Gracious God, may the words of our mouths and the meditations of our hearts be always acceptable in your eyes, O God our Strength and our Redeemer. Amen.

LOOK DOWN - - - - NOT UP !  LOOK DOWN - - - - NOT UP !

When we look UP the social ladder to those who have more than we do, we feel deprived and jealous, and we want to acquire more to match them and comfort our hurt feelings. But when we look DOWN at those who have less than we do, we realize how rich we really are and our hearts become filled with gratitude and thanksgiving. Look DOWN, not UP.

Today we celebrate World Mission Sunday, a day set aside to remember the mission of the church throughout the world. This year our church leaders have asked us to celebrate the ministry of young people in global mission. In reading about the global mission of the Episcopal Church, I learned that we have a mission program designed for young adults. It’s called the Young Adult Service Corps. It’s a program for Episcopalians in their 20s who are sent to dioceses in other parts of the world to help with their work. Some of the young people teach English or work in youth recreation programs. Some of them have medical skills and help with clinics in impoverished areas. The young missioners receive a few weeks of orientation and then serve for one year.

When the church sends young people to other parts of the world, they learn valuable lessons themselves. Mission work is a two-way street. We do what we can to help others, and in return, we gain in learning and faith ourselves. Some young people from our Fall River churches have taken part in the Youth Leadership Academy, which includes a mission trip to another part of the world. One of St. Luke’s teens, Sam Holt, our Deanery Youth representative, went to El Salvador with other youth from the diocese to help build housing for some impoverished people there. Several Fall River area churches helped support his trip with donations. The young
people offered their help to the community in El Salvador for a couple of weeks. They did what
they could to help. But they received something in return far more valuable, something that will
remain with them all their lives. They received an awareness of how people live in other parts of
the world, people who do not have all the modern conveniences we take for granted. By
LOOKING DOWN to those at the bottom of the economic scale, they gained a deep sense of
appreciation for the comfort and privileges of American life. Mission work changes our hearts
and gives us an important new perspective.

All the churches present today have engaged in some sort of mission project. I know
about the soup kitchens at St. Mark’s and Church of the Ascension, for instance. I believe we
all have run food closets or given resources for clothing and toys for poor families in Fall River.
Perhaps you have had overseas mission projects as well, children you have sponsored or relief
efforts you have contributed to. Mission helps us see the world through God’s eyes. I trust it
will not surprise anyone to learn that God is not an American! Of course, I hope God loves us
Americans but God loves the rest of the world as well! We are ALL God’s children. As the
song reminds us, “Red or yellow, black or white, they are precious in His sight, for Jesus loves
the little children of the world.” When we look at the world through God’s eyes, we grow in
love for all God’s children. There are no national borders on God’s map. Asia or Africa, Europe
or the Americas — ALL are precious in God’s sight. Celebrating World Mission Sunday reminds
us that God wants us to be where God’s people are. God want us to be where the needy are.
God wants us to pay special attention to those at the bottom of the economic scale. God wants us
to look DOWN, not UP.

I want to tell you today about a special mission project involving the Sudan. It’s called
the New Sudan Education Initiative, and there’s a flyer in your program today about it. This
The project was started by some of the “lost boys” of the Sudan. The “lost boys” were orphaned refugee children driven out of the southern part of Sudan by war in the late 1980s. Separated from their relatives and other adults, the boys banded together to walk to safety. There were some 26,000 of them. They spent two months walking to Ethiopia, only to be chased from there by more conflict. They ended up walking back across Sudan to Kenya, a journey of more than 1000 miles that took them over a year. Many were small children only 5 or 6. When they could go no farther, one of the older boys would pick them up and carry them. In addition to warfare, the boys encountered lions and crocodiles. Many died along the way from starvation and thirst. The only help they received was food drops by Red Cross helicopters. The Red Cross could not evacuate the boys because of the ongoing warfare. Of the 26,000 boys who started the journey, only 10,000 survived when they finally made it to a refugee camp in Kenya in 1992.

After years in the refugee camp, some of the boys were relocated to the United States. Many of them were Anglicans, and Episcopal churches took part in resettling the refugee boys. Today, they are young men and some have managed to get a college degree. When peace finally was declared in South Sudan in 2005, some of the former lost boys went back to Sudan to look for their relatives. They were appalled by the deep poverty of South Sudan after decades of civil war. They learned that nearly half the children under the age of five suffer from chronic malnutrition. Only 1 out of 3 children go to school. Of the girls, only 1 out of 10 go to school. That’s the lowest rate in the world for girls’ education. Only 1 out of 100 girls finish primary school. And only 4% of all high school aged children attend secondary school in southern Sudan. There are only 20 secondary schools in the entire area, an area as large as Germany and France combined.
In response to the dire needs that these young adults encountered, some of the former “lost boys” decided to form a non-profit organization to rebuild southern Sudan’s education system. That’s the New Sudan Education Initiative. They knew that some international organizations such as UNICEF were building primary schools, and so they decided to focus on secondary schools to develop the future leadership of Sudan. Their hope is to build 20 secondary schools over the next ten years, doubling the number of secondary schools in southern Sudan. Some of them will be specialty schools to teach the skills that Sudan needs, such as medical skills, agricultural know-how, teacher training, business, and government. Some of the schools will have a transitional primary school for girls to give them the special assistance they need. All the schools will teach peace studies in addition to the regular curriculum.

The Episcopal Church of Vermont has been especially involved in this project. A number of the lost boys were resettled by the Episcopal Church in Vermont, and many of the leaders of the effort are Episcopalian. They have asked Episcopal churches to talk about their project today, World Mission Sunday, and hoped for 100 churches to be involved. So today, we here are one of those 100 churches. The loose offering today will be given to the New Sudan Education Initiative for their first school, the New Sudan School of Health Sciences.

When we think about the tragic history of the “lost boys,” our own problems fade in significance. When we think about children who on a regular basis do not have enough food to eat, we feel so thankful for the food that we put on the table for our children. When we remember girls who cannot go to school, we are grateful for the modern school system here in the United States. When we look down to the impoverished people of the world, many tossed about by war, we are moved to give deep thanks to God for our many blessings. God has blessed our country with enormous privileges that we have not earned. We have them simply by the
good fortune of being American. God wants us to use our good fortune to help those down the economic scale. God wants us to remember the poor. God wants us to look down, not up.

- - Khmer translation - -

Let us pray.

Gracious God, you love us all, no matter the color of our skin, no matter the size of our pocketbook, no matter the nation in which we live. Stir our hearts with compassion for those less fortunate, at home and abroad. Fill us with gratitude for our many blessings, and help us to remember the poor. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.
Bong p’on, knom som nieyeay phiesaa khmai.

Merl joh tov, at larng.


Kaal na yeurng merl joh, kaal na yeurng chooey menuh gror, yeurng cet deung gkun (grateful), yeurng cet sok sbay.