaphorically, the poet imagines covering the earth like a garment covering the deep. These verses demonstrate that God is creator and God is in control. The poet further describes that mountain building and valley sinking as processes of uncovering the earth (v.8). God establishes the balance in their locations and specifically marks the irreversible nature of process. At the time, many people knew something about 'cosmic forces' and their potential for destruction of the world and everything in it. The poet emphasises that God alone who sets the boundaries of time and space and guarantees that waters will not return to cover the earth.

QUESTIONS

a) How do you understand God being in control? What does this mean to you?

9 This hymn begins with a personal call to bless God (v.1). It is then followed by a devout exclamation of wonder at God's splendour and majesty in the use of creation for his benefit (v. 2-4). God is described as wearing light as his garment. Authur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (London: SCM Press, 1962), 667, observes that God appears '. . . as the brilliance of the heavenly light in his glorious royal robe.' He is surrounded by honour and majesty. This utterance speaks of the theophany of God. The properties of the sky, light, in this view is connected directly with God's being and God's activity. This sets the ground of praise by the Hebrew poet. According to Weisser, the utterance in the first line sums up the occasion for the whole psalm where the poet realises all things in nature have their own way of speaking of the One mighty God and exemplify to him his majesty and wisdom, (See *The Psalms*, 663). The light in the skies alone does not give substance to God's splendour and majesty, but it includes the building of the heavenly habitation likened to a man stretching out and putting up his tent (v.3-4). The use of the verb *nātâ* which refers to pitching or extending further denotes 'bending' hence it implies a kind of a canopy though it is not specifically mentioned. This construction visualizes the upper stories or the rooms on top of the house. It could also refer to the successive layers of heaven, either three or seven. God lays the beams over the waters which refers to the clouds. These are Yahweh's heavenly habitation or dwelling place, like the living quarters on top of a house. As Craig Broyles, New International Biblical Commentary (Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1999), 398, puts it 'He unfolds the skies as though they were a mere tent.' The upper chambers are placed over the waters of the skies which refers to clouds that droops over the Earth. Besides, the poet describes God's majesty in his personal use of waters, cloud and the wind (v.3a – 4). He creates waters for his home by laying the upper chambers of his home in the waters. Clouds are a form of transportation - used as his chariots. The wind created becomes his footpath so he can walk upon the wings. These natural phenomena, the clouds and the wind, serve as his chariot and lightning to serve him. The poet shows God's majesty through physical phenomena by making the wings his messengers and flaming fire His ministers. Like the light as mentioned earlier, waters, clouds and the wind are connected with God's being and activity. These wonders should not be merely regarded as material elements of the natural world and are not empty of divinity. Rather the light, wind and the clouds possess a divine character. They are a medium of the revelation of God, and are an indication of God's presence.

10 This illuminates the flood story of the Genesis account. The height of the waters standing above the mountains measures the depth of the coverage. The power of God's rebuke dramatically draws back the floods and the floods disappear at the sound of his thunder. According to Samuel Terrin in his *The Psalms and Their Meaning for Today* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2004), 58, the poet is aware, in his mind, of the danger of a cosmic cataclysm but believes that God is and remains in control of his universe.

The last statement states that 'God alone who sets the boundaries of time and space and guarantees that waters will not return to cover the earth'.

b) How do you understand this in terms of Climate Change? Is God promising that sea level rise will not happen or warning that the greedy are impacting the earth in ways that are undermining God's promise?

Read Psalm 104:10-13

God creates Ecosystems of life And Provides Sustainability (Psalm 104: 10-13)

In this section the poet describes what modern science calls 'ecosystem chains of life' – the way that all living things dwell, grow, and depend on one together. All of this life is sustained by God. Waters through springs are sent into the valleys and between the mountains so that beasts from the fields are free to drink (v.11-12); birds sing happily besides the rivers on the trees and the rain waters the mountains from His upper chambers so that fruit grows.

In 14-18 we see grass grown for cattle to eat (v.14-15); next we see vegetation for people to grow and farm for food (v.14b-15). Wine, oil and food are all made for sustaining people's hearts and bodies. Trees are given enough moisture and places for birds are created, while high mountains are made for the wild goats and cliffs are built for rock badgers (v.18) God is both the creator and the one who continues to give all these things life. Samuel Ryan (Samuel 1952:60) noted it well when he said 'Life is the property of God and is never independent of its creator.'

The poet describes the different ways that all of life supplies, feeds and supports each other, all species and natural cycles tied together in a joyous and gracious earth community. Each part of the animal, plant and human kingdom are members of the Earth.

QUESTIONS

a) The Psalm affirms the interconnectedness of all creation – human and non-human beings. Does this change the way you relate to or understand creation? Or is this an understanding that your culture already holds?

b) If so, share how your culture understands the relationship between humans and non-human creation.

Read Psalm 104:19-23

God Provides Time and Space so that all creation thrives (104: 19-23)

In this section we see God organising time through the sun and moon. Moon was made for seasons; darkness and light are appointed to benefit God's creatures. Darkness (night) is given so that forest beasts can hunt, (lions seeking their prey in darkness). On the other hand, daylight is given to make sure lions retreat and man may work until his retirement in the evening.

Read Psalm 104:27-30

God's Provision for the Sea and the land (v.24-26; v. 27-30)

Next, the poet praises God's wisdom because God's provision for the sea benefits his creatures (v. 24-26). The vastness of the sea allows for a huge range of fish and other marine life as well as sailing ships and mystical creatures like the leviathan.[11]

The poet is aware that through all the different seasons, God's creatures depend upon God's Providence (27-30). When God opens His hand they are satisfied. Interestingly enough, the poet observes that for both human and nonhuman, the breath of God defines life: without it all things will die. In understanding life, humans and animals are not viewed in different categories but they share

11 Note that leviathan is not seen as an enemy of God as typical of ancient Near Eastern creation myths, but rather a playful creature of God's creation ArthurWalker-Jones, "Psalm 104: A Celebration of the Vanua," in Norman C. Habel (ed), *Earth Story in the Psalms and the Prophets,* The Earth Bible Vol.4, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 90.

the same breath and breathe the same air. By defining breathe as life for humans and animals alike, humans and nonhumans are placed within a single conceptual world. Further, the dust of which we are made of encompasses the divinity and the humanity of life (v.29).

QUESTION

a) The Psalmist describes human and non-human beings as sharing the same source of life – God's breath. Discuss.

Read Psalm 104: 31-35
Our Kinship with Earth – Oikos

The poet further praises God for by purifying the earth in a number of ways (31-32). The trembling of the earthquake and the eruption of the volcanoes are natural ways of purifying the earth. Earth has its own way of re-ordering, renewing and promoting growth.

Finally, at the closure of this hymn, the poet calls for the eradication of evil that humans bring (v.35). Humans are not seen as either superior or inferior to other parts of creation. They are simply shown as members of Earth's community. The poet, in his praise, specifically hopes for an earth without evil and sinners (33-35). The role of human beings is seen as a threat to the way God's household has been set up to operate.

This section of the hymn highlights the poems concerns for human attitudes that exploit and violate the spaces of others who also have every right to live whether they be animal, fish or plant. All living things are to respected and acknowledged as God's and they are to be treated as such.

In the final verse 35, the psalmist returns to verse 1 of this hymn. He personally exhorts and blesses God, acknowledging God as the Giver and Sustainer of Life and all creation.

4. APPLYING THE TEXT

We now move from the Psalm to considering how we may apply the message of the Psalmist to our everyday life. How does the message of the Psalmist apply to us in terms of our everyday discipleship?

QUESTIONS

Consider the following questions, sharing with one another 1-2 key practical things you can do together as a community to care for the earth and one another.

a) Psalm 104 portrays God as a Relational Being who created and provides for all of creation. Each part, including human beings, depends on the other. How and what does our cultural and traditional knowledge teach us about living alongside creation, so that both are respected (sustainable living)?

b) In Psalm 104: 35, the Poet makes a call to eradicate evil created by human beings. What kind of changes do you see might need to be made to reflect a world where creation and people can both thrive? In your country? Your local area? Your own life?

