

Jesus Christ, the Mediator

Sermon by pastor Tesso Benti Ujulu

1 Timothy 2:5-6

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Dear brothers and sisters

Nobody wishes conflict, but everybody is confronted with it in his/her life. Conflict is part of human life. It is possible to minimize conflict, but difficult to avoid it. Even God did not avoid the conflict he was going to have with human beings. Instead he looked for a way of solving the conflict through a mediator. The sermon text I want to share with you today reads:

There is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all (1 Timothy 2:5-6).

Jesus Christ mediated between God and man sacrificing his blood and paying a ransom. He was able to mediate and reconcile because:

1. He is the son of God and acknowledges the demands of a just God who demands eternal punishment for sin.
2. He is the son of man, who became like us. Therefore, He understands our weaknesses.
3. He redeemed us by His blood and justified us before God.

The main message of the Gospel is to proclaim the good news of peace achieved by our mediator Jesus Christ. However, humans fail to solve their conflicts with other humans in a peaceful way and destroy millions of lives and resources. The problem is not a conflict itself, but not knowing how to handle a conflict.

Believing in mediation and accepting a mediator is one way of handling a conflict. In our world we have many mediators of conflicts and preachers of peace who draw the road maps of peace. Unfortunately they are unable to restore peace. The last 60 years of mediation between Israel and Palestine, the long years of mediation talks in Africa could not solve human conflicts.

In olden days Africans were religious and followed their religious practices that include mediation. In contemporary Africa this tradition seems to be a thing of the past.

An African scholar, Anglican Church Priest, the former Professor of religious studies at Mekere University Uganda, Samuel Mbiti studied the culture of 300 African societies and published a book titled “African Religions and Philosophy” in 1969.

In his book, Mbiti states that

1. Africans are notoriously religious. All African societies have their own religious system with a set of beliefs and practices.
2. According to African traditional religion the human being is understood to be the centre of the Universe. Therefore he or she is considered as a priest of the universe.

The word ‘priest’ is used in his study to cover everyone who performs religious duties whether in Temple, shrines, groves or elsewhere. Therefore, every African believes

in his or her priesthood and believes in mediation.

The main duty of the trained religious leaders such as priests, prophets, diviners, rainmakers and elders is mediation. They mediate between God and human beings, between Man and invisible spirits and between men themselves. According to traditional African religions a ritual of mediation and purification must be conducted in cases where serious sin occurs, due to the danger of the escalation of conflict.

I would like to mention the traditional mediation rite of my own people, the Oromo of Ethiopia, as an example. Scholars such as Eike Haberland of Germany, Asmerom Laggase of Eritrea, Bartels Lambert of the Netherlands and others have studied the Oromo culture and produced books. In his book titled “*Oromo Religion: myths and rites*”, Bartels, a Catholic priest and missionary, recorded the mediation ritual of the Oromo known as “*Gumaa Araarsuu*”, (reconciling after manslaughter) in Oromo language. The

process of this Oromo ritual of mediation includes five things.

1. Stopping Communication

When one man kills another person the peace of the community is distorted. Thus the first step is stopping communication between the parties who have entered into conflict. The families, relatives and clans of the killer and the victim must stop all sorts of relationships until the ritual of mediation has been conducted at the river side. They stop talking, trading and eating with each other. They can no longer drink from the same river. Communicating with each other before the ritual of mediation as well as purification rites is sinning against the creator. Therefore every Oromo should respect this religious custom.

2. Isolation and humiliating the Killer

The reconciliation of *Guma araarsuu* is not without consequences for the killer. The man killed a human being who has the spirit form Waaqa known as *Ayyaanaa*. It is believed that unless peace is maintained, the spirit of the

dead will revenge himself sooner or later. Therefore the killer should be punished through isolation and humiliation. Then he regrets his deeds.

They take him to an “unknown” place. The house where he lives must be guarded day and night so that the relatives of the dead do not kill him. He lives alone, sleeps alone; he is not allowed to speak to people, not even to those who bring him food and drink. He is offered a small portion of food on a broken plate. He wears the same clothes he wore when he killed the person. Nobody shakes his filthy hands that shed blood. He has to cover his face with cloths. He has to stand at the road side covering all his face and beg for money to be paid as the blood price. No matter if he is rich or poor he must beg and be humiliated. Everybody who sees him knows that he is begging to pay the blood price and give him what he or she can. The person who kills another person is treated as if he was not living. Socially he is seen as a dead person

until the ritual of mediation and reconciliation has been conducted.

