

Speaking and Doing God's Word in Plague Time

Pointers for a Christian response to the HIV / AIDS epidemic in Africa and beyond

In the ministry of Jesus, healing and salvation worked hand-in-hand. In him was seen both the future promise of the kingdom for the children of God, and the present reality of God's compassionate love for individuals in need.

The love of Jesus reached out to those marginalised by prejudice, ignorance, fear, and social custom. He touched and healed people with leprosy and other diseases, and those with mental and physical disabilities. His teaching embraced those normally excluded from positions of religious and political power: women, children, and those from despised ethnic or social groups.

Jesus spoke God's judgment on leaders who abused the authority of God's Word, ignoring the needs of the people and trampling underfoot the weak and the poor. In his ministry he demonstrated the alternative leadership which is based on service, acceptance and love, and not on power and control. Those trapped by life's circumstances were not cursed or excluded by Jesus, but rather heard from his lips the Gospel of comfort and forgiveness. In fellowship with him and his disciples they discovered the restoration of true community.

Jesus also spoke against those who taught that God's anger is directed against particular sins or groups of people. Rather, he warned that each one of us stands in need of repentance and should turn in faith and hope to the promise of God's mercy. In ourselves, not one of us could stand before God's righteous justice. Here, human standards of right behaviour and acceptable lifestyles count for nothing in the eyes of a holy God. Salvation and the wholeness of life are the gifts of God's Spirit alone, in Jesus alone.

The ministry and message of Jesus continues in the church he empowered to speak and to act in his name. Therefore, the Christian response to sickness, disaster, and epidemic is rooted in the same love and compassion of God shown by Jesus himself. The church and its people will be especially active in areas where prejudice and fear mean that the needs of individuals and groups are treated as a low priority or even seen as manifestations of God's judgment. The situation regarding HIV / AIDS in Africa presents us with a compelling opportunity to speak and to show the unconditional love of Jesus. Church members throughout the world can be mobilised to support and provide resources for medical and educational programmes. In its legitimate prophetic role the church can urge governments to act in accordance with God's will and provide protection and help for the very weakest members of the world community.

In our own worshipping communities we will continue to sing and pray, *Kyrie, eleison*, Lord, have mercy! We may think of ourselves as limited in what we can do in the face of such great need, but the resources of prayer and intercession should never be ignored. And as we pray, we can look with a critical eye at our own lifestyle and society, and seek honest repentance and change for everything that works against God's will and tends to promote poverty and despair closer to home. When all of this happens, we can be certain that it does so in accordance with Jesus' own word of promise and blessing, *Whenever you did it for any of my people, no matter how unimportant they seemed, you did it for me.*

Selected Biblical references: Luke 6:18-19; Luke 10:25-37; Luke 11:37-52; Luke 13:1-5; John 9:1-34; Luke 17:11-19; Luke 18:1-8; Luke 19:1-10; James 2:14-17; Matthew 25:31-46.

[See also the HIV/AIDS Article from The Lutheran](#)