5. CONCLUSIONS

- God is in relationship with or relates to the earth
- God is present and acts in both the heavens and the earth
- Creation is good and worth celebrating
- All of creation is interconnected, each with a special part to play in the cycle of life and within the ecosystem.
- God is creator and sustainer of all life and cares for all of life. Human beings are not seen as superior but simply part of God's good creation

6. KAIKAI/MEAL

NOTES

BIBLE STUDY 2: MATTHEW 7:24-27

BE PREPARED IN EVERY WAY

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our second study. We hope you'll learn from studying Jesus' words in this section of the Sermon on the Mount that 'building a home on a firm foundation' applies to all areas of life, from our spiritual growth to our physical and economic wellbeing. This is important when we think about the challenges that we face in our homes as Oceanic people, especially in a time when we are threatened by changing climate and natural disaster. Like Oceanic people, Jesus is a strongly relational person (three in one) and calls us to be prepared to meet the needs of our local community as God's people together. This bible study demonstrates the Faithful Practice principles of Active Discipleship is Preparedness in Action, Pasifika Knowledge and Wisdom and Prophetic Voice.

2. INVITATION

READ MATTHEW 7:24-27 (NKJV)

24 "Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 "But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

What does it say?

This passage is found within the Sermon on the Mount Matthew 5 – 8, which talks about what it means to follow Jesus within the Kingdom of God. The main themes of the Sermon on the Mount are what kind of people will be found in the Kingdom, the need for justice and the difference between people who simply hear and those who act.
In Matthew 7:15-23, large crowds followed Jesus and they called him kurie (Lord, Lord) meaning 'supreme in authority or the one who controls.' The repetition of this term *kurie* intensifies the respect and honour shown to Jesus. Yet Jesus responded by saying *not everyone that calls kurie (Lord, Lord), will enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Only those who are willing to obey him and take responsibility are given that privilege. To follow Jesus means more than just hearing and listening. Jesus drives this point home in the verses we are studying today. He calls us to carefully choose the foundation on which our homes are built – rock or sand. The wise person – the one who hears what Jesus teaches and carries it out – will build a home on rock that withstands the storm. The foolish person – who hears but does not obey – will find their home destroyed.

Throughout history, the Bible has been interpreted and re-interpreted many times. Many of our churches in Oceania believe that the passage we're studying today only speaks about the spiritual and moral aspects of Christian life. But is this all that Jesus meant?

Our study today will encourage us to look for ways to apply the text in ways that help us find the benefits of practically living out Jesus' words, not just holding onto them for moral or spiritual comfort.

QUESTIONS

a) When you think about this text, what songs, stories or images come to mind?

b) Are there any similar stories from your local area or tradition about the wisdom of building carefully on strong foundations?

3. EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Matthew 7:24a

There are three important things to notice about Verse 24a: *'Therefore, whoever hears these words of mine and practices them'.* The word *therefore* signals that what follows requires more than hearing. It is the beginning of the application part of Jesus' teaching on the Mount. It guides the audience to translate what they have heard into action. That is why Jesus said, 'hear and practice', meaning that to be a true hearer or follower of Christ is to be a *doer* of his teachings.

The adjective (pas) *'whosoever'* reminds us that this teaching is for everyone, not only the crowd but everyone who dwells in Galilee. These Galileans consist of Jews, Gentiles and Christians. During Jesus' time, many hearers and followers were illiterate; they preferred to listen rather than to read. Spoken words were highly regarded and in order to attract audiences or crowds, Jesus used parables. This address shows that no matter who heard this message - Jews, Gentiles or Christians; literate or illiterate - everyone was called to respond.

The phrase *hears these words of mine and practices them* emphasises that these words belong to Jesus and reveals the importance of hearing and doing things God's way. Theologian Vaitusi Nofoaiga believes that local people needed to **go beyond 'familiar spaces** of doing things and enter unfamiliar spaces' to apply Jesus' unexpected teaching to everyday worlds and needs. This means that Jesus' teachings should not be understood as something heavenly, but rather a way of life integrated and practiced daily to help the needs of the community in Galilee. In the Pacific, we have been taught to be 'receivers of what was given to us' - passive readers or hearers of Jesus' teachings. However, this text reminds islanders that we need to move away from being 'receivers or passive readers' into 'present island interpreters'. As island interpreters, our interpretation begins with our own life experiences because our interpretation of life is an everyday activity.

QUESTIONS

a) Do you think of yourself more as a 'thinker and teacher' or a 'doer'?

b) Throughout history, the church has been seen as teaching people how to live moral/spiritual lives. Here, Jesus suggests his teaching is also about actively applying wisdom to practical issues. What do you think are the most important practical issues facing your local community that Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount might have something to say about?

READ MATTHEW 7:24B AND 25

'… is/will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock'.

The use of the Greek word *hoiothesetai* means *'is or will be like'.* This shows the parable has an eschatological (future) meaning and a present meaning. The hearers and the doers of God's will are *like* the wise men who built their houses on rock. Houses built on rock or sand are reflections of life in Palestine where a house built during the dry season seems secure until the storm comes. In the first century, the time and energy required to build a house was beyond anything we might see today. In modern day building, machines are involved and compared to ancient times, it takes only a few weeks to complete a house. Matthew 24b and 26b highlights that both houses have similar constructions, built to withstand natural disasters - both are built by human hands. But the difference lies in the type of material used for the foundation of each house.

The question is: 'what does this rock and sand foundation represent?' When the story was first told, it would have been heard both as a literal, concrete warning as well as having a deeper meaning.

The rock foundation: In ancient building practices, houses were usually made of either stones or bricks. The builders who laid the foundation had to shape and set the cornerstone of the foundation accurately, because the whole building was set out in relation to it. As builders moved on to the construction of the walls, they used additional cornerstones to tie the main walls together and make the whole building stable. The placing of the chief cornerstone was always a satisfying achievement because this was the stone that guaranteed the perfection of the whole building. The cornerstone therefore provided a useful illustration of triumph and achievement. Matthew 16:18 asserts that this rock is Jesus Christ and to build a house on the rock would mean 'to build one's life in Christ', the best stone of all. The parable illustrates that the two builders were not judged by the care which they took in building their houses, but by the foundation on which they stood. True stability in life is centered in Christ, the rock.

The sand foundation: As a local himself, Christ probably had knowledge that strangers who came to Galilee to build would be more attracted to a 'ready-prepared' level surface of sand rather than upon the hard and rugged rock nearby. But a house built without care for the foundation may fall at any time.

QUESTIONS

In reality, when life is calm, the foundations do not seem to matter. But when crisis' come, our foundations are tested. A solid foundation does not imply being inflexible or stubborn about our beliefs and opinions. Instead, a solid foundation suggests the ability to apply what we have learned from Jesus' teaching to practical situations. What practical crisis' have you or your community faced and how has applying the teaching of Jesus prepared you to cope with these challenges?

The strength of each house's foundation is tested by natural disaster. In ancient times, Eastern monsoons, floods and hurricanes did great damage to strong houses and destroyed those less strongly built. Verses 25 and 27 *the rain descended, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house* reminds readers that both houses were built to withstand natural disasters but while the house built on the rock remained standing, the house built on sand collapsed. The intention of Jesus using natural disaster is to warn the crowd to avoid a similar fate. Storms are part of life whether one is wise or foolish. Challenges come from all sides; from above (rain descended), the sides (winds blowing and beating) and below (streams rising), but a life that is truly grounded in Christ endures in all situations whether spiritual, economic, social or physical.

READ MATTHEW 7:26 AND 27

26 But everyone who hears these words of
mine and does not put them into practice
is like a foolish man who built his house on
sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams
rose, and the winds blew and beat against
that house, and it fell with a great crash.

