

A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT: THE CHURCH'S RESPONSE TO "MAN'S INHUMANITY TO MAN"

By



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ABSTRACT

The role of the church in the struggle for liberation in South Africa is that which was captured more intensely during the emergence of Black Theology in the days of the Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa. It was no secret on whose side, the voice of the church was during those dark days of apartheid. Through marches, protest-actions, prayers, moving speeches and sermons at the funerals of those who were mowed down by the Apartheid forcers, the church was able to keep the light of the liberation struggle burning in the midst of the amorphous and nefarious laws of the apartheid regime, hence the title of this talk: "A knock at Midnight – The church's Response to "Man's Inhumanity to Man". It is hoped that this talk will re-kindle the role of the church in today's state of affairs which is confronting the country where fraud and corruption, tenderpreneurship, bribery, sexual molestation of mothers, sisters, daughters, babies and grandmothers seem to be the order of the day. As Ministers of Religion going into the

complexities and perplexities of the world, you will come face to face with such challenges and in this regard, you will hear a voice saying: “A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”! All of these things are happening right under the nose of the church and thus the prophetic voice of the Church will have to be heard in responding to these barbaric acts of man’s inhumanity to man. If the Church remains quiet in the midst of these social evils, would it be a matter of being complacent now that we have an ANC led government or would it be a matter of being caught up in a Mid-day Slumber?

This talk will broadly reflect on the role of the church in the struggle for liberation and community development and where appropriate will also touch specifically on the role played by the Methodist Church in the struggle for liberation.

Key words: Knock at Midnight, the Church, Man’s Inhumanity to Man, the Struggle for liberation, Ethics & Morality

1. INTRODUCTION

Firstly, let me express my sincere as well as my profound gratitude to the President of the Seminary, Professor Simangaliso Kumalo, for having seen it fit that I should address you today. Nginyabonga Mntungwa!

Secondly, inviting a Lay-Preacher to talk to the men and women of the cloth is a special, special honour as there are better qualified scholars who would perform this task far better than me and this is a responsibility I am not taking lightly!

Thirdly, I claim no superior knowledge on the subject, but sharing my views with you as I do will certainly help us to redefine our role in the current political conjecture.

Fourthly, the views as herein expressed capture my own personal, academic and political journey. That which I have captured is a reflection of my own journey of meandering and wondering in the desolate desert of the academia but I never gave up as the Lord has been with me and so will be with you for as long as you stand on the side of social justice and the down-trodden and the victimised.

2. THE VOICE OF THE CHURCH IN THE WILDERNESS

At a time when the apartheid regime was in control, apart from the political organisations like the ANC and the PAC which were forced to operate from outside the borders of the country, students, in the form of SASO (South African Students Organization), who had embraced the Black Consciousness philosophy, under the leadership of the stalwarts of our time like Malusi Mpumlwana, Barney Pityana, Striney Moodley, Peter Jones, Harry Nengwekhulu, Pandelani Nefholovhodwe, Mosimudi Mangena, Saths Cooper, Mapetla Mohapi, Steve Biko, Tenji Mtintso, Mamphela Ramphele and many others, held the torch of hope for our liberation high. In the struggle for the emancipation of the Black people, the church was equally at the forefront of the marches for freedom and liberty and people like Bishop Tutu, Rev Allan Boesak, Dr Beyers Naude, Rev Trevor Huddleson, Rev Prof Peter Storey, Rev Alex Borrain, Dr Simon Gqubule, Rev Soga, Rev Mcebisi Xundu, Dr Khoza Mgojo, Rev Ernest Nkathazo Baartman, Rev Dr Stanley Mokgoba, Rev Mvume Dandala, Rev Andile Mbete, and many, many others were the voice of the voiceless.

These men of the cloth were frequently arrested and tortured by the Security Police for standing up straight in an upside down environment and therefore standing for truth and justice.