3. Asking for Peace

The mediators carry religious symbols and are accompanied by handicapped people such as deaf people, blind people and dwarfs and go to the family of the killed person. They ask for reconciliation according to Oromo cultural peacemaking called “*Nagaa buusuu*”. At the beginning the family of the victim says nothing. They are given time of grief but answer later when the mediators come back. The family and the clan of the dead have to accept the request of ‘*Nagaa*’ Peace in Oromo language.

4. Paying the blood price

Mediation is not without price. The family of the victim must be paid the blood price for their living. The mediators make sure that the entire blood price earned through the killer’s begging be handed over to the family of the victim.

5. Performing Reconciliation Ritual

At the end of the mediation process, the religious ritual of mediation is arranged at the river side. The two families including their clans come from the opposite directions to the river. The killer is covered with cloth and surrounded by elders so that nobody sees him. A curtain is put between the family of the killer and the family of the dead. An old female sheep known as '*Kupha*' in Oromo language is brought and carried up on the river. The mediators conduct hours of prayer for peace to '*Waaqayyoo*' (God in Oromo language). They say we have forgiven his sin o '*Waaqa*' do also forgive him. They cut the stomach of the old sheep so that the blood flows into the river. Then the killer and the immediate family shake hands through the stomach of the killed sheep and wash their hands with the blood.

The priest makes the prayer of peace, and announces the forgiveness of sin that the killer committed. Then they remove the old cloth of the killer, throw it in the river. The killer is

immersed in the river as a symbol of dying and taken out of the water as a symbol of resurrection. He is washed again with mineral water and medical leaves. They shave all his hair and put on him a new cloth. They throw the sheep and the knife into the river. Nobody is allowed to turn back and look at what they threw away. They go to the home of the victim, and conclude the ritual of mediation by preparing a feast of peace and eating together.

Such important Oromo traditional spirituality helped the Oromo to understand the mediatory role of Jesus Christ. The Christian theology of mediation and ransom payment in the case of sin already existed in their tradition. It is parallel to their tradition. Therefore the Oromo responded to the Gospel accepting Jesus Christ as their great ancestor and mediator.

Unfortunately the Christian and Islam missionaries preached against the important African heritages and destroyed them. However these two religions fail to replace the Oromo Traditional Religion in solving the

conflicts through mediation. Quite the opposite, both religions are becoming part of the conflicts in Africa. The recent violence between Christians and Muslims in Nigeria, Ethiopia and Egypt are concrete examples. The Amhadiyya Muslim Jimaat Deutschland e.V. published a booklet in June 2011. In this book one reads in German: **„Islam bedeutet Liebe, Frieden und Sicherheit“. Islam means Love, Peace and Safety.**

The same is true for Christianity. The message of the Gospel is about love, justice, freedom, and peace. There are many religious and non-religious organizations who preach peace.

There are mediators of peace who run here and there like fire fighters to reconcile. I do not underestimate the efforts of some good mediators and commissioners. However, there are long ways to bringing sustainable peace in this world. All people need peace, but all do not know how peace can be achieved.

We may not need to kill a sheep like in the Old Testament or in the Oromo ritual of mediation nowadays. However we can be active in the

mediation of the peace process in our communities according to the context in which we live.

According to my understanding, at least three factors are important so that mediation brings peace.

1. **The belief in mediation:** The parties involved in the conflict and the mediators must believe in mediation.
2. **The mediators' quality:** In order to win acceptance, the mediators must be free from partiality and personal benefits. Personal motives such as winning Nobel prizes and getting income from mediation must be avoided.
3. **The maintenance of justice.** Peace is not the absence of war but the maintenance of justice. Reconciliation without justice is the suppression of feelings that may explode any time.

Dear brothers and sisters!

Do we really believe in mediation? Do we accept our mediator Jesus Christ who

reconciled us with God? If yes, we need to live our faith showing it in practice. Jesus has mediated and reconciled us with God. The work of peace is finished. This does not mean there is a guarantee of peace for everybody without human participation. There is a role to play from the human side. One needs to accept peace. One needs to share his peace with others. We need to believe in peace and be ready to make peace in this universe. Jesus our mediator is calling us today saying: **“blessed are the peacemakers for they are called the sons and daughters of God”** (Mt.5:9).

According to the African traditional beliefs every person is a priest and a mediator.

According to the Protestant faith, we believe in the priesthood of all believers. Thus as Priests of this universe we have a priestly duty to accomplish. Our duty is to restore peace through mediation and reconciliation. Apostle Paul in his second letter to the Corinthians chapter 5 verse 19 writes: ***“God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of***

reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors". For me Christianity is not only a religion but also a relationship. As commissioned ambassadors of Christ, it is our duty to mediate, reconcile, restore human relationships and build peace here on earth. **May God help us to do so! Amen!**