



Guidelines for World AIDS Day Worship Service

Compiled and Distributed by CABSA

Date: Sunday 19 May 2019 (Fifth Easter Sunday)

Focus text: Acts 11:1-18

Let it sink in, God has broken through

Introduction¹

Sunday, 19 May 2019, is the 36th annual International AIDS Candlelight Memorial. Join organisations and churches around the world to remember the friends and family we lost and raise awareness with this year's theme ***Intensifying the fight for health and rights***.

When the AIDS Candlelight Memorial was first held in 1983, no-one could have predicted the scale and impact that the global HIV epidemic would have. With millions of lives lost and close to 37 million people currently living with HIV, we, as a global community, remain profoundly challenged by this epidemic.

In a time when support for HIV organisations, civil society, particularly for advocacy and for networks led by and for people living with HIV, is waning, we are calling on churches to stay committed and to strengthen the response to HIV.

The International AIDS Candlelight Memorial reminds us that those most affected by the HIV epidemic: including people living with HIV in all their diversity need to continue to be at the forefront leading our movement for the right to life and the right to health. This includes fighting for universal, comprehensive and sustainable treatment, care and prevention services, and intensifying our work around human rights, stigma reduction, social and economic justice to ensure that no one is left behind.

Join us on 19 May 2019 as we gather, share our stories, commemorate and intensify the fight for health and rights for all people affected by HIV and AIDS around the world.

In South Africa where more than 7 million people are living with HIV and about 4.4 million are on ARVs, the lifesaving HIV medication, it was recently reported that the health sector has serious problems and lacked the capacity to retain patients who started treatment.² As a result of this inadequate performance South Africa's biggest HIV/AIDS donor, the United States President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPHAR) is threatening to seriously reduce their funding to South Africa.

Where does this leave us as faith communities? What role can we play in intensifying access to health and human rights? How can we promote the dignity and worth of marginalised people in our midst, and especially HIV positive people? What will happen to millions of people if they do not have access to ARVs and other health services? How can we support the health sector to keep people on treatment? How can we strengthen the voices of those of us who are living with HIV? And how can we improve access to care, as well as improve the quality of health care?

On this Candlelight Memorial Day, this is just some of the questions, we as church should be asking ourselves.

¹ Adapted from <https://www.candlelightmemorial.org/news/item/62-candlelight-memorial-2019-intensifying-the-fight-for-health-and-rights.html>

² Read the article <https://www.businesslive.co.za/bd/national/health/2019-04-10-health-department-scrambles-to-stop-us-cut-in-hiv-funds/?fbclid=IwAR3uYYTiXserSUKwNG6t0qrIBzVNzvsI7LOfVbBshUCRlik-ljU07mVR0KA>

Liturgy

Welcome

Today, on the fifth Sunday of Easter, we also commemorate AIDS Candlelight Memorial Day. We are reminded of the HIV epidemic that has devastated so many lives across the world. Therefore we dedicate this service to raise awareness about the epidemic, but also to call on us as people of faith to stand closer and intensify our involvement in promoting health and human dignity and rights to all people, including those of us who are living with HIV.

We greet you and welcome you in the wonderful name of God our Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.

The same God who created heaven and earth, and who also created us all, in his image.

Blessing:

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled." Matthew 5:6

Praise and Worship

Suggested hymns:

A new commandment

My hope is in you Lord

Litany and Lighting of the Candle

Leader: Lord, we know that we must persevere to not only keep the focus on HIV, but to intensify it. As we do this, we are reminded that you are our God. You are the Almighty God, the resurrected Christ, the loving Father and the ever present Holy Spirit. In the midst of this crisis, we turn to you and light this candle to remind us that our hope, our strength and our courage to do this, is in You.

Light the candle

All: Our Hope is in you Lord

Leader: This candle is lit for all of us who are living with HIV. Be it in our own bodies, our homes, our loved ones, our sisters and brothers, or the strangers we do not know.

All: Our strength is in you Lord

Leader: This candle is also lit to remind us that we have the potential to stand up, stand closer and make a difference.

All: Our courage is in you Lord.

Leader: So, let us worship our Lord,

The Lord who touched the lepers,

The Lord who touched the lonely,

The Lord who touches our hearts today and enables us to be symbols of hope.

All: Lord give us the strength and the courage to embody your hope and love in a world with HIV.

Amen.

Scripture Readings

John 13:31-35

Acts 11:1-18

Prayer

Sermon guidelines

We could read the text from Acts on two levels.

