



THE JOURNEY OUT

PRISONERS OF HOPE

This has been a year that many people would love to forget! There have been so many challenges from the coronavirus, economic upheaval, social turmoil, natural disasters, all with a backdrop of daily uncertainty and confusion around what might be coming next. As we stepped into this *Year of Confident Hope*, little did we know that this would be what we would be facing and how much we would need this word to strengthen and sustain us through such a difficult time. It certainly can be tempting to simply give up, and yet we find ourselves as the prophet Zechariah describes us, as *prisoners of hope* (Zechariah 9:12). Wow, what a profound picture. This declaration comes in the midst of a prophetic word Zechariah received about the Lord who was coming in the midst of difficulties to restore His people. Like then, in spite of what we see around us now, nevertheless we are encompassed by the confident hope that is found in God our refuge.

How can we lean into that confident hope right now? I believe the prophet gives us a way forward in this passage.

REJOICE

"REJOICE GREATLY, DAUGHTER ZION! SHOUT, DAUGHTER JERUSALEM! SEE, YOUR KING COMES TO YOU, RIGHTEOUS AND VICTORIOUS, LOWLY AND RIDING ON A DONKEY, ON A COLT, THE FOAL OF A DONKEY."
ZECHARIAH 9:9

The word of the Lord here from Zechariah clearly points to the coming of the Messiah, the Anointed One, Jesus, who came into Jerusalem riding upon a foal, humbly proclaiming His role as the Prince of Peace. Our hope is not dependent upon the circumstances we find ourselves in, our hope is dependent upon the Person who rules over those circumstances. Our joy is deeper than a happiness that is grounded in happenstance, our joy is rooted in the One who is righteous and victorious and *"who proclaims peace to the nations and whose rule extends from sea to sea."* Zechariah 9:10.

The Apostle Paul declares something similar when he writes. *"Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus."* Thessalonians 4:16-18 Note, we are not commanded to give thanks for all circumstances but rather in all circumstances. Why?

Not all circumstances are good. However in all circumstances God is still good and is working for our good, even when it is hard to see. And so, we look through eyes of faith understanding that *"Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see."* Hebrews 11:1

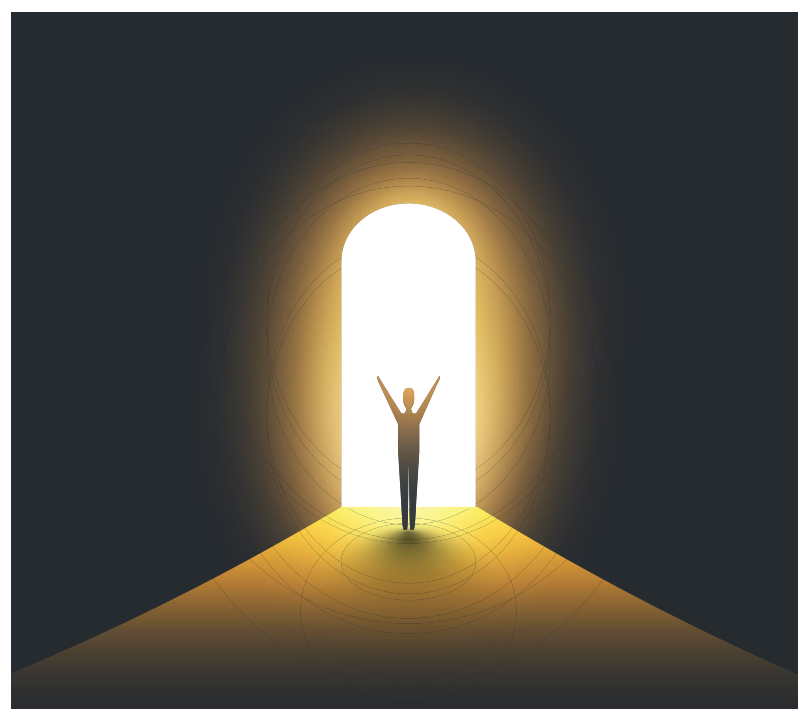
RETURN

"RETURN TO YOUR FORTRESS, YOU PRISONERS OF HOPE."
ZECHARIAH 9:12A

Here the prophet invites us to return to the only place of true security, stability, and serenity, the Lord our fortress. As the psalmist says, *"I love you, LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I called to the LORD who is worthy of praise, and I have been saved from my enemies."* Psalm 18:1-3 What a powerful picture of safety in the midst of danger, difficulty, and distress!