QUESTIONS

a) The Christian tradition has sometimes seemed to teach that following Jesus will allow us to avoid life's storms or somehow protect us from suffering/pain/disappointment. This parable suggests that as Christ's followers, no matter how faithful we are, we **won't** avoid storms (the houses of both the wise and foolish men suffer from disaster). Does this clash with the idea of natural disaster as punishment for evil?

b) What might Jesus be communicating instead about natural disaster, and about how we respond to difficulty?

c) V.26-27 states "But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." In term of the impacts of a Natural Disasters, how do we understand this? Is Jesus saying that only the houses of the foolish fall? Or are we being challenged to practically secure our homes in anticipation that the storms will come?

4. APPLYING THE TEXT

Luke records this same parable but further describes that the wise builder *dug deep* on the foundation (Luke 6:48), meaning that what makes the foundation strong and reliable is how *deep* the foundation is laid and constructed. One of the things we learn when we have a deep understanding of Jesus is that Jesus is not simply an individual, but a Trinitarian being, where the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit are found in each other. As islanders, faith finds its deepest expression not in individual belief but when the community is involved and transformed. This means that every person matters and can find a home within the life of the church, no matter what our background, ethnicity, religion or gender. A life in Christ means to be open and flexible to new opportunities and life to which the Spirit of Christ directs us.

QUESTIONS

a) When you consider the call of the communal/ relational Jesus to include all people, how deep is the foundation of faith in your family and church life?

b) What are some examples of the way your family or church include people who are different to yourselves (people with disabilities, people from different religions)?

The house (oikos) was the center of the church and the economy during Jesus time, as well as the meeting space for Christians in the first century. In Matthew's gospel, God's people are expected to use their houses, as they use all things, for the glory of God. The home was not just for entertaining friends but to provide generous help and friendship to the lonely, the poor and the needy. The home was the center of economic, political, social, religious and ecclesial life.

In many Pacific islands, the house is seen as a communal space, a home rather than a building, the center and strongest unit in our community. The house represents the foundation of life where the principles of *Aitu* or *Atua* (God); *kainaga* (people) and the hanua or fenua (land and sea) are interwoven and part of each other. It is this foundation that conceives our identity and moral values (who we are and what we can become); our relationality (relationships to those around us and our connections to our land) and our richness in life (richness is not determined by how much one owns and possesses but how one relates to others). When the foundation is not strong due to the loosening of these three strands above, then one is considered to be poor and can be swept away by the problems of life.

QUESTIONS

a) How do you personally use your home to live out the teaching of Jesus and to demonstrate our Pacific ideal of the home as the strongest unit in the community?

b) What do you see as being the main threats to the home in Pacific culture today?

Today, the threats to our *hanua* or *fenua* (home) are not only moral and spiritual but very physical, exactly as the first listeners to Jesus' story would have heard them. Our Pacific homes are threatened by storm surges, flooding, cyclone, earthquake and drought – all brought about climate change. While it can be tempting to respond to this suffering as though we can only offer spiritual advice, Jesus teaching is practical and for the whole of life: spiritual, physical, economic and relational. There is no *one-dimensional way* to be a Christian, where the focus is only spiritual

growth. Following Jesus is *multi-dimensional* where all facets of life - spiritual, social, economic and physical - are embraced.

The text we've studied today invites island readers to look at what makes our foundation strong as people of Oceania. Our foundation is strong because we see and understand Christ as part of our daily lives, expressed and woven into our daily social, political, economical and church life. It is this foundation that maintains and creates new relationships and respect in all facets of life. Our foundation as people of Oceania is not based on individuality but rather on being part of a community. Within each individual, the life of his/her own village, family and *hanua* or *fenua* (land) are reflected. As Tui Atua Tamasese Eifi affirms 'I am accountable to my father, my mother, my family and my village and I am accountable not only to the living but to the dead… so that the face is not the individual secular, private face as in the *Palagi* context, face is the collective face of family, village and ancestors'. The individual and the community are inseparable. Our foundation as people of Oceania is not merely based on 'words' but rather on 'deeds' lived and experienced as a daily activity.

QUESTIONS

One of the main ideas to arise from this text is that for Jesus' teaching to be of use to his followers, it must be practically applied to all parts of life, not just the spiritual. This is especially true when it comes to managing life's difficult times – both the physical challenges that we face like sickness or disaster, and mental or relational challenges.

a) What more could your community be doing to prepare for the physical and emotional difficulties that vulnerable people in your community face as a result of cyclone, storm surge, earthquake or drought?

b) How do you make sure that all people, regardless of their background, are included in your care and planning?

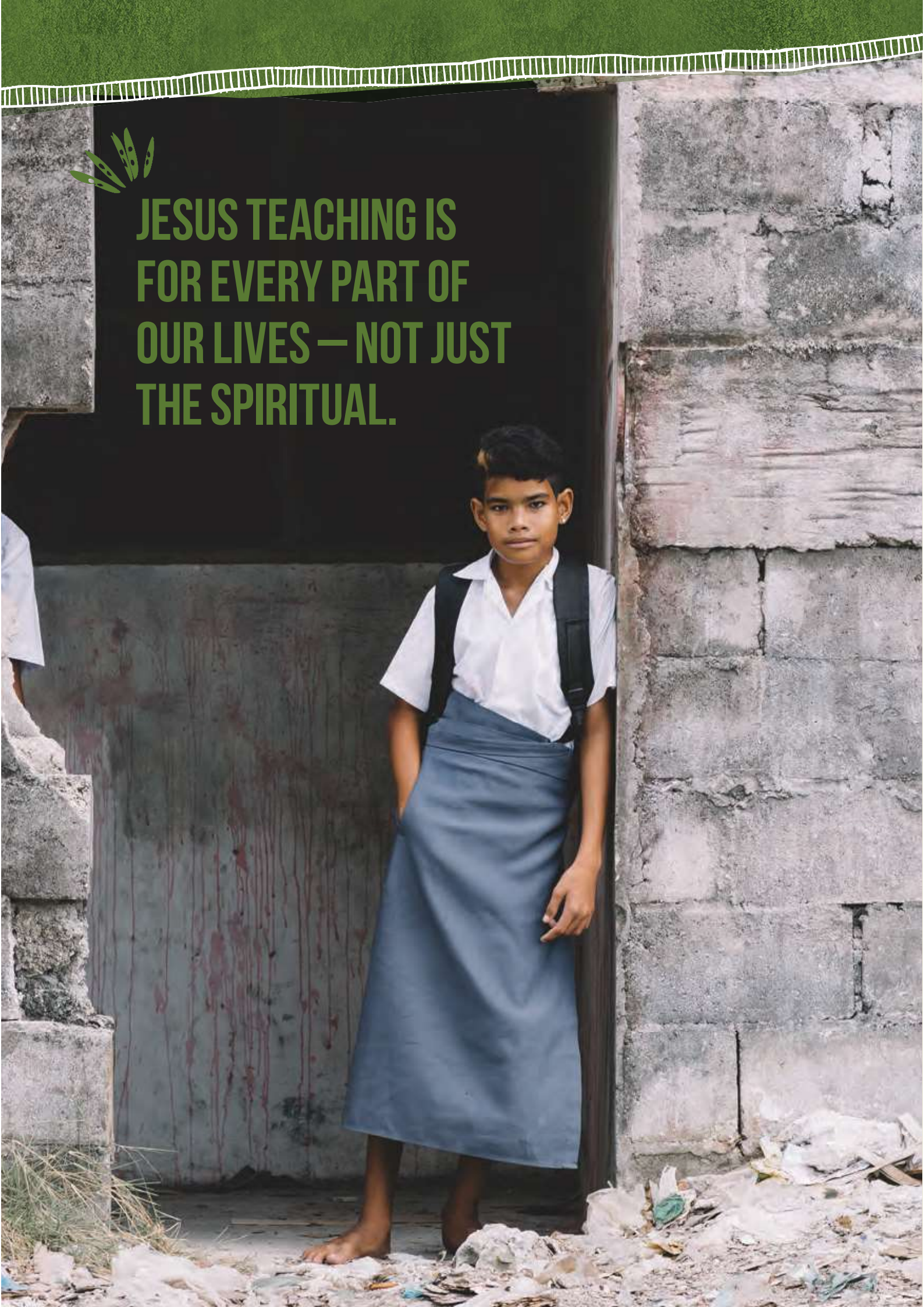
c) To build deeply on the character of Jesus is to be part of an inclusive community that works together for change, because Jesus is a relational being made of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Are there ways you can plan to work with others – even those you might not agree with - to build strong foundations that will ensure that your homes – in every sense – will survive and thrive into the future?

d) How and in what ways does this bible passage relate to the principles of Faithful Practice identified in the introduction (Active Discipleship is Preparedness in Action, Pasifika knowledge and wisdom and Prophetic Voice) to this study?

