

Trust in God our Help and Hope Faithful Forever

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Stepping into a new year is normally a time of mixed feelings—there is a sense of relief, some disappointment, plenty of expectations and underlying it all, uncertainty. For Malaysians, 2019 is not only a new calendar year but for the first time, a new year with a changed political landscape. Understandably, crossing over this season invokes these feelings in greater measure.

As Christians, how do we attend to such situations and as a Christian ministry, what influences our response? This was uppermost in our thoughts as we sought the Lord for Malaysian Care's 2019 theme in light of the tasks God had placed in our hands over the past eight years as the situation in our nation unfolded.

His reply came in Psalm 146.

- v. 1 *Praise the LORD! Praise the LORD, O my soul!*
- 2 *I will praise the LORD as long as I live; I will sing praises to my God while I have my being.*
- 3 *Put not your trust in princes, in a son of man, in whom there is no salvation.*
- 4 *When his breath departs, he returns to the earth; on that very day his plans perish.*
- 5 *Blessed is he whose help is the God of Jacob, whose hope is in the LORD his God,*
- 6 *who made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, who keeps faith forever;*
- 7 *who executes justice for the oppressed, who gives food to the hungry. The LORD sets the prisoners free;*
- 8 *the LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are bowed down; the LORD loves the righteous.*
- 9 *The LORD watches over the sojourners; he upholds the widow and the fatherless, but the way of the wicked he brings to ruin.*
- 10 *The LORD will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the LORD!*

These 10 verses spoke clearly to the country's current context, reaffirmed our foundation and summed up Malaysian Care's continuing mission. Three key lessons stand out:

Trust in God

As God has placed the future of the country in the hands of a new team of leaders, we pray that they will heed God's requirements to walk in the paths of righteousness, justice and mercy. The task of turning the country around is not easy and will require every citizen to play their part, especially Christians who are called to be salt and light.

Yet it is not in the hands of men—whatever their ideological or religious persuasions—that the future of our nation is secured but it is in God's hand. Leaders may have promised much but the weakness of the flesh means that men are prone to straying from God's path. When that happens, all the best laid plans and good intentions come to nought. The Living Bible translates verses 3 and 4 as "Don't look to men for help; their greatest leaders fail; for every man must die. His breathing stops, life ends, and in a moment all he planned for himself is ended". Even as we are called to play our part in rebuilding our nation, the Psalmist reminds us that ultimately, we are to trust in God alone.

Our Help and Hope

We can trust in God because the Creator of heaven and earth, the seas and all living creatures is unquestionably compassionate towards the poor and oppressed. The Psalmist makes this unmistakably clear from verses 5 to 9. Recently, I accompanied my colleagues from Pusat Care Kampar who were facilitating discussions on land rights with a cluster of Orang Asli villages high in the mountains of Pahang. I had not been back there for almost 10 years and it was wonderful to reconnect with long-time friends there. While we had all grown older, the promises by the authorities to improve the infrastructure into the villages had seen little fulfilment and the road going in was as bad as I had remembered. Despite the challenges, their faith and communal bonds remained strong for they knew their help and hope came from God.

Then two weeks later, I travelled deep into the interior of Sarawak with my colleagues from Pusat Care Miri. We were headed for a Penan village where a project to repair the roofs of the longhouses was underway. That night, we had a lengthy discussion with the community about follow-on projects for economic empowerment. Although the concept of microcredit and livestock farming was untested with them, we were greatly encouraged by their thoughtful questions and enthusiastic response. As the discussion ended, we committed the venture into God's hands, knowing that to walk this uncharted path together, we need His help and hope to succeed.

Isolated, needy communities such as these may not figure much in the halls of the powerful or in the sweeping plans of those who govern but the Creator God has neither forgotten nor forsaken them. In fact, He actively works to uplift them and to call those who oppress the poor to account. As Christians, we are required to demonstrate the same compassion and service in bringing help and hope.

Faithful Forever

It may take many years to rebuild the harmony and fortunes of our country just as it takes even longer to restore the rights of the Orang Asal, to reintegrate the prisoner into a community, to remove the stigma society attaches to people with HIV, to return the refugee to a place of security or to reconcile the many broken and fragmented families in the city. By our own strength and ability, we would fail, give up or burn out.

But God is faithful forever as He is always alongside us through joys and struggles, when we are bold to seize opportunities or when we face uncertainties in ministry. He is entirely dependable for you, for Malaysian Care and for Malaysia because He reigns forever. Praise the LORD!

May God's faithfulness reign in your homes this Christmas so that you may bring help and hope to homes that need it in the year ahead. ■

■ *Young Soon sees Psalm 146 reaffirming Malaysian Care's calling as we celebrate its 40th anniversary in 2019.*