There is a fable of a kite which once said to itself, "If I could just get rid of that anchor which is holding me back, then I could fly above the clouds and kiss the stars." One day the string broke. Now at last, it was free to soar higher than it had ever gone before. but much to its surprise, it did not rise above its present height. In fact, it came crashing down to the ground." The kite had not realized a fact of aerodynamics: the string holding a kite down is the string holding it up. A kite can fly above the clouds only when its anchor on earth is secure.

In order to live in confident hope, we need to dwell in God our fortress as His prisoners of hope. So it is with us. Thankfully, as the writer of Hebrews reminds us, *"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure."* Hebrews 6:19 We can soar to the heavens, because we are firmly anchored to our Rock, our Fortress.



RESTORE

"EVEN NOW I ANNOUNCE THAT I WILL RESTORE TWICE AS MUCH TO YOU."
ZECHARIAH 9:12B

What a remarkable promise! To a people who had lost everything, here was the hope of receiving everything again. As this passage goes on to say, *"The LORD their God will save his people on that day as a shepherd saves his flock. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. How attractive and beautiful they will be!"* Zechariah 9:16-17a As God's people, we too are called to sparkle in the midst of what at times feels like a barren land. Why do we sparkle? Because the Lord himself, our shepherd, has reclaimed us, redeemed us, reconciled us, refined us, and has restored us!

In a similar way, Peter wrote these timeless words of encouragement to God's people enduring great suffering, *"Praise be to the God and father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you."* 1 Peter 1:3-4 We are actually "prisoners of a living hope," not simply a hope that is time and earth bound, but one that is timeless and heaven bound. We know that the end of the story has not yet been written, and that whatever chapter of that story we find ourselves in right now we are called to rejoice, invited to return, and we will be restored!

JIM OLSON, PCR PRESIDENT



A PRAYER FROM ARTHUR



JESUS: our LORD, our LIFE, our HOPE, our HELP: Long ago You created a world-wide fellowship, unique through the centuries, by simply inviting people to leave their nets, and boats, and desks, and work and follow You – to an Upper Room in Jerusalem, and then to the seat of the Sanhedrin, and the Judgement Hall of Pilate the governor, and finally, to a Hill Far Away, and an “old rugged cross, the emblem of suffering and shame,” where you proclaimed FORGIVENESS upon a world that did not know what it was doing, and promised Paradise and a heavenly home to all who would humble ourselves and BE YOURS ALONE.

We gather here, offering our hearts to you and to each other – yearning to be the fellowship of the forgiven in these days when You are the only sure thing. We pledge our lives to you, these resurrection days, to be the fellowship of the forgiven on the Emmaus roads of the world, to be the company of the Table, the brotherhood of love, ever heading out with You to bring the world Home to Your heart.

Help us there, O LORD. Help us not turn back. Heal our wounds. Make us brave. Help us be humble, and daring, and joyful – known as those who are Yours. Alone, forever. We pray in Your sweet and wonderful Name, O JESUS.

AMEN.

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Dr. Jim has asked that I let the wider Pilgrim Center family know of this personal work in case you might want to explore the website, read the blogs, call the faith line, gather for Advent and Lent Bible Studies, or make an appointment at the fireside of Covenant Village. Love to you all.

ARTHUR ROUNER, PCR FOUNDER



A NEW CHAPTER IN RWANDA: BREAKING THE CYCLE OF VIOLENCE

“TRAUMA, IF NOT HEALED, CAN BECOME A TRANS-GENERATIONAL PHENOMENON.”

The Rwandan genocide claimed the lives of 1 million Tutsis and their sympathizers. A generation has since passed yet Rwandans, old and young alike, are continuing to experience post-genocide trauma. This phenomenon has been observed not only among those that lived through the 1994 Rwandan genocide, but also among a second generation of Rwandans who continue to suffer from the societal trauma caused by this tragedy. This observation brings us to undoubtedly confirm that trauma, if not healed, can become a trans-generational phenomenon.