5. CONCLUSIONS

- As part of the Sermon on the Mount, these words call us to act, not just to listen
- Jesus teaching is for every part of our lives – not just the spiritual.
- We will all suffer the 'storms of life' – regardless of whether we are (in Jesus' words) foolish or wise. Natural disaster is not a punishment for wrongdoing
- The difference in how we cope depends on how deeply we understand and apply Jesus' teaching
- As an image, a 'house' or 'home' is powerful for us as Islanders because the home is the centre of our community life
- We need to be looking for ways to apply Jesus' practical teaching about preparing ourselves – physically as well as spiritually – for everything that threatens our homes. For us in the Pacific, this especially includes the impacts of climate change
- As followers of Jesus, who is part of a three-in-one relationship (the trinity) and as Oceanic people who find identity in community, we need to find better ways to include all people and to work with those who might be different
- These are all urgent calls in light of the threats we face as communities who will be the first to feel the devastating impacts of sea level rise, temperature change and increasing natural disaster.

6. KAIKAI/MEAL


JESUS TEACHING IS
FOR EVERY PART OF
OUR LIVES – NOT JUST
THE SPIRITUAL.

NOTES

BIBLE STUDY 3: LUKE 14:15-24

THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM AT GOD'S BANQUET TABLE

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our third study.

In this study we will explore one of the biblical basis for the theological principle of inclusion and its implications for DRM work. It is hoped that as we explore the parable of the great banquet we will understand the importance of inclusion in God's kingdom as the basis for treating one another with respect and exercising protection with dignity over those entrusted into our care. This bible study relates to the Faithful Practice principle of Inclusion.

READ LUKE 14:15-24

15 One of the dinner guests, on hearing this, said to him, "Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the
kingdom of God!" 16 Then Jesus said to him, "Someone gave a great dinner and invited many. 17 At the
time for the dinner he sent his slave to say to those who had been invited, 'Come; for everything is ready
now.' 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said to him, 'I have bought a piece of land,
and I must go out and see it; please accept my regrets.' 19 Another said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen,
and I am going to try them out; please accept my regrets.' 20 Another said, 'I have just been married, and
therefore I cannot come.' 21 So the slave returned and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the
house became angry and said to his slave, 'Go out at once into the streets and lanes of the town and
bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind, and the lame.' 22 And the slave said, 'Sir, what you ordered has
been done, and there is still room.' 23 Then the master said to the slave, 'Go out into the roads and lanes,
and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled. 24 For I tell you, none of those who were
invited will taste my dinner.'"

2. INVITATION

What does it say?

The parable of the Great Banquet is a story of insiders/outsiders, of inclusion and exclusion. It is also on the other hand a story of great hospitality and welcome to all and a reminder of how costly discipleship can be, in that it calls us to continuously make room for the other at God's table; and that God's table is never full, there is always room for one or many more. The challenge for us though, is that usually, it is those we find hard to welcome, for whatever reason, are the very ones God challengers us to welcome and include.

The conversation takes place over a meal and begins at Luke 14:1. Jesus is going to dine at the house of one of the leaders of the Pharisees on the Sabbath and we are told that it is already a hostile environment. The leaders are watching him closely. While there a man with dropsy presents himself to Jesus for healing. Perhaps, reading the mind of those gathered, before he heals the man, Jesus asks the Pharisees and leaders if it is lawful to heal on the Sabbath. They are silent. So Jesus answers his own question with a question saying that if their ox or their child fell into the well, would they not rescue the child or the ox immediately?

Today's text finds Jesus at table with the Pharisees and religious leaders where in previous verses (7-14) Jesus has just finished taking them to task on their practises concerning choosing seats and inviting guests, reminding them that the kingdom holds them to a higher standard. Jesus challengers the religious leaders to consider hospitality as a form of discipleship whereby much is offered and given, and yet little or none is expected in return. Thereby Jesus makes the point that the invitation to dinner should be extended to those beyond the circle of wealthy family and friends – to include the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind.

Responding to one of the dinner guests who on hearing Jesus words exclaims 'Blessed is anyone who will eat bread in the kingdom of God', Jesus tells the parable of the Great Banquet. The guest's statement carries with it a sense of assurance and superiority that he is already guaranteed a place at the banquet – an assumption Jesus challenges through the parable.

QUESTION

a) What have you understood this parable to be about?

3. EXPLORING THE TEXT

There are three possible levels of meaning in this parable - there could be more. The first is clear. Jesus has been going around Galilee summoning people to God's great banquet. The first invitation was to the 'righteous' – those who deemed themselves 'privileged insiders' (v.17). The righteous or 'privileged insiders' in this instance are named as the Pharisees, religious leaders and lawyers. Perhaps, those who should know better? In any case the moment has come! 'Those who have been invited long ago must hurry up and come[12].' It was the practise of the time to send an invitation in advance and then to follow up. So those who had been invited were given advance notice. Their refusal then or their flimsy excuses of why they could no longer attend demonstrated their utter disdain and disrespect of the host. They were snubbing the host. The host then extends the invitation. The second invitation goes to those deemed the outcast of the community (v. 21). They are the blind, the lame, crippled and poor. And behold there is still room for more. So the invitation is extended further - to the roads and lanes – the streets and byways (vs.23).

QUESTION

a) Who do you think the parable is addressing?

Traditionally scholars have interpreted this parable to be directed at Gentiles or justification for Gentile inclusion. Matthew's context (parallel parable Matt. 22:1-14) is that of Jewish rejection and Gentile inclusion. For Luke the context is social. Luke is known to use coupling and contrasting imagery. The first two invitations are to the house of Israel. The first group being the privileged insiders, and the second group being the inclusion of the outcasts and marginalised. The third invitation has often been interpreted to be the Gentiles. The use of the word 'compel' suggests that this group of people needed a little more encouragement to come to the dinner because they would not have been Jews and as such would need convincing. But recently, some scholars have argued that this parable is in fact addressed to the house of Israel and that those in the lanes and byways were still within the city walls of Israel and could perhaps be the outcasts of the outcasts within the Jewish community.

As this passage has traditionally been understood to be about Gentile inclusion or mission to the

12 N.T. Wright "The Parable of the Great Banquet Luke 14: 12-24." *In Luke for Everyone,* 176-79. (London, Louisville, KY: SPCK, Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 178.

Gentiles, and/or about an invitation to us who have become Christians, we tend to overlook the fact that Jesus does mean and intend that we as part of our discipleship have a responsibility to include the outcasts and the marginalised. Louise Gosbell[13] argues that this understanding has meant that Christians forget that they need to be active and intentional in ensuring that everyone has a place at the table. Secondly, like the Pharisees and religious leaders in the text, our privilege can lead us to exclude others.[14] The Lukan parable directs the Christian community to focus on the marginalised.