These are men of the cloth and many of whom were the Methodist Ministers who responded to the clarion call:

“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”

The role of the church in the liberation struggle is best described in the words of the Anglican Archbishop Desmond Mpilo Tutu, quoted from the lesson plan developed using resources from the PBS News Hour Extra state in which in March 1988, he declared:

“We refuse to be treated as the doormat for the government to wipe its jackboots on”

This was the most profound statement made by this uncompromising Church Leader who risked his life as the Voice of the voiceless. The same source goes on to mention that

“At the end of the Commission’s Enquiry (TRC), in August 1998, he attacked South Africa’s former White Leaders saying that most of them had lied to the commission.”

It is this kind boldness which ignited the church’s spirit to set the pace for the people’s desire to be liberated. However, a probing question which we will ignore at our own peril is whether or not the church now as a voice of the voiceless has become deaf to the many cries and lamentations of social injustices and the raping of the country’s wealth to benefit only a few – a few who are politically well connected. What is the church’s response and what will your response be to “a knock at midnight?”

As Ministers, freshly baked in pots of ethics and morality, you have a challenge of responding to **“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”**. Otherwise all the years you have spent toiling at the SMMS would come to nothing if you fail to respond to this call! The role of the church in the struggle for liberation is best portrayed in the rationale presented by David Venter (Independent Scholar), published in H-SAfrica (May, 2007), in his review of De Gruchy’s article **“The Church and the struggle”**. In this Masterpiece, he denotes that: “for John de Gruchy, “the church” is a theological term encompassing all Christian denominations. However, it has to be noted that not all denominations were involved in the “struggle” nor does De Gruchy deal with all of those who were. This review goes on to indicate that a distinct theology commensurate with the feelings, aspirations and ideals of the oppressed people of South Africa had to be born. This review states that: “Black Theology arose from a broad theological spectrum, including the University Christian Movement, Lutherans (Manas Buthelezi), Reformed (Allan Boesak), Congregationalist (Bonganjalo Goba), Methodists (Khoza Mgojo), and Anglican (Desmond Tutu). Ironically, Black Consciousness and Black Theology fuelled renewed protests against minority white rule just as some Black Youth were abandoning churches, for being irrelevant (175, Review by Venter, May 2007).

It is against this background that I am making a passionate plea to make your sermons relevant so as to draw the lost youth back into the Church’s fold by responding to **“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT!”**. The review by Venter puts the Church at the forefront of the struggle. As evidenced earlier on, the whole church rallied behind the emancipator’s mandate: **“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”**, and efforts towards the liberation of the oppressed people of SA.

3. A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT – A RESPONSE TO OUR CONSCIENCES

Political Reconstruction within the context of the current democratic dispensation argues in favour of Healing, Reconciliation and Social Justice.

It would indeed be a travesty of the social reconstruction and the moral fibre of our society if we would leave this hall, not having reflected on extending a hand of friendship even to those who only yester-year may have been our arch – enemies, for a Knock at Midnight, echoes, Phumla Gobodo – Madikizela’s words (2003:117), as quoted in her book – “A Human Being Died that Night” wherein she says:

“Although forgiveness is often regarded as an expression of weakness, the decision to forgive can, paradoxically elevate a victim to a position of strength as the one who holds the key to the perpetrator’s wish. For just at the moment when the perpetrator begins to show remorse, to seek some way to ask forgiveness, the victim becomes the gate keeper to what the outcast desires – readmission into the human community and the victim retains that privileged status as long as he or she stays the moral course, refusing to sink to the level of the evil that was done to her or to him. In this sense, then forgiveness is a kind of revenge, but revenge enacted at a rarefield level.

Forgiving may appear to condone the offense, thus further disempowering the victim. But forgiveness does not overlook the deed: It rises above it. “This is what it means to be human, It says: “I cannot and will not return the evil you inflicted on me.” And this is the victim’s triumph”

This is not a spiritual sentimental statement which seeks to appease those who abused the Human Rights of others under the guise of upholding “Law and Order” during the days of the Apartheid Regime,

and may I dare say even during the days of our nascent democracy, the statement still has a profound impact on our consciences for it is a statement which challenges the church to continue finding expression in its commitment of bringing two contending parties together and therefore with great profundity and unequivocally responding to: “**A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT**” and this is a challenge which will be confronting and staring you right in the face when going out to the field of your ministry. The statement “To maintain Law and Order” was recently used in Parliament when over 400 members of the SANDF were deployed in addition to the members of SAPS turning Parliament into a War Zone – to maintain Law and Order! My foot!