Why is this the case and what can be done to counter this enduring trauma? The transmission of trauma from one generation to another and its related consequences are engaging the interest of peace-building organizations in Rwanda and PCR is among them.

During a two-day training of trainers in August 2020, the PCR Rwanda Servant Leadership Team presented different issues that they have found on ground related to trauma transmission, which also is manifested into other forms of violence and misconduct. Among the issues discussed were: *an increasing number of kids on the street, the increase of teen mothers and single mothers, conflict in families that culminate in family killings, intermarriage issues where people cannot accept their children to be married into another family due to ethnicity divisions, widows who have transmitted their wounds to their children, youth who have inherited those wounds, children born with an identity crisis, genocide ideology, and Christians with unstable foundations of the gospel.*

From these findings the Rwanda Team has concluded that they must start a new chapter that will enable the organization to operate in the context of breaking the cycle of violence through a community-based approach. As servant leaders called to minister in this particular context, they have committed to becoming a model and building a movement that will leave a legacy to a new generation. Friendship and love will be the center and means to reach targeted people.



THE GOAL IS TO BRING TANGIBLE CHANGE IN THESE COMMUNITIES THROUGH PROLONGED PRESENCE AND FREQUENT ENGAGEMENT

To implement this new chapter the team has selected 4 respective communities in geographic areas that are most affected by intergenerational trauma transmission.

The Servant Leadership Team of PCR Rwanda, in collaboration with the Pilgrim Center for Reconciliation Eastern Africa Initiative (PCREAI) Team, is launching this new chapter in 2021. The goal is to bring tangible change in these communities through prolonged presence and frequent engagement that will transform these communities and bring a sustainable impact that will break the cycle of violence.

BENJAMIN NDIZEYE, PCR FACILITATOR

BECOMING A RECONCILER COURSE UPDATE



This past May we launched our new Becoming a Reconciler course. This course is designed to be a follow-up to our Way of Reconciliation course, answering the question, "what next?" Over the course of six sessions we walk through the process of becoming an ambassador of reconciliation from awareness, to adapting, to action, to advocating. It includes both information giving and interactive pieces to engage the head as well as the heart with the goal of personal transformation.

Because of the pandemic we offered our first course virtually. The timing was fortuitous as we began the course the Thursday night before George Floyd's death in Minneapolis and so the remainder of the course unfolded with the backdrop of the events following his death, including the racial reckoning and social unrest that

continues even now. Our diverse group of participants were able to engage in deep honest conversations about what we were experiencing and wrestling with together.

Through the journey of our 6 weeks together we had our distressed souls renewed, strained relationships were restored, and we discovered how we might participate meaningfully in the revitalization of our communities. All of us came away with a renewed commitment to living out our call to be Ambassadors of Reconciliation. To find out more information and to register for upcoming courses and retreats visit our website.

"All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God we're making his appeal through us."

2 CORINTHIANS 5:18-20

SOUTH SUDAN: A NEW COUNTRY INITIATIVE

"THIS IS WHAT WE HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR. TELL PCR TO COME QUICKLY. DO NOT DELAY. THE DOOR OF OPPORTUNITY IS OPEN FOR PCR TO BRING HEALING TO THE NATION OF SOUTH SUDAN."

South Sudan, the newest country in the world, is in great need of healing. On July 9th, 2011 it gained independence from Sudan, ending Africa's longest civil war (51 yrs). There was much jubilation. Many South Sudanese went back home with high hopes to settle and rebuild their nation.

Unfortunately in December 2013 Civil War broke out again owing to disagreement between the President and Vice President resulting in much insecurity. 1.5 million South Sudanese fled into refugee camps in neighboring countries and 2 million went to major cities within South Sudan. An estimated 400,000 lives were lost. The people have suffered loss of property, poverty, disease, and sexual violence against women.

South Sudan is home to 64 indigenous ethnic tribes, some of whom have long standing ancestral enmity of cattle raiding and youth violence against each other. The circle of revenge has been tolerated as the norm in these situations. There are deep war traumas among the refugees and internally displaced people which remain unaddressed. These wounds affect the future. The work of the Holy Spirit is needed.