The second level is what this might mean for Luke in particular and the kind of people that are invited to join the party. It is worthy of note that in Luke's version the message is directed to Pharisees and lawyers who actively reject the prophet. This is not a parable of the rejection of Jews as such, because the poor and the outcast who had come to the banquet were themselves Jews. The parable is a reflection of the kind of people who are invited and included in the party – not just Jews, Gentiles, but 'people with every kind of moral and immoral background, people of diverse cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds'.[15] This parable signifies a paradigm shift. It is more than likely that Luke is using this parable to 'highlight a reversal of fortunes for the marginalised members of the Jewish community'[16].

Thirdly, there is a twist to this parable. Returning to the challenge Jesus issues in verses 12-14, the party to which the guests were invited was Jesus kingdom-movement, his remarkable welcome to all. Following Jesus, the call to discipleship, is a call to 'Go and do likewise' (Luke 10:37). This means that as followers of Christ, we are obligated to welcome, and treat every human person with dignity and respect. As N.T. Wright states:

Christians everywhere must work out in their own churches and families what it would mean to celebrate God's kingdom so that people at the bottom of the pile or at the end of the line, would find it good news. It isn't enough to say that we ourselves are people dragged in to enjoy God's party[17] *(N.T. Wright)*

4. APPLYING THE TEXT

The twist for us is as party guests we then are expected to become party hosts in turn and to demonstrate the same measure of hospitality and welcome to those who most need it. It is our role as party host to honour the invitation given to all regardless of gender, sexual orientation, political affiliation - 'those who miss the kingdom of God do not miss it because God decides they cannot attend. The choice is made by them'[18].

The issue is those whom we marginalise – women, children, youth, LGBTIQ, those with disabilities, want to be at the table but those of us at the center of power often exclude them.

So we return to the question that is at the heart of this parable; who do we need to make room for at the table? How do we listen to and include the voices that we deem inferior? How do we intentionally make space for them at God's table? Is it even our place to assume that it is our decision to make regarding who is in or who is out? Is it God's decision or ours?

13 Louise Gosbell, " The Parable of the Great Banquet (Luke 14:15-24), CBM and the Church: Churches as Places of Welcome and Belonging for People with Disability." St Mark's Review 232, no. 2 (2015): 109-22.

14 Warren H. Stewart, Sr. "The Problem with Privilege on a Planet Prone to Prejudice: An Exposition of Luke 14:15-24." *Review and Expositor* 108, Fall (2011): 575-78.

15 Wright, "The Parable of the Great Banquet', 178.

16 Gosbell, "The Parable of the Great Banquet', 114.

17 Wright, "The Parable of the Great Banquet", 179

18 Sullivan, Roger W. "The Parable of the Great Supper (Luke 14: 15-24)." *The Theological Educator,* no. 56 Fall (1997): 56.

QUESTIONS

a) Take a moment to think of those we find hard to welcome to the table? Why?

b) Where is the church in the story?

c) Who do we need to make room for at the table? Who are those that we exclude? On what basis do we exclude?

d) What excuses or criteria do we make for the exclusion or inclusion of others?

e) Who decides who gets a seat at the table? Is it our place to decide who is invited to the table?

f) What other questions does this parable raise for you?

g) What does this parable teach us about inclusion?

5. CONCLUSIONS

- There is always room for one or several more at God's table.
- Christians are called to welcome and provide hospitality to others.
- We need to be aware and sensitive to who is included or excluded, whether intentionally or unintentionally, in our DRM planning, policies and evacuation procedures.
- Christians have an obligation to care for the most vulnerable in our communities or societies.

6. KAIKAI/MEAL

CHRISTIANS HAVE AN OBLIGATION TO CARE FOR THE MOST VULNERABLE IN OUR COMMUNITIES OR SOCIETIES.

NOTES

BIBLE STUDY 4: JOB CHAPTERS 1 & 2

RESPONDING TO DISASTERS

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our fourth study.
This study is the first of a series of three bible studies on the book of Job on the theme of 'responding to disasters.' The following cluster of bible studies (bible studies 4, 5, & 6) respond to the questions of suffering and God's place in and response to suffering in the book of Job. The bible studies also explore the theme of resilience. Ideally bible studies 4,5,6 should be explored as one unit together. The bible studies demonstrate the Faithful Practice principles of Active Discipleship is Preparedness in Action and Prophetic Voice.

We hope from examining the first part of the story of Job together you'll begin to think through some questions about the role of God in natural disasters, as well as learn from Job's attitude toward God, suffering and tragedy. How can we be better prepared in terms of our attitude toward 'natural' disasters? What does it mean to be resilient in the face of suffering?

Some terms to be familiar with:
Resilience is the ability to recover quickly from difficulties – literally to 'spring back'. It's toughness under pressure.

Divine justice (retributive justice) is an idea from the Old Testament that basically means God rewards good behaviour (those who are righteous) and punishes evil behaviour (the wicked). It was the foundation of most people's beliefs at the time and led to the simple conclusion that suffering was the result of sin.

2. INVITATION

Let's read Job 1 & 2
What does it say?
The Prologue tells the story of a non-Israelite man Job[19] from Uz. A good man with a large family, Job even offered sacrifices to God on behalf of his children in case they had sinned in their thoughts. One day Job becomes the subject of a conversation between God and the *hassatan* (the Satan),[20] with Satan betting that if God took away all Job's children and possessions, Job would no longer worship him. After Satan loses this bet, a second wager is made in which Satan is allowed to inflict suffering on Job himself.

In response, Job sat in ashes and scratched himself with a piece of broken pottery. He refused to listen to his wife's advice to give up his integrity and curse God, so he could finally rest in death. Instead he replied, 'Should we accept only good from the hand of God and not accept evil?' (2.10). The narrator of the story notes that in all this, 'Job did not say anything sinful' (2.10)[21]. His 3 friends Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar came to console him, sitting with him for 7 days and 7 nights without uttering a word.

19 The Hebrew root for the name Job ('yyob) means 'enemy'. But in Aramaic, it can mean 'the one who turns to God' or 'the repentant one'.

20 Hassatan (the Satan) also known as 'the Adversary' could otherwise be understood as the Prosecuting Officer in the heavenly council of divine beings presided over by God (cf. Zech 3.1-2). This is not the same as 'Satan' or the 'Devil' of the New Testament.

21 Literally, did not 'sin with his lips.' Which raises the question, might he have sinned with his heart then? Cf. 1.22 where the narrator notes that Job did not sin (i.e., in his heart), nor 'charge God with wrongdoing' (NRSV).

QUESTIONS

a) Have you heard this story before?

b) What feelings do you have about this story?

3. EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Job 1: 13-22

In Chapter 1, Job and his family are hit with 4 disastrous events one after another – two lots of local raiders (the Chaldeans), fire and wind – who destroy not only the family and Job's home, but all Job's animals and possessions.

Since we know that the actions of the raiders were somehow influenced by the Satan and allowed by God, we wonder at the source of all the violence in the world. While the wind and fire could rightly be called 'natural' disasters, these were also endorsed by God himself. We could say that in this particular story, God is ultimately the source of all the disasters that fell on Job.

The fact that all these events happened in one day makes their overall effect that much more devastating. Although it appears the disaster has fallen on a single family (i.e., Job's), we could say that it affected many more people attached to Job's family. The story does not tell us how they felt or responded to the disaster.

Job's response:

Job's reaction to the reports of the servants (tearing his robe and cutting his hair) shows how deeply devastated he was by his loss. On the other hand, he throws himself on the ground and worships, showing his humility and a pious acceptance of the situation. Job said, 'Naked came I from my mother's womb, naked shall I return there; the Lord has given, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord' (1.21).

In Job's worldview, all his belongings and his relationships were from God. God gives and God takes away. God is sovereign and free to act as God wishes. Job's speech shows his belief that whatever he has is just an add on to the way he was born: naked and vulnerable. And when humans die they return to this same state. The relationship between the mother's womb and the grave (earth) to which one returns in death (1.21) shows earth as mother and the connections between humans and earth (cf. Gen 1-2)[22].

