

**The Reverend Peter Deng Mayen Faith Journey. Second Sunday in Lent .25 February 2018.**

**Let us pray: in the name of God the Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. Amen.**

As a Church community, people of God, we are entering into our second Sunday in Lent. Lent is a time to sit back and reflect on the work of God through the Son, to accept that our forgiveness and redemption has been accomplished on the Cross of Calvary. God's grace is sufficient and gratuitously given to us all. Please do not be surprised if I become emotional as I share my faith journey.

To begin with, some of my personal story has been shared last year in the Parish before I moved here with my family to work as an assistant Priest.

I was born in North-East Africa in 1975 into a Christian family, got baptised in 1985 and left Sudan in November 1987. As an unaccompanied minor I was taken to Ethiopia by the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) with thirty thousand boys. I was conscripted against my will as a child soldier in 1989 along with other boys, many of whom died in Ethiopia due to multiples circumstances such as: poor medical services, mistreatment and negligence by the caretakers and outbreak of early childhood diseases in the camps.

God was with me, I felt His gracious presence through my prayers as I sang Sunday school praises. I believe God hears us through prayer. Many of you might have experienced this power of God in their supplications. When I felt hopeless and in desperation for help and security because I was so lonely, God embraced me and strengthened my body to keep walking. My God was my companion, guiding me in the thick and darkest night in the bush, providing me with food, courage and comfort. In short God was enough! I ate wild fruits and drank dirty waters, slept on a wet grassy ground, and God was there guiding me and protecting me to this day. God's mercy, compassion and steadfast love was all round me.

Our God is so good and amazing, brothers and sisters. I came to the personal conviction that God cares for all people's wellbeing regardless of personal status. I knew God then as my Holy Father and I still believe and trust now as my only comforter and defender. The most famous verse in the Gospel of John 3: 16 says, "For God so loved the World that He gave His only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him may not perish but may have eternal life." My own life is a witness of God's love and protection from death, even if so many of my peers are dead now and live in heaven with My God and saviour.

I have gone through hell and many shadows of death, but my God was before and after me. He was encircling me when I felt exhausted, weak and nearly dying. He was my good shepherd in my wilderness experience. I still affirm this faith of mine today to you all brothers and sisters, that our God is good and enough. Like David, the King of Israel who said in Psalm 23: "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me". And according to the Gospel of John chapter 10, Jesus is the good the shepherd for me and us. These scriptures kept my faith and God kept reminding me of His protection and love in my suffering and loneliness.

I arrived in Kenya after the Ethiopian Regime collapsed and became a refugee in Kenya at a place called Kakuma Refugee camp in June in 1992 and I lived there for 12 years. The climate was harsh. The conditions were extremely hot, dusty and sunny. I continued with my faith in God, going to church was an activity I enjoyed, apart from other social gatherings, learning new hymns and praying alone or with my friends. It was also in Kakuma Refugee Camp where I was confirmed in 1994 with more than 2000 candidates. During my preparation for confirmation, I was told to affirm the Apostles Creed standing up and facing the Cross as symbol of my dedication to Jesus Christ who died and rose from the grave. Part of this conviction was because of the threat from the Muslims from Sudan. They would interrogate Christians and persecute them if they affirmed faith in Jesus Christ.

I know this might not be a danger here, to affirm your faith in Australia as Christian. There is no Christian persecution compared to mine, but I still believe Australian Christians might experience similar responses in passive aggression from non-believers. I attended both primary and secondary education in Kenya and enrolled in a Pharmacy course in 2002 immediately after graduation from high school and was granted employment at the main hospital as a Pharmacy Assistant from 2003 to 2004.

I was ordained Deacon in the Episcopal Church of Sudan by Bishop Nathaniel Garang Anyieth on the 5<sup>th</sup> of September 2004 in Kenya in Kakuma Refugee Camp. Later in 2004 I was given the opportunity to come to Australia. After arriving in Australia I worked in the food industry as a processor taking up multi-task roles in various companies.

I began worship in 2004 on the 24 of October in the Parish of Ekibin, St.Lukes Anglican, where I served as a deacon between the mainstream congregation and the Sudanese Anglican ministry for 9 years and 8 months before relocating of our worship to St. Paul's Anglican Church, Ipswich in which I continued to serve in the a diaconate from 2013 to 2017. I entered into the discernment and formation process for ordination as a Priest. I continued worshipping as a member of St. Paul's Anglican Church in Ipswich with my family, Rachael Aguer, Michael, Abraham, Sarah, Elizabeth and Israel Mayen.

I felt a vocation to be Christ's servant while I was in Ethiopia, but I became confident of God's calling in Kenya- Kakuma Refugee Camp. I was involved in teaching young adults and mature Christians with hymns and the catechism. I led the worship using the Book of Common Prayer of 1662, part of which was translated in Dinka language. My love for Christ's peoples and my relationship with God came to the surface even more through my personal involvement in serving God's people within the Anglican Diocese of Brisbane from 2004 to the present.

My passionate ministry has grown from strength to strength because of God's gratuitous grace through the power of the Holy Spirit, prayers from relatives, Christian believers, especially Bishop Rob Nolan, Bishop Cameron Venables, Bishop Jonathan Holland, and Venerable Dr Randall Nolan. My wife Rachael Aduel Deng Arok Aguer and our five children have been instrumentally a source of my joy, strength and courage to serve within our diocese as deacon. And now as a Priest. I stand here to express their unswerving love and I appreciate enormously the support and contribution received from congregations in both parishes in which their love and your love here with prayers will continue as we serve one another in love and commitment.

Finally I invite you to find courage and hope when facing difficulties in your faith journey like I have. I have been reminded many times when I felt lonely or lost. I felt the motivation to open and read the Scriptures. I encourage you please to read Paul's letter to the Romans chapter 8 verses 35, 36-37-39 , which say, "Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? No in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord". God's sovereign grace in our life is enough. I am depending on Him and I believe all of us here need God to journey with us in tough times.

Amen.