THERE IS HOPE FOR A NEW BEGINNING

In February 2020, the 6 year old civil war came to an end and an agreement to form a national unity government was reached. Ministers were appointed and appointment of governors for the ten states and commissioners is expected soon.

The current population of South Sudan is estimated at 15 million, 70 % are under 30 years of age, and the literacy rate in the general population is 35%. Refugees anticipate returning home in the next two years.

The expectation is the newly formed national unity government will be in transition for 3 years and after that there will be general democratic elections to form a new government. Two government commissioners and church leaders recently told Dr. Monica Yugu, who is leading our work in South Sudan,

"PLEASE GIVE OUR REQUEST TO PCR. WE NEED HELP. OUR PEOPLE ARE HURTING. SOME HAVE WITNESSED NEIGHBORS LOOT THEIR PROPERTY OR MURDER THEIR LOVED ONES. HOW CAN THEY LIVE WITH EACH OTHER WHEN THEY RETURN FROM THE REFUGEE CAMPS."

Over the last three years we have been exploring and laying an initial foundation for establishing a movement of reconciliation in South Sudan. We have hosted 13 Retreats with over 700 participants both in South Sudan as well as with South Sudanese diaspora in refugee camps in Northern Uganda and South Sudanese refugees here in the US. We have also hosted 2 Training Retreats, one in Northern Uganda and one in Juba, the capital of South Sudan, to begin to identify and develop indigenous leadership. Retreat participants have repeatedly said, *"Many NGOs have come and we have attended conferences but we have never seen anything like this. This is what we have been looking for. Tell PCR to come quickly. Do not delay. The door of opportunity is open for PCR to bring healing to the nation of South Sudan."*



Presently our work in South Sudan is being led by Dr. Monica Yugu, who currently resides in St Paul, has recently retired, and is spending an increasing amount of time in her homeland, South Sudan. She recently returned from several months there and intends to return for six months in January 2021. Dr. Monica has served with the Pilgrim Center for over 10 years as a Senior Facilitator, Trainer, Prayer Coordinator, and Board Member. She has significant contacts and credibility with the South Sudanese community here in the US, in the refugee camps in Northern Uganda, and up in South Sudan. She will be serving as our PCR South Sudan Country Director for the launch of our South Sudanese initiative beginning in January 2021.

OUR PLAN FOR YEAR ONE INCLUDES:

Identifying, training, mentoring, and then releasing Facilitators and Senior Facilitators. These emerging leaders will form the nucleus for an eventual PCR South Sudan Leadership Team.

Hosting retreats and courses with strategic groups of diverse leaders and influencers within the church, community, government, and the military.

Pursue official governmental registration and establish a PCR South Sudan Board of Directors and Administrative Support Team.

This is a historic opportunity to bring healing to many in South Sudan, cutting off revenge in the hearts of people and enabling them to choose forgiveness and reconciliation.

JIM OLSON, PCR PRESIDENT

MONICA YUGU, PCR SOUTH SUDAN COUNTRY DIRECTOR

ORIENTING STRATEGY: REPRODUCIBLE

As our movement of reconciliation continues to grow, the Pilgrim Center Board has adopted three orienting strategies to guide our work; Sustainable, Reproducible, and Contextual. When these three strategies are properly aligned with one another, our movement will grow and flourish.

The first orienting strategy, sustainable, suggests that we expect the work of reconciliation will become self-sustaining within the communities, countries, and cultures in which it is embedded.

The second orienting strategy, reproducible indicates that we expect that the work of reconciliation will be replicated with integrity into the communities, countries, and cultures in which it is expanding.

Our work is not just a program or technique, it is a deeply experiential process that leads to transformation. Therefore, it is essential that in all that we do, and wherever we go, our ministry remains consistent with our foundational principles, reliable in its' outcomes, and easily multipliable. Towards that end here are some practical ways that we at PCR are endeavoring to implement this orienting strategy.

SIMPLICITY

From the beginning of our work in Rwanda starting over 25 years ago, the work of the Pilgrim Center has been oriented around the simple message of the gospel of reconciliation. Our retreats and courses have grown out of that simple message and are easily accessible and achievable for all people from all around the world.