In the many years of the Methodist Church’s existence, among the many revolutionary sermons which the Servants of the Lord preached throughout the Connexion, I am almost convinced that the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation were among such prominent themes as even the crucified Jesus equally extended a hand of forgiveness to those who brutally abused him physically and emotionally and therefore committed a crime against humanity – to wit – **MAN’S INHUMANITY TO MAN!**

Healing and Reconciliation should be seen as a Revolutionary Change which touches every aspect of Human Life for:

- There can be no healing and reconciliation when fraud and corruption, tenderpreneurship, personal aggrandizement seem to be the norm in a society which still smacks of economic imbalances and disparities. Can the Methodist Church remain silent when confronted with such challenges! The answer is “NO!” as the voice of the Presiding Bishop is often heard responding to “**A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT**” and to this end, we are grateful to be led by a man who is not afraid of speaking out against the injustices of the current political order!
- The voice of the church to heal the wounds of those who suffered and continue to suffer even in the current political dispensation cannot be silent, as to do so would be turning a Deaf-Ear to “**A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT!**”
- There can be no Healing & Reconciliation if this Church does not stand up and say “**Enough is enough to crime, hijacking, drive-by-shooting, burglary, prostitution, selling and**

consuming drugs and intoxicating narcotics & beverages, sexual molestation of women and children and when the perpetrators of crime seem to have more rights than the victims, and when the Constitution is violated and the State Capture Report is staring at us, and when South Africa has, economically speaking been downgraded to a junk status by both S & P and Fitch". The church in its desire and quest for a social, democratic and just system in which Human Rights of all citizens are entrenched in our constitution cannot keep quiet, for silence does not always mean consent – it can arguably mean “the betrayal of one’s moral and ethical conscience, when one keeps quiet in the midst of the social and moral decay which seem to be running rampant in our society.” Some of those who fought against apartheid, social and economic injustices, are no more, and are probably tossing and turning in their graves when the church is turning a deaf ear to “a knock at midnight.”

And amongst those prominent politicians who were members of our church, Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe (PAC) and Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela (ANC), are probably turning in their graves when they see that is happening in the political space of our country today!

- The Seth Mokitimi Methodist Church Seminary in its 9 years of existence can rejoice, dance and ululate when it recalls its trials and tribulations, BUT still it cannot and should not keep quiet when there is a deliberate neglect of the Rule of Law and that the Supreme Law of the Country – The Constitution seems not to be worthy the paper it is written on as some people, and may I boldly say, some politicians who have been elected by us, arrogantly disregard the constitution and do as they wish, hence the then Public Protector was always discovering rattling skeletons in the cupboard and rocking the boat, as it were. She became the conscience of the Country! And this is the space which you, the Ministers, have to occupy – if we are to be the conscience of the Nation.
- Thulie Madonsela’s investigations - rightly or wrongly are a reminder of our moral and ethical responsibility and accountability and it is therefore true to argue that her

investigations unashamedly responded to: **“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT!”**

- A Knock at Midnight is a call for reflecting upon the status of our System Education, and a call to asking ourselves the question “what went wrong?” Year after year, our children who write Matric, especially those registered in the Townships and Rural Schools, fail dismally or fail to meet the minimum University Entrance Requirements! The Methodist Schools in the years gone by were at the forefront of fighting the apartheid Bantu Education System and such schools were known for producing the best Matric Results and competing on an equal footing with the so-called “Model C” schools. Indeed, the probing question as we celebrate today is whether or not we are **“RESPONDING TO A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT?”**
- There can be no Healing and Reconciliation when the Voice of the Church seems to be muted in the midst of gross Human Rights violations, and yes when the fight for political positions goes on, as the ANC is preparing for its elective Conference in December 2017. The question is “Are we going to have a Leadership that is going to respond to **A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT** or yet again a Leadership that is going to be concerned with “What’s in it for ourselves and our families”. The future will judge them for their actions of perpetuating a draconian ritual of “Man’s Inhumanity to Man”. Ironically, the Ruling Party previously once stated that it was a LISTENING PEOPLE’S MOVEMENT but the latest developments prove the statement otherwise.