For Job, blessings or not, his primary responsibility is to do what is right by God. And that includes blessing the name of God.

QUESTIONS

a) What do you think Job's attitude is to his family and his belongings? Explain.

b) Do you feel the same way toward your family and belongings?

The question 'why?'

Even as Job understandably mourns his loss, his accepting and detached attitude toward the loss of his children and property seems to indicate he has something of a 'disinterested' faith. For us in Oceania, such a devastating loss would be very difficult to recover from, if at all. For example, in Samoa many people still experience severe forms of trauma after a tsunami struck the southern and eastern coasts of Samoa in 2009 (Kazaz, 2018). And it would be questionable if these people could ever make the same assessment of the situation as Job did, given the loss of their loved ones and the psychological damage done to their lives. In fact, the question of 'why' would be foremost in our people's minds, as they try to find answers to disaster.

22 This belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of humans to their earth environment is a commonly held belief also amongst peoples of Oceania, e.g., the concepts of *vanua* (Fiji), *fanua* (Samoa), *whenua* (Maori), *fonua* (Tonga), etc. all contain similar understandings of the integral unity of all things of nature including humans.

But in the case of the story of Job, the 'why' question doesn't seem to come up. This is because Job feels that God is free to act according to God's own purposes. From Job's response, we get the feeling that disasters are a fact of life that should just be accepted as coming from God.

God's response:
God was very pleased with Job's response to disaster and was probably sorry that this has happened to Job. As God later said to the Satan, 'He still keeps his integrity; so you have incited me against him to destroy him for no good reason.' (2.3).

At the end of this episode, the narrator tells us that in all of this, 'Job did not sin nor did he cast reproach on God' (1.22). Job's piety was truly disinterested, and he did not think to evaluate God's actions[23].

QUESTIONS

a) Do you think God may have treated Job unfairly?

b) What do you think of Job's lack of interest, up to this point in the story, in asking the question 'why'?

c) Do you think Job's response, at this point, is a good example of what it means to have resilience?

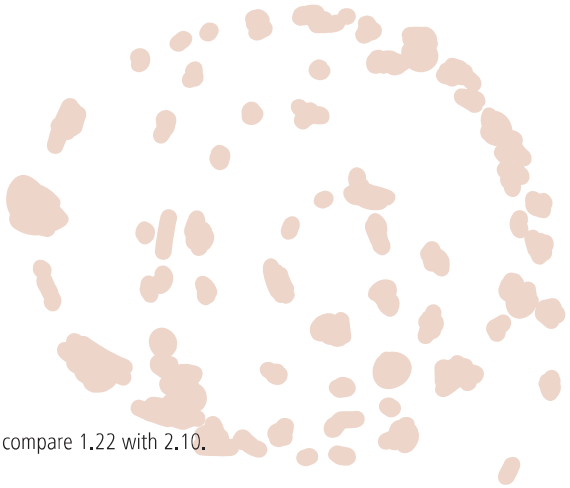
The second test
Read Job Chapter 2
Job suffers even more when Satan is given free rein to test his faith further. Covered in sores from head to foot, he sits in misery but still refuses to curse God and die, even though his wife suggests this would be the best option for him. When his three friends[24] who came to comfort him saw the atrocious condition Job was in, they were totally dismayed.

Job's response:
Job's piety in the face of great suffering remains intact.

'Should we accept only good from God and not accept evil?' he says (2.10).

Job here is saying that God can be both the author of good and of evil. When the narrator says that 'in all this, Job did not sin with his lips' (2.10) he seems to be suggesting that maybe in his heart, Job was beginning to feel differently about his condition. Afterall, Job now admits that what has happened to him and his family is actually some kind of 'evil' that came from none other than God himself.

Job's wife's response:
Distraught at her husband still holding on to his integrity, Job's wife begs him to 'curse God and die' (2.9). It's quite possible that her love and concern for her husband and her frustrations at not being able to help has led her to say those words. After all, her 10 children have all died presumably by the hand of God.[25]



23 Note that there is a change in Job's disposition at the end of the second test of his piety: compare 1.22 with 2.10.

24 Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuite and Zophar the Naamathite (2.11).

25 The Septuagint (Greek Translation of the Hebrew Bible) attributes to Job's wife a much longer speech: 'And when much time had passed, his wife said to him, How long wilt thou hold out, saying, Behold, I wait yet a little while, expecting the hope of my deliverance? for, behold, thy memorial is abolished from the earth, even thy sons and daughters, the pangs and pains of my womb which I bore in vain with sorrows; and thou thyself sittest down to spend the nights in the open air among the corruption of worms, and I am a wanderer and a servant from place to place and house to house, waiting for the setting of the sun, that I may rest from my labours and my pangs which now beset me: but say some word against the Lord, and die.' (2.10)

4. APPLYING THE TEXT

The question of moral justice:

Job's wife's response to disaster is of interest here because it raises another important issue that concerns us with disasters. This is the issue of moral justice which up to this point in the story, Job has not bothered to address at all. It is not as yet clear if Job believes in a system of divine retribution[26] or not. But judging from the wife's response, she obviously believes that when you curse God or sin against God you die. So death is like a punishment for sin against God. Even if Job's wife thinks that she and her husband are suffering for no good reason (note God's response in 2.3), she now urges Job that he might as well die for a reason, i.e., by cursing God. Job on the other hand thinks that it's foolishness. The only right response is to accept the good and the bad from God (2.10). Note that the narrator seems to suggest that maybe certain changes are happening in Job's heart at the end of this latest 'test' of his faith (2.10).

If we would quickly jump to the conclusion of the story for now (ch 42.12-17), we see that the story has a happy ending because 'the LORD blessed the latter years of Job's life more than the former.' It remains to be seen however if this blessing was a gift of God's free grace, or a reward for Job's patience in the face of suffering.

QUESTIONS

a) Do you think people today still believe in 'retributive justice' (that evil is punished by God?) Do people in your community believe that when disasters come, they are from God and there is nothing they can do to avoid them?

b) As readers, we know that in fact Job is innocent, and his suffering has nothing to do with his behaviour – that in fact it is because of a bet between Satan and God. Does this mean that all disasters are a test of faith?

c) What would this mean for the way we prepare and respond to them as a community?

d) From Job's perspective, blessings and suffering are two sides of the same coin of human experience. And the only appropriate response to disaster and suffering is patience and a humble acceptance of God's sovereign rule. Afterall, God is free to give and to take away as it pleases God. At the same time, Job has also made sure that he doesn't displease God by offering sacrifices to God on behalf of his children who may have sinned in their thoughts. This shows that he believes that he can influence God's behaviour and that he has some belief in retributive or moral justice.

QUESTIONS

a) Do you think that Job's approach is a good way to nurture resilience in the face of disaster today? Why or why not?

b) What parts of Job's story so far work in terms of understanding a response to disaster and what parts do you think need to be balanced with other parts of the biblical story we are learning about?

c) How would you use Job's story to teach something new about disaster and God's role in it?

26 Retributive justice is a theory of justice where punishment for a crime committed, is adjudged to ensure that it fits the crime. This same idea was used by the ancient Israelites during Old Testament times but with certain qualifications. God was the supreme arbiter of moral and social justice and has the power to carry out his judgements. In this system, sin is punished by God in proportion to the severity of the crime, usually by means of all manner of suffering and even death. But God according to this system, also rewards and blesses those who conduct their lives according to the laws of God. This system is usually referred to as Divine Retribution, examples of which are found in the book of Deuteronomy (cf. Deut chs 27-28) and in the Deuteronomistic literature (Josh-2 Kgs) as well as in the book of Proverbs. So in brief, divine retributive justice means that God punishes the wicked but rewards and blesses the righteous.