MODELING

We recognize that this work is primarily caught, not taught. Therefore, all of our training is committed to in depth ongoing modeling as a key component of maintaining the integrity of this work. Wherever we go and to whomever we are sent the DNA of this message and ministry will remain the same.

NETWORKING

The expansion of our work has always come through relational networking. People often ask, "How do you go about organizing a retreat?" It does not happen mechanically, it happens organically. All through the years God has faithfully brought us key "people of peace" who have had the influence to open doors of opportunity to new people groups in new places. And those networks continue to expand!

Now more than ever, our communities, country, and world are seeking real reconciliation. We have a unique method that has been tried, tested, and found to be true. We are trusting that God will help us to remain faithful to this calling and that He will continue to reproduce this ministry of reconciliation to the ends of the earth!

THE PILGRIM CENTER is called to bring hope and healing by renewing individuals, restoring relationships, and revitalizing communities through the ministry of reconciliation.

Our work takes us to places of historic and contemporary conflict and pain to minister reconciliation by loving presence, healing retreats, and peaceful witness.

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REFLECTIONS FROM PCR LIVING RECONCILIATION PANEL DISCUSSION ENGAGING THE POWERS: A PRINCIPLED APPROACH



What a blessing it was to hear from such a wonderful panel at our recent Living Reconciliation Night! In light of the call to action we were sensing to engage in the present moment's call for justice, PCR pulled together a diverse panel of practitioners who are engaged as Kingdom difference makers in cultural systems and structures. Hosted at Fountain of Life Gospel Church just blocks from where Mr. George Floyd was killed, we had an in person audience and a much larger following on three online platforms. The five panelists met a few nights before the event to connect and pray. Although they didn't know one another, it was evident that they carried the PCR DNA/ attributes we hoped to bear witness to – humility, hospitality, synergy, authority, and integrity. They brought such valuable perspectives from their experiences, both personally and professionally.

From left to right:

Melanie Leehy has been a Council Member in Falcon Heights since 2018 after serving as co-chair of the City's Task Force on Policing and Inclusion following the killing of Philando Castile. She has been involved in community renewal over several decades advocating for relationship development, education, and empowerment.

Jim Halbur is the Senior Pastor of Fountain of Life Gospel Church which is a multiracial congregation that Jim has led for the past 18 years to powerfully impact their South Minneapolis community through a variety of creative outreaches and community partnerships including with the local Parks and Recreation.

Shvonne Johnson is an educator from North Minneapolis whose career includes leadership in both higher education and K-12 public schools. She is also an inclusive organizer who was directly involved in the recent protest movement with connections to local and national leaders in the African American Community.

Riz Prakasim was born in South Africa during the apartheid regime and serves today as pastor of New Life Presbyterian Church in Roseville. He was also a manager at Gandhi Mahal off Lake Street which was burned down in the aftermath of George Floyd's murder.

Booker Hodges is Assistant Commissioner at the Minnesota Department of Public Safety and has experience as both a sheriff and chief of police. He has been the President of the Northstar MN Chapter of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE) since 2017.

The first question posed was, *"Can you tell us more about yourself and the ways you are involved in this topic of engaging the powers?"* What a testimony it was to hear of how each person was motivated by their remarkable stories of God's love and healing in their own lives. Several shared difficult circumstances including death of family members, crime and incarceration, abuse, and the intent to "become a racist". Their reconciliation stories through Jesus became the platform from which they explained how they now approach their work.

The panelists shared ways in which they reach out to form partnerships, specific postures that help them, and inspirational ideas. It was so impactful to see how they played off one another's answers and often gave shout outs of agreement to one another. Though from very different sectors and backgrounds, it became obvious that as Christ followers they each use that unique foundation to both motivate and center them in these difficult times.

The audience was also given the opportunity to ask questions and 2/3rds were themed by how the Christian Church can engage in these important issues. To a person, the panel bore witness to putting our eyes on Jesus and living the example he gave us versus programmatic solutions. In other words, we were encouraged to take our mandate seriously and look to see what our sphere of influence might include.

At the Pilgrim Center this encourages us to see what God is doing and join the action.

If you would like to watch the rebroadcast of the Living Reconciliation panel discussion check it out on Pilgrim Center for Reconciliation's Facebook page.

JONATHAN STUART, PCR SENIOR FACILITATOR