4. MIDNIGHT CHALLENGES FACING US TODAY

In the entire presentation I have consistently been referring to **“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”** and some may wonder as to what relevance such a topic has to do with a celebratory occasion such as this one and some may even think that the Chairperson of the Governing Council is a wet-blanket. But my dear Brothers and Sisters, allow me to assure you that we would be failing to respond to this clarion call, even in the midst of celebrations only at our own peril. We cannot appreciate the present if we fail to honour, respect and recognize the past.

Reference to the Role played by the Church in the struggle for liberation was highlighted as it was indeed by some denominations which kept the torch of hope and light burning during the dark days of apartheid, for the sake of the majority of the people of South Africa whose human rights were brutalized and violated. Some of those who fought against apartheid sought refuge in the churches e.g. Regina Mundi in Soweto as well as at the FEDSEM in Alice by Fort Hare students who ran away from the Police brutality in the early 1970's and on a lighter note I was one of those. These kinds of police acts of barbarism and man's inhumanity to man led to the victims losing their dignity and their sense of worthiness which had been bruised and battered. For these categories of people, coming into contact with the brutality of the Police, theirs was an affirmation of "**Sunset at Midday**" and indeed a question of a "**Mountain-Top experience**". The church, notwithstanding its financial constraints and the wrath of the state, came to their rescue. Helping the victims of Police Brutality, the church was responding to "**A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT**", because without the church, the lives of the victims of apartheid would have been an experience of a dark midnight and therefore no hope for the future.

These are the challenges you are going to face in the circuits to which Conference will be sending you!

- You are graduating at a time when the "Political Winds of Change are blowing all over South Africa as Things Fall Apart!"
- You are graduating at a time when "Our Iceberg is Melting" (Kotter . J :2006)
- You are graduating at a time when South Africa is on a downward spiral as Politicians are too sparing on truth, honesty, moral efficacy and justice.
- You are graduating at a time when the three socio-economic challenges of Poverty, Unemployment and Inequality have been identified as evils which wreck families for the past two-decades but nothing has been done to address them, except for empty promises made, year in and year out – no service -delivery!
- You are graduating at a time when the country's political agenda is fraught with contradictions and ambiguities and

Barrack Obama's "Audacity of Hope" (2006) is fast escaping us as a result of using apartheid as a scapegoat for all the weaknesses of the present day government!

- You are graduating at a time when our country has been captured and at a time when corruption, injustice, tenderpreneurship, perfidious procurement processes are followed to benefit only a few that are politically well connected!
- You are graduating at a time when police brutality is synonymous with the apartheid tactics and whenever cases are reported the response is always "The matter will be investigated" and there is no feedback! "Oh! I Cry for My Beloved Country!"
- You are graduating at a time when South Africa is once again becoming the skunk of the world, much to the chagrin of Nelson Mandela
- You are graduating at a time when our people are thirsty for Service-delivery and not for the empty and unfulfilled promises.
- You are graduating at a time when Parliament has lost its dignity, respect and moral efficacy and has become a circus and our children are asking a probing question:

**"is this the kind of
democracy, freedom and
liberation you fought for?
If so, this is disgusting!"**

Now these are the challenges you will be confronted with as you shall be embarking on a new journey of responding to **"A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT!"**

This journey requires people of stature and integrity and people who do not get into bed with sin; people who are able to stand up straight in an upside-down environment – just like our Presiding Bishop continues to do!

It is no wonder that the Presbyterians when faced with such trials and tribulations would always burst in that beautiful poetic rendition of theirs and sing:

<p>“Ndiyakuthi ndakudinwa, Akuphel’amandl’omzimba Ndiziphakamisele kuwe izandla Ndicele kuwe amandla”</p>	<p>“I will, when I get tired and weary, when strength escapes my body, lift up my hands to Thee and ask Thee to invigorate me”</p>
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That Hymn kept many Political Prisoners going strong for they knew that their struggle was not in vain. Our Country needs our prayers as a Church for it is characterized by perhaps three kinds of midnights, which directly challenge the church to be vigorous and aggressive in its approach and strategies of dealing with such midnights.