5. CONCLUSIONS

- Job has a worldview that includes the idea that God punishes evil behaviour and rewards good behaviour. But his own experience shows that this is not always true. Sometimes we can be completely innocent and still suffer. We don't always have any idea why things are happening to us.
- Natural disasters are not always 'natural' in the sense that in this story, God allows Satan to inflict suffering on an innocent person. Chaos in the form of Satan plays a role in what we might think of as 'natural' disasters.
- It looks from the story in chapters 1 and 2 that Job has a world view that accepts both good and evil from God without question. In our modern context, however, it seems reasonable that we ask questions about the origin of disaster and suffering. We'll look more at this in the next study when Job begins to ask these questions.
- Simply accepting everything from God without question can look like a form of toughness or resilience. But it can be useful to question whether this is the best way to prepare for and respond to disaster.

6. KAIKAI/MEAL

NOTES

BIBLE STUDY 5: JOB CHAPTERS 3 - 38

RESPONDING TO DISASTERS

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our fifth study.
This is the second of the three studies on the book of Job. These bible studies demonstrate the Faithful Practice principles of Active Discipleship as Preparedness in Action and Prophetic Voice. The aim of this study is to learn from the response of Job's friends to Job's disastrous tragedies and his suffering, as well as Job's own defence of his behaviour. What might this teach us in terms of how we treat others who suffer and the judgements we make about the meaning in tragedy and disaster?

Remember that **Divine justice (retributive justice)** is an idea from the Old Testament that basically means God rewards good behaviour (those who are righteous) and punishes evil behaviour (the wicked). It was the foundation of most people's beliefs at the time and led to the simple conclusion that suffering was the result of sin.

2. INVITATION

Let's read Job Chapters 3-31.
What do Chapters 3-31 say?

The conversations between Job and his three friends make up the bulk of the middle section of the book of Job. This section is written in poetic language and each of Job's friends takes a turn 'lecturing' Job (sometimes quite harshly) about why he deserves his suffering. They strongly use the idea of divine justice to argue that Job and his family must have been sinful in order to have brought these disasters upon themselves.

Job has changed his attitude quite a lot from the opening parts of the story. He is no longer patient and accepting, but angry and impatient, levelling accusations at his friends and God. God is referred to no longer as 'the Lord God' but just as 'God'.

Despite Job's persistent calls for God to answer, God seems to have disappeared or is choosing to remain silent. Job defends himself from the suggestion that he must deserve his suffering, declaring that he is innocent and that God is punishing him for no reason.

QUESTIONS

a) Are you surprised by this plot twist?

b) Did you expect the 'friends' to come on so hard with their accusations that Job must deserve to be punished?

3. EXPLORING THE TEXT

Read Job 3: 1-10
Right at the beginning of this section we see a major change in Job's character. Gone is the unswerving patience and perseverance in the face of pain and suffering. Now he curses the day of his birth and wishes it had never happened. Life itself is unbearable and all he wishes for is the end. Gone is his quiet acceptance of whatever God does to his people of faith as Job lets loose his feeling and experiences the full brunt of the disaster.

QUESTIONS

a) What do you think has changed for Job?

b) Why the big shift in his thoughts and emotions?

How do you respond when people undergo a shift in faith or emotion in response to major tragedy or suffering? Do you think in general the church helps

people to process their reactions and encourages them to speak about their thoughts and feelings?

Read Job 4: 1-10 (The speech of Eliphaz) **Job 8:1-10** (Speech of Bildad) and **Job 11:4-8.**

All three friends find Job guilty of some act(s) of evil against God's moral order. Job would not have suffered such disasters in his life had he maintained a life of righteousness before God. Even his children have suffered the consequences of their sins (8.2-4). The friends see Job's suffering as God's way of reprimanding and disciplining him for doing evil. Should he return to God in humility and repentance, God would greatly reward him.

Job disagrees.
Before any of Job's friends had started to speak, Job never thought to consider whether or not his suffering was fair. He always knew that he was righteous. And if disasters had struck and caused him to suffer, it had nothing to do with whether he was a good person or not.

This changed when Eliphaz pointed out that Job's suffering has to do with God's justice. 'Think now, what innocent man ever perished? Where have the upright been destroyed?' (4.7). This implies that Job's suffering is because of something he had done wrong.

Job of course strongly denies this. He says to his friends, 'Teach me, I shall be silent; tell me, where I am wrong... Now be so good as to face me, I will not lie to your face; Relent! Let there not be injustice; Relent! I am in the right.' (6.24, 28-29).

Job attacks his friends and calls them 'inventors of lies' and 'quacks', and that it would be considered wise of them to keep quiet and listen to his argument (13.4-6). Job rejects his friends' doctrine of divine retribution, calling it an 'empty consolation' with nothing but deception as its reward (21.34). His own case of innocent suffering (21.4-5), and the prosperity and security of the wicked (21.7-33), are proof that the long-held idea of divine retributive justice does not work.

Of course, as readers we understand that Job's friends are well meaning, but also wrong. Job is not being punished. The disasters are part of something happening in another place altogether - influenced by 'chaos' in the form of Satan.

This argument continues for quite a long time!

QUESTIONS

a) Why do you think Job's friends continue to insist that he must have done something wrong in order to deserve his punishment?

b) Do you think it is arrogant of Job to keep declaring that he is innocent?

c) Why do you think he believes this so strongly?

4. APPLYING THE TEXT

We now move toward thinking about how this section of Job relates to our every day life and ministry as we work with disaster.

QUESTIONS

a) People often look toward the Church to help them make sense of disaster and suffering.

b) Do you think the church ever behaves like Job's friends - trying to explain to people 'why' tragedy or natural disaster has happened?

c) Can you think of examples within your community or communities you know of where it has been suggested that disaster may have been brought about by 'sin' or wrong doing?

d) What other practical problems contribute to natural disaster in your area and what is being done to address these issues?

God's silence in this section of the story is very obvious. Job repeatedly asks God to answer, but God is absent.

e) Have you had experiences during times of disaster where God feels absent?

f) How does this impact your faith and resilience?

g) What is your community doing to help people feel the presence of God during times of tragedy and suffering?

5. CONCLUSIONS

- It's natural for people to undergo major shifts in thoughts, emotions and faith in response to tragedy and suffering.
- It's understandable that we reach for typical theological or 'church teachings' like divine retribution (the wicked will suffer, the righteous will prosper) in the midst of tragedy and natural disaster, but these ideas are not always helpful or accurate. While his friends assume they speak on behalf of God, Job is prepared to question God and to think outside the box
- The feeling of God's absence requires patience and a response from God's people.

6. KAKAI/MEAL

NOTES

BIBLE STUDY 6: JOB CHAPTERS 38-41

RESPONDING TO DISASTERS

1. WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our sixth study.
This is the third and final study on the book of Job. The bible studies demonstrate the Faithful Practice principles of Active Discipleship as Preparedness in Action and Prophetic Voice. The aim of this study is to sum up what we've learnt from looking at the story of Job, in particular to understand more about the way God relates to Job and his friends in response to Job's plea that God explains why he has suffered. Together we'll try to come to some conclusions about our own role in disaster and look at what makes for resilience in the face of tragedy and suffering.

God makes two speeches in response to Job:

1) Chaps 38-39
2) Chaps 40-41

2. INVITATION

Let's read the above two speeches.
What do the speeches say?

Most noticeable are the rhetorical questions, designed to show that God alone has the knowledge and the wisdom to answer, as well as the power to carry out his own designs for the universe. God alone was there in the beginning and only through God's power and wisdom is all creation the way it is and continues to be.

Another important feature of the divine speeches is the lack of mention of human beings. While human beings are usually at the centre of such discussions, in this case humanity is right on the edges.

God's reply to Job and his friends does not address any of their concerns about moral justice or Job's search for answers about his suffering. Either God is completely unaware of the previous dialogue between Job and his friends or has deliberately chosen to ignore their concerns. Instead God chooses to speak about creation and its majesty.

