

Archbishop Thabo Makgoba
Lonmin's Marikana Mine Tragedy
St George's Memorial Service
22, 23 August 2012

Let me begin with my own welcome to everyone here today. Thank you, Madam Mayor, for your presence. I also acknowledge Tony Ehrenreich, along with many clergy and religious leaders, and all who have come to join in this service.

We are here today in what has been declared a week of national mourning. What does national mourning mean for us in Cape Town, who are so far away – and not only geographically – from Marikana? How do we avoid voicing platitudes, or falling into blaming and condemning at a distance? Yes, there must be investigation, yes there must be justice – and justice in its widest possible sense – but this is not part of mourning. And this week, today, mourning is most definitely our task, the task of the whole nation.

To use another word from Holy Scripture, our task is to lament. We are to cry out to God, for all that has gone wrong – not just last week in Marikana, but for all that is wrong in our country, our nation, which contributed to this terrible, heart-breaking tragedy. We cry out because it is a tragedy for all those individuals caught up in it, in whatever capacity. It is a tragedy for our nation, which thought – which hoped and believed – that we should never again witness such scenes.

We lament because things have gone wrong, terribly wrong. Whatever the merits of the various disputes, things have gone horribly, awfully, wrong:

- between mining companies and their employees,
- between unions,
- between union leaders and workers,
- and between miners and police.

Yet all these things did not go wrong by themselves. They point to a wider 'going wrong' – a going wrong:

- around law-enforcement policy and its implementation
- around policy-making, in the public and private sectors
- around economic inequalities between employers and employees, between rich and poor
- around attitudes that allow all these gulfs to emerge and widen
- even, around the relationship between government and citizens, politicians and people.

We cry out to God in lament for all of this. We cry out because we know – and this is the most important point of all – we know that God hears our lament, because God also laments with us. The God who is love, the God of mercy and compassion, grieves for all that harms even the hair of one human head; and grieves most of all when we are our own worst enemies, the cause of one another's hurts and pains.

Heard by God, held by God, it is safe to lament: safe to speak out in honesty about all that pains us.

And so today, as a nation, we mourn. We mourn for every life lost, knowing it is one life too many. We mourn for the bereaved: for everyone who has lost a father, a husband, a brother, a son, a friend, a colleague. We mourn for every family left without a breadwinner. We mourn for all those who have been wounded. We mourn for all those who have been traumatised. We mourn for all those who have been arrested, and for all who seek justice. We mourn for all those who wielded weapons, for all those who pulled triggers, for all who contributed to the escalating violence – and who are all inevitably themselves harmed in spirit if not in body. We mourn for the mistakes that were made, for the poor judgments reached, for the wrong decisions taken. We mourn for all who bear some responsibility, even in a small way, for how events unfolded, and now carry the burden of wishing they could have said or done differently.

And we mourn for the failings of our country, our government, our societies – which made it possible for so much to go so badly wrong. We mourn for how we have become selfish and greedy, or merely complacent, and failed to hold fast to the vision that brought us freedom; and failed to strive to make it a concrete reality for every son and daughter of our soil. Today we mourn – because we are not a country where every human person lives in dignity, with adequate housing, food, water, sanitation, health-care, education, and all the basic necessities of life – and because we do not tackle these shortcomings with the greatest possible urgency.

We mourn for ourselves, because, when things go wrong, we do not always speak truth to power as we ought – though this morning in Khayelitsha, as religious leaders we pledged ourselves to move from witness to action, signing a pledge to ensure our faith communities and all our people truly do stand up against all forms of corruption, which exacerbates injustice and inequality.

Of course, some will always be richer than others – but it is not right that a few should pursue such high levels of luxury when so many have so little. And this is true far beyond the mining sector. But we mourn for our lack of compassion, asking: where is the love that each should have for their neighbour, no matter whether their neighbour is in a mansion or a tin shack?

And how can we look on those with inadequate housing, and not do something about it? Can we not see as God sees – that every human being on our TV screen is a beloved child of God, a precious individual, treasured and cared for. Each one, each worker, each police officer, each family member, each journalist, , each representative of management, of unions, of law-enforcement, of government, each individual caught up in events: every single one is known by name – their hopes, their fears, the circumstances and struggles felt in the heart of God.

Not one is insignificant. And nobody should be an anonymous marble in the invisible hand of the powerful – whether employers, unions, politicians, whoever, as they play their larger strategic games. Surely we know all this – but we have failed to live it out.

And so today is a day of mourning: it is not a day of stirring up. God knows our emotions have been more than stirred up in the last weeks. Today is a day of laying down. It is a day of laying down the burdens of our brokenness, our pain, our sorrow – of laying them down before the throne of God. It is a day of bringing to him our anger, our frustrations, our feelings of desperation, as well as our lamentation.

And we bring all this to God with a purpose – we come to ask him to take it all, and redeem it, to change it, and to change us so we may make a good and godly difference. We ask him to bring:

- comfort for sorrow;
- hope for despair;
- healing for pain;
- wholeness for brokenness;
- forgiveness for wrong-doing;
- reconciliation for division;
- and a new beginning wherever it is needed.

We know that this will ask a lot of us, so we also ask for:

- strength in our weakness;
- wisdom in our ignorance;
- courage in our fearfulness;

so that we might dare to see what it is that we need to do, and have the commitment to carry it out.

For we know that it is not enough only to mourn – though we must mourn. It is not enough to pray for wounds to be bandaged and pain healed, and to demand that conflict ends, unless we are prepared to address the wider context and the underlying issues on which conflict feeds.

We need to ask ourselves: why are so many hurting? Why are so many weeping? We need to be honest about what is fuelling this level of anger and desperation. We must also ask how we will handle it, if it spills over and spreads to other situations, other places.

We have brought to God our lament over the anger, the inequality, the poverty, the death, the suffering, the injury, the hopelessness: and now we must listen to what is he asking us to do. In the Bible, the Prophet Isaiah records this promise of God:

'I will appoint Peace as your overseer, and Righteousness as your taskmaster: violence shall no more be heard in your land, devastation or destruction within your borders ...' (Isaiah 60:17-18).

God's word to us is that devastation and destruction end only when there is true peace and righteousness. This is a clear message to all – a message of common sense to everyone, whether religious or not. The plain truth is that our greatest need lies in ensuring true justice and genuine fairness prevail in all sectors of our country's life.

This is not merely about justice in terms of answering legal questions of who did what in the events of last week. It is the question of wider justice, across all of society, across the whole nation. It is about the justice and fairness and equity that are marked:

- by true economic emancipation of all,
- by good governance, honesty and truth,
- by mutual respect regardless of status,
- by flourishing democratic systems,
- by free but constructive speech.

This is the vision encapsulated in 1994 and in our Constitution. Its achievement lies in our hands, if we recommit ourselves positively, and work hard, rejecting complacency and hopelessness in the face of the country's challenges. God wants what is best for all his children, and will help us, if we strive for all that is good and right.

We should not be afraid to hold fast to his promises of hope. For when his vision for good is at the centre of our lives, it will shape us and our society. This – this ideal of human dignity and flourishing, at the heart of our Constitution – defines who we are, who we truly aspire to be, rather than any of the difficulties, challenges, setbacks that we experience.

So, even as we mourn, let us ask God to bring his light into our darkness, and guide our feet into his life-giving pathways. May he bring comfort and blessing to all who mourn, and fresh courage and hope for tomorrow. Amen