These midnights are the described by the late Rev Dr Martin Luther King Jr (1981) as follows:

- It is midnight within the social order – family lives are broken and there is no support base. It is midnight because people are dying of HIV/AIDS and other dreaded diseases increase the number of widows, widowers, and orphans. Yes, it is midnight and the church seems not to be responding to

“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”

- It is midnight within the psychological order – Everywhere paralyzing fears harrow people by day and haunt them by night. Deep clouds of anxiety and depression are suspended in our mental skies. More people are emotionally and mentally disturbed today than at any other time of human history. (Remember the 100 mentally ill patients who died at the hands of non-carrying Health Officials in Gauteng). All of the threats are indicative of the fact that it is midnight within the inner lives of human beings. Yes, it is midnight and the church has to respond by establishing Self-Help Schemes and therefore helping and restoring the dignity of those whose lives were broken, bruised and battered under apartheid and to some extent people still experience the brutality of hunger, deprivation, and desperation within the current political order. As much as this is the responsibility of the Government’s Social Security

System, the Church has an equal role to play in pricking the conscience of those charged with the responsibility of looking after the destitute and the vulnerable!

Yes, you will be faced with such challenges, especially those of you who will be placed in Rural Circuits – Turn lemons into lemonade!

In responding to a **“KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”** personally, I have always turned to my late sister’s Hymn 249 – whose first verse is captured below:

<p>“Eyona nto inexabiso Kobu bomi sibudlayo Asikudla nezambatho Ngoba komnceda ntonina umntu Ukuzuza lonk’ilizwe Uze umphefumlo wona ulahlelwe emlilweni”</p>	<p>“What is of great value, in this our lives Is not the food and the garments we wear For, what would it help a person to acquire and/or inherit the whole world. And yet his/her soul will be thrown into the furnace of fire”</p>
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The lyrics of this hymn have seen me grow and develop academically, politically, intellectually and spiritually. For your own roles, now and in the future apply these lyrics in your own lives!

➤ It is also midnight within the moral order –

At midnight, colours lose their distinctiveness and become a sullen shade of grey. Moral Principles have lost their distinctiveness for modern man, and for some of the present-day generation of politicians, absolute right and absolute wrong is a matter of what the majority is doing.

It is no wonder that the Methodist Church Wesley Guild Sotho Chorus would go thus:

<p>“Jesu, Jesu, ke a orapela Ha o ntse o sisa babang</p>

Semphete le nna!”

**Jesus, Jesus, I Pray to you
That when you help others**

Don't pass me by

Perhaps these words are no longer directed at Jesus per se, but to the church which represents Him on earth .Please, the clarion call is **“HELP THOSE IN NEED AND YOU WILL BE RESPONDING TO A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT!”** At best this is the journey I have had to go through and at worst, I suffered personal hard knocks of life – falling seven times but rising up eight times, the beauty is that I never gave up!

Right and wrong are relative to likes and dislikes and the customs of a particular community .We have unconsciously applied the Einstein's Theory of Relativity, which properly describes the physical universe, to the moral ethical realism.

Midnight is the hour when men desperately seek to obey the “eleventh commandment” , “ thou shall steal but not get caught “ According to the ethic of midnight , the cardinal sin is to be caught and the cardinal virtue is to get by .It is all right to lie ,but one must lie with real finesse. It is right to steal, if one is so dignified that if caught, the charge becomes embezzlement, not robbery – we have seen this happening with some of our Government Officials. It is permissible even to hate, if one so dresses his hating in the garments of love that hating appears to be loving (the Oscar Pistorius vs Reeva Steenkamp case). The Darwinian Concept of the survival of the fittest has been substituted by a philosophy of the survival of the slickest. This mentality has brought a tragic breakdown of moral standards and indeed has brought about moral decay in our society and the midnight of moral degeneration deepens (Martin Luther King Jr: 1981: 58 – 60)

Yes, you the young clergy graduating today have a moral obligation to respond to these various **KNOCKS AT MIDNIGHT**, by applying the soothing balm to all those affected, infected, and afflicted because for them in their state of confusion and desperation. **It is midnight!**

However, as we are gathered here to celebrate and to rejoice with those who are graduating today, we only need to reflect where we coming from and perhaps in the midst of our own midnights, we may have been saying:

“We have toiled all night and have caught nothing”

In situations like these, Jesus tells us that, the right thing to do is “To throw the net on the other side!”