3. EXPLORING THE TEXT

Let's read Job 38: 1-25
What the speeches say and do:

1) They question the credibility and limits of human wisdom and power (Ch 38-40)
2) They affirm the incomparable wisdom and power of God as creator in establishing the foundations and dimensions of the earth (38.4-6), and setting laws for the heavens (38. 31-35).
3) They reveal knowledge of life in and of the wild - this untamed and seemingly disordered way of life is supported and sustained by God (38.39-41.26).
4) They advocate for a more inclusive moral perspective of the world that allows not just for law, order and structure but also for chaos and unpredictability. This challenges some popularly held beliefs in the Hebrew Bible: (i) that God fights victorious against the forces of chaos in order to establish order in creation (cf. Ps 74.13-14)., (ii) that all of creation is good and ordered (Gen 1), (iii) that human beings are rulers over creation (cf. Gen 1).

In God's reply we see an unusual and unsettling view of creation. God points to other dimensions of creation that the human mind has little or no knowledge of. Disasters can be seen as the product of destructive forces of disorder that exist in the world, constantly threatening the ordered world that humans prefer to live in.

This is quite a radical worldview that goes against the dominant biblical view that sees creation as essentially 'good', being maintained and sustained by a morally good God. But even in this world of chaos as represented by life in the wild, God also is understood to be present as benefactor of the wild.

QUESTIONS

a) How do you respond to God's response to Job? Do you feel God owes Job a better explanation than the one God gives? Would you have been satisfied with God's reply?

b) What do you think of the idea that there are wild and unpredictable forces at work in the world? What do you make of this idea compared to the descriptions in Genesis where the world is ordered and human beings are in control?

c) The speeches present the idea of God as benefactor in a world of wild nature. Do you think this resonates with some of our own Pacific indigenous beliefs and knowledge concerning disasters - for example the idea that natural disasters are the environment's way of renewing or regenerating itself?

d) How would you use God's speech in Job to help explain these ideas in your community?

Job's response

Job makes two responses - read them in **Job 40: 3-5** and **Job 42: 2-6.**

It is actually quite difficult to get to the heart of exactly what Job means with his responses. There are a number of possibilities: he has repented of his anger and now fully understands that God is in control; or he rejects God as having failed to explain the reason for his suffering. Now he will become his own man. He will no longer hold to a doctrine of divine retribution or a belief in some overarching moral order governing the world. Job will no longer call on God to testify for him or vindicate him. He will pick himself up from the ash heap and get on with his life as best as he can.

While the above readings of Job's reply are all possible given the language of the text, their differences point to the ambiguity associated with Job's real meaning. In other words, Job has very cleverly masked his real intentions thus leaving it open to interpretation depending on one's own moral and theological standpoint.

The Epilogue - what happens to Job and his friends? Read Job 42: 7-17

God is angry with Job's friends because 'they have not spoken the truth about Me as did my servant Job. Although it's difficult to tell exactly what 'truth' God is commending (Job made several speeches at different points), we can conclude that God was unhappy that the friends took a simplistic approach to the idea that disaster is always the result of sin or wrong doing.

Job himself was blessed with more possessions and family than he had before the disasters occurred. But God has not admitted any wrongdoing in the whole story - unless his 'blessing' of Job is seen as an apology rather than as a blessing to Job for having stayed faithful throughout his trials.

STEP 4: APPLYING THE TEXT

Whatever else we find from Job's story, we see that there is a great deal of mystery and ambiguity surrounding the reasons for disasters and suffering! There is no simple 'one size fits all' approach to explaining why we suffer or the nature of God's involvement in tragedy. The book of Job not only critiques notions of an overarching moral order designed by God to govern people's lives in the world, but also advances the idea that disasters and suffering in the world are brought on by chaotic elements present and active in the world.

QUESTIONS

a) Does it matter if we can't explain the nature of suffering, disaster and God's role in it? Why or why not?

b) What is the important message you take away from Job in terms of understanding, preparing for and responding to disasters?

c) How would you teach about what resilient faith means in light of new understandings from Job?

5. CONCLUSIONS

- There is a great deal of mystery and ambiguity surrounding reasons for disasters and suffering.
- There is no simple 'one size fits all' approach to explaining why we suffer or the nature of God's involvement in tragedy.
- We should avoid taking a simplistic approach to the idea that disaster is always the result of sin or wrongdoing.
- Disasters can be seen as the product of destructive forces of disorder that exist in the world, constantly threatening the ordered world that humans prefer to live in.

6. KAKAI/MEAL

NOTES

CONCLUSION

In this final chapter let us recap some of the important lessons gleaned from our six bible studies relating them to the faithful and loving practices of a theology of disaster resilience.

FAITHFUL PRACTICE

A theology of disaster resilience is lived through faithful and loving practice. A theology of disaster resilience hinges on five key principles and accompanying practices that have at its core the care of creation and care for people throughout the disaster preparedness and resilience process. The five principles, accompanying practices and accompanying bible studies, are:

EARTH COMMUNITY

- **Principle:** The Earth Community is made up of the human and non-human creation. We are all members of God's Oikos, God's household. We are all equal and valued members of the earth community.
- **Practice:** Mutual custodianship and service
- Bible Study 1

INCLUSION

- **Principle:** We must respect the human dignity of all people and the integrity of creation. All are created equal and worthy of respect.
- **Practice:** Include and respect everyone without bias in all aspects of the process
- Bible Studies 1, 3

ACTIVE DISCIPLESHIP IS PREPAREDNESS IN ACTION

- **Principle:** Christian Preparedness is prayerful, active and discerning action
- **Practice:** Informed and inclusive disaster preparation
- Bible Studies 2, 4, 5, 6

PASIFIKA KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM

- **Principle:** All our Pasifika cultures have traditional knowledge and wisdom that are integral to disaster resilience and climate change custodianship
- **Practice:** Integrate Pasifika cultural understanding and practices into Disaster preparedness and resilience whenever possible
- Bible Studies 1, 2

PROPHETIC VOICE

- **Principle:** A theology of disaster resilience must address issues of climate injustice. Disaster resilience and climate justice are interrelated.
- **Practice:** Advocacy and awareness raising in church, local government and global spaces
- Bible Studies 2, 4, 5, 6

A SUMMARY OF LESSONS FROM THE BIBLE STUDIES

God, Creator and Sustainer is in relationship equally with both heaven and earth.

All of creation is interconnected, with humanity simply another part of this good creation.

As humans are a part of creation, we have a responsibility to care for the earth and each other.

Jesus' teaching applies equally to the practical and spiritual aspects of our lives- there is no real division separating 'heavenly' from 'earthly' things.

As we prepare ourselves for the impact of disaster, we need to and must find ways to include those who are on the edges of our communities (elderly, those with disabilities, people of other faiths etc) as an expression of our faith and a symbol of the centrality of 'home'.

Natural disasters are not always 'natural' - humans, through their lack of care, increase the impact of disaster.

The idea that the good will be rewarded and the evil suffer (retributive justice) is not a useful way to explain suffering or disaster. We need to think outside the box and be less rigid in the way we understand the way the world works.

In times when God appears absent, God's people need to draw closer together to help provide resilience. We should be careful to avoid speaking too rashly on God's behalf when we offer explanations or 'comfort' to those who are suffering.

God's own explanation for tragedy, disaster and suffering emphasises a lack of neat order in the world, instead highlighting the chaos, wildness, majesty and playfulness of the world.

Finally, that God is mystery and although we may not always understand why suffering happens or exists in the world, we can be assured of God's deep love for each one of us in Christ. In all that we face in life, God is faithful and the one truth remains – 'in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us' for nothing can 'separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord' (Romans 8: 37-39).

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AS HUMANS ARE A PART OF CREATION, WE HAVE A RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE FOR THE EARTH AND EACH OTHER.

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