On a first level the text is about inclusion and exclusion. God prepares Peter in a vision, or challenges him to reconsider what he would typically regard as clean or unclean. And this challenges him on a very profound level. All of Jesus' disciples were Jews and his ministry was mostly aimed at Jews. In Matthew 10:5-7 Jesus instructed the disciples:

"Do not go among the Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. ⁶ Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. ⁷ As you go, proclaim this message: 'The kingdom of heaven has come near.'"

And when the Canaanite woman approached Jesus and asked him to heal her daughter, his first reaction seemed to confirm that she was in no position to ask this of him. In Matthew 15: 26 he replied:

²⁶ "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs."

Even in Jesus' death, his cross was marked, King of the Jews.

And yet, God appears to Peter in a vision to challenge his perceptions of who and what is clean and unclean. Through this vision, he prepares him to leave the next day with a group of non-believers without any hesitation. And when they arrive in Caesarea, Peter discovered that Cornelius was instructed through a vision to send for him.

When he reflects on his encounter in Caesarea, Peter says:

¹⁷ "It is clear that God gave those Gentiles the same gift that he gave us when we believed in the Lord Jesus Christ; who was I, then, to try to stop God!"

This is an almost perfect text to read on AIDS Candlelight Memorial Sunday. As even today, when our worlds are not defined between who is Jew and who is not, we have created so many other distinctions and walls to separate people from one another.

And HIV positive people so often still share experiences of stigma and rejection, even from faith communities.

Peter's vision challenges our perceptions of who is acceptable and who is not, who we view as "unclean" or "off less value."

We are challenged and reminded that:

¹⁶ "...God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life."

Also in our other text from John 13: 34-35 we are reminded of Jesus' words:

³⁴ "And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵ If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."

If Love is the new commandment, there is no more place for human made labels of us and them. Then our responsibility is to make sure that we as a faith community is a safe and welcoming place where we may all seek communion and healing.

But the text also challenges us to read a bit further. It is not only the story of God reaching out to the gentiles through Peter, no. Our text actually starts where Peter is called to order.

When Peter got back to Jerusalem, some of his old associates, concerned about circumcision, called him on the carpet: "What do you think you're doing rubbing shoulders with that crowd, eating what is prohibited and ruining our good name?"

God prepared Peter to make a profound change in his ministry. But it was not only for the sake of Peter's ministry or just the family of Cornelius. As Peter had to put his case to the elders in

Jerusalem, he was sharing God's vision with them. He became an advocate for what God convinced him of. And in explaining very clearly what he experienced, we see how the attitudes of his associates also changed.

A meeting that started off on hostility, suspicion and accusations, created a moment of transformation for all present. We read in verse 18:

¹⁸ Hearing it all laid out like that, they quieted down. And then, as it sank in, they started praising God. "It's really happened! God has broken through to the other nations, opened them up to Life!"

We are challenged to not only be obedient to God's call on our lives, we are also called to explain this to others, difficult as it sometimes might be, especially with a seemingly hostile crowd. But in sharing this, and advocating this dream, we are also sharing God's heart.

This dream includes one where we are defined by our love for one another and let us challenge each other to make this visible through our behavior and actions, also to marginalised people, including HIV positive people.

Let us care enough for the health and human dignity of everyone, to want to make a difference.

Prayer

You can read this prayer out loud, or

Contact Clive (082 300 8880) for the video clips

Dear God, after so many decades that HIV and AIDS has been in our midst, and millions of lives have been lost and devastated, there are some of us for whom HIV has become very near and very real, but there are also some of us who still only know HIV from a distance. Whether it is close or far, today we would like to join people of faith worldwide as we remember these lives, and as we reflect on the HIV epidemic, Lord, we are convinced that we cannot and don't want to ignore it.

Lord, we would like to show love and compassion to everyone who is living with the realities of HIV. We would like to do this by first confessing our own prejudice and ignorance about it. Forgive us our attitudes that easily hurt and discriminate.

As faith community we would like to reach out to people who have been hurt and rejected, especially by the church. We would like to embrace, support and accompany people on a journey of healing and peace.

Dear God, grant us the grace to be a welcoming place where people will feel safe to worship free from judgment.

Help us to respond in practical ways to assure that treatment and proper medical care are available to all. We honour you for important breakthroughs in HIV treatment and access to it, but Lord, more is needed.

We pray specifically for those who because of poverty do not have access to proper care or treatment. If we could be the instruments through whom everyone access the treatment they really need, let our hearts not be hardened, my Lord.

Almighty God, have mercy on us and rescue us. Give us Hope, Give us strength and God, give us the courage to stand closer.

Amen

Hymns:

El Shaddai

Lord make me an instrument

Blessing and Greeting

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