Yes, indeed. I seem to hear the President and the Leadership of this Seminary to be saying:

“We have toiled all night and have caught nothing!”

When faced with such challenges and desperations, get courage in the words of Kent M Keith, quoted by Martin Luther King Jr (1981: XII), wherein he says:

“People are illogical, unreasonable and self – centered.

Love them anyway

If you do good, people will accuse you of
selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway

If you are successful, you will win false friends
and true enemies.

Succeed anyway

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow

Do good anyway

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable

Be honest and frank anyway

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can
be shot down by the smallest men and women with
the smallest minds

Think big anyway

People favour underdogs but follow top dogs

Fight for the underdogs anyway

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight

Build anyway

People really need but may attack you if you do help them

Help them anyway

Give the world the best you have, and
you'll get kicked in the teeth

Give the world the best you have anyway"!

5. A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT – NO CROSS NO CROWN!

Rev Bennie Mostert (2000:77-78), gives a vivid explanation of a response to a **Midnight Knock** by stating that there can be no crown if one does not carry a cross. For 4 years, some of you have experienced the paradox of the cross, because carrying it brought about a pain and suffering but still it had to be carried because at the end of the journey a cross brings about joy, jubilation, contentment, fulfillment and freedom.

Bennie (2007:77), says: **“there is no oil without squeezing the olives, no wine without the wine press, no fragrance without crushing the flowers”**.

As a church we are living in an age in which there is deeper hunger for the things of the Lord. People are seeking for a new way in which to live their Christian faith and Christian values. Unfortunately, a gospel that does not reflect the realities of life is being preached in too many places. Too often only one aspect is preached, namely that **God is love (and He is love)**, that **God is merciful (and He is merciful)**, that **He forgives sin (and He does forgive sin)**. The cost of discipleship however, is not spelt out. Christians need to understand that Christianity does not mean that all will go well everyday. It also means that, at times, believers will have to go through **fire and water**. Christians do not always experience success and prosperity, nor are they always winners. Christians, and those who stand for Truth and Justice in the midst of adversity are always presented with an unsurpassed strength and fortitude; they experience suffering, loneliness, failure, pain, rejection and much chastisement. All things are part of their commitment to the struggle for liberation and social justice for all. And these things are a response to : **“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”**.

To follow Jesus Christ and fighting for the restoration of the moral social order and dignity for our people – the hungry, the needy, the destitute, means taking up a cross and following the path of self – sacrifice (the Via Dolorosa of our own time!) and embracing the wilderness experience. There is no alternative for the church if it wants to fight for justice and make a difference in the lives of many who brought about the freedom we enjoy today. Those who seek the sanctuary in the church are recognized by the crosses that they carry, not by the crosses they speak about or the glow on their faces, their big bank balances or their resounding successes, or their popularity. The watermark of the struggle is the cross! And a response to **“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”**!

Listen to these words as you are going to encounter these challenges!

However, the problem is that it is easier to talk about the cross and to philosophize about it than to take it up and carry it along life's road.

We may write beautiful things about laying down self, but it is totally different to walk only the way of the cross and truly die to self.

6. A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT – BEYOND THE HILL

I hope when time comes for us all to leave this Hall and look back at the success of these celebrations, we will be imbued with a spirit of newness and say:

***“We have been to the mountain top
and have seen the Promised – Land
and that we shall be our Brothers’ Keeper!*”**

And so, to buttress this point further, it may be appropriate to once again quote Martin Luther King Jr (1992:26), when he defines an ethical and a moral leader who is able to respond to:

“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT”

and this is a challenge that is put to all of us as church leaders, and as members of Civil Society, particularly in the present day political epoch, as he posits:

***“A time like this demands strong minds,
great hearts, true faith and ready hands;
Leaders, who the lust of office does not
kill; Leaders, whom the spoils of life
cannot buy; Leaders, who possess
opinions and a will; Leaders, who
honour; Leaders who will not lie;
Leaders, who can stand before a
demagogue and damn His treacherous
flatteries without winking! Tall Leaders,
sun crowned, who live above the fog in
public duty and private thinking.”***

The probing questions are: “Are we such Leaders”? or better still “Are there such Leaders in our midst?”

Failure to respond to an emotional **KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT** as the church may ostensibly and perhaps even potentially fulfill Charles Dickens' prophetic words captured in his masterpiece book – **A Tale of two Cities**, wherein he posits:

“It was the best of times

It was the worst of times

It was an epoch of belief

It was an epoch of incredulity”

Having noted the above, we should, as a church ask ourselves whether or not we are comfortable with the old order to the extent that the introduction of new things is somewhat unsettling and we therefore want to maintain the status quo! If we continue in this manner, the old order would forever continue to be an albatross around our necks. Yes, we have fought for the new democratic dispensation and whilst we recognize and acknowledge the backlog occasioned by the administration of yester – year, we had hoped that the New South Africa would somewhat be a panacea to the socio-economic problems of years – gone by, but alas! this seems not to be so – signs of willingness for a better service delivery are there but putting such willingness into action and operation is an indictment to our democracy and this is where the voice of the church and the voice of Civil Society are once again needed! The implementation of the grandiose plans as contained in the Nelson Mandela's RDP Document, post 1994, cannot be postponed and/or be amended forever, as I am sure there can never be acquiescence on a definite way forward. The church should make a difference and call for the speeding up of service delivery because the church is the conscience of the Nation.

You are going out there to respond to: **“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT!”** and the Powers that be, will describe and define you derogatory as **“CLEVER PEOPLE”** but do not despair when they call you names because you will be taking after your Master anyway!

7. CONCLUSION A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT – AND ONLY YOU CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE

As we rejoice today with friends and families, I wish to plead that you should continue with your noble work of touching the lives of those in need and therefore making a difference.

In this regard, allow me to conclude by quoting that famous Italian – American Motivational Speaker, the late Leo Buscaglia, who would always end his motivational speeches by saying:

“ONLY YOU CAN MAKE THE DIFFERENCE”

- **You alone can bring magic and humour, and joy to the people you encounter;**
- **Anything you dream, by the very nature that you can dream it, makes it possible;**
- **The purpose of life is to help others. And if you can't help them, would you at least not hurt them!**
- **You can make things happen that you never thought you could!**
- **The greatest risk in life is to risk nothing. The person who risks nothing, does nothing, has nothing and is nothing.**
- **To be is to do – and to do, is to do now, because tomorrow might not be there.**
- **You have everything you need to be so much – don't settle for less!**
- **There is no end to human potential – and there is so much more to learn.**
- **The time for action is now, and only you can make the difference!”**

When Leo Buscaglia uttered these words, he was trying to emphasize the beauty and the importance of building and reconstructing something from good to better and thus in this context, yours would be to respond to a KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT by growing your circuits:

From Good to Great

From Great to Awesome

From Awesome to Auspicious

From Auspicious to Ostentatious

From Ostentatious to Incredible

From Incredible to Remarkable

From remarkable to Fantastic

From Fantastic to fabulous

From Fabulous to Magnificent

From Magnificent to Majestic

From Majestic to Splendid

From Splendid to Spectacular

From Spectacular to Revolutionary

From Revolutionary to Victory

From Victory to Contentment!

This would be a response to a Knock at Midnight!

Perhaps equally important, especially in the current political conjecture would be to sensitize you to Robert Sobukwe's vision of a truly African State which he articulated at the Fort Hare Graduating Class of 1949, at which he inter-alia said:

“Let me plead with you, Lovers of my Africa to carry with you into the world the vision of new Africa, an Africa re-born, an Africa rejuvenated, an Africa re-created, young AFRICA. We are the first glimmers of a new dawn” (Pogrund, B:2015,36)

And so, to our graduating ministers, I plead with you to carry into the world the vision of our Methodist Church of Southern Africa:

“A Christ healed Africa for the healing of Nations”

And by doing so, you will be responding to the clarion call:

“A KNOCK AT MIDNIGHT!”

I THANK YOU!

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