REVD. DR. D. J. AJITH KUMAR

From Bondage to Freedom: God Walks with the Oppressed

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READINGS
OT Deut. 26:5-11; Psalm 146

Epistle Philemon 10-18

Gospel John 4:5-14

Key Verse –

“Jesus answered her, ‘Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give them will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.'”(John 4:13–14)

The Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost is observed in many churches as Dalit and Adivasi Sunday. It is a day when we remember that every human being is created in the image of God and possesses equal dignity, value, and worth. It is also a day to acknowledge the pain, exclusion, discrimination, and injustice experienced by many Dalit and Adivasi communities, while affirming God’s unwavering commitment to justice, liberation, and reconciliation.The Bible is, in many ways, the story of a God who hears the cries of the oppressed. From the slavery of Israel in Egypt to the ministry of Jesus among the poor and marginalized, Scripture consistently reveals a God who walks alongside those who suffer. God’s heart is always turned toward the forgotten, the powerless, and those denied justice. His mission is not merely to comfort them but to restore their dignity, freedom, and hope.The readings appointed for today beautifully express this truth. In Deuteronomy, Israel remembers its deliverance from slavery. Psalm 146 celebrates the God who upholds the oppressed and lifts up the downtrodden. Paul’s letter to Philemon demonstrates how the Gospel transforms unequal human relationships into relationships of brotherhood. In the Gospel, Jesus deliberately crosses social, ethnic, and religious barriers to offer living water to a Samaritan woman who had long been excluded by society.The message of today is therefore not simply about one community; it is about the very character of God. Wherever people are oppressed, marginalized, or treated as less than human, God is present. Wherever barriers divide people, Christ builds bridges. Wherever hope seems lost, the Holy Spirit brings new life.

1. God Remembers the Cry of the Oppressed

The first reading from Deuteronomy begins with Israel’s confession:“A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt… The Egyptians treated us harshly and afflicted us… Then we cried to the Lord… and the Lord heard our voice.”This passage was not merely history; it was Israel’s identity. Every generation was instructed never to forget where they had come from. They had once been strangers, slaves, and victims of oppression. Their freedom was entirely the work of

God’s grace.The God of the Bible is not indifferent to suffering. He sees injustice. He hears the cries of the oppressed. He remembers those whom society forgets.Throughout Scripture, God’s mighty acts of salvation begin with His compassionate response to human suffering. The Exodus was not merely a political liberation; it was God’s declaration that oppression is contrary to His will.The Church today must never forget this biblical memory. We are called to remember those who continue to suffer discrimination, poverty, displacement, exploitation, and exclusion. Dalit and Adivasi communities have contributed richly to society and to the life of the Church, yet many continue to experience inequality and injustice.Remembering is not merely recalling the past. Biblical remembrance leads to responsibility. Just as Israel celebrated God’s deliverance by sharing their blessings with the Levites, foreigners, and the needy, Christians are called to ensure that no one is excluded from God’s table of grace.God’s people cannot celebrate His blessings while remaining indifferent to the suffering of others.

2. God Restores Human Dignity and Calls Us to Justice

Psalm 146 presents one of the most beautiful portraits of God’s character.“The Lord executes justice for the oppressed; gives food to the hungry… The Lord sets the prisoners free… The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down.”These verses reveal that justice is not merely one activity of God; it is part of His very nature.Throughout the ministry of Jesus, we see this same concern. He touched lepers, welcomed tax collectors, defended women, healed the sick, embraced children, and associated with those whom society rejected. His ministry consistently restored human dignity.Dalit and Adivasi Sunday reminds the Church that discrimination based on caste, tribe, ethnicity, language, or social status has no place within the Body of Christ.The Gospel proclaims that every person bears the image of God.Every individual is equally loved by Christ.Every believer has equal access to God’s grace.Therefore, Christian mission must include both proclamation and transformation. It is not enough simply to preach salvation while ignoring systems that diminish human dignity.The Church is called to become a community where equality is practiced, hospitality is extended, voices are heard, and gifts are recognized regardless of social background.True worship produces just relationships.True faith challenges prejudice.True discipleship values every human life.Whenever the Church welcomes those whom society excludes, it reflects the Kingdom of God.

3. Christ Breaks Every Barrier and Creates One New Family

The short letter to Philemon provides one of the New Testament’s most remarkable examples of reconciliation.Onesimus had once been a slave. Paul now sends him back, not merely as a servant but as “a beloved brother.”The Gospel transformed their relationship.Although Paul does not directly attack the institution of slavery in this letter, he plants a far more powerful principle. In Christ, social distinctions no longer determine human worth.Master and servant now belong to the same family of God.The same truth appears vividly in today’s Gospel.Jesus intentionally travelled through Samaria and stopped at Jacob’s well. There He met a Samaritan woman.Everything about this meeting crossed accepted boundaries.She was a Samaritan.She was a woman.She carried a painful personal history.She belonged to a community despised by many Jews.Yet Jesus began a conversation with her.He did not define her by her past.He did not reject her because of her ethnicity.He did not avoid her because of social customs.Instead, He offered her “living water.”This encounter reveals the heart of Christ.The Gospel tears down walls of prejudice.It creates new relationships.It restores broken lives.It invites everyone into God’s family.The Church must continually ask whether our congregations reflect this same openness.Are our churches places where every person feels

welcomed?Do our leadership structures reflect the diversity of God’s people?Do we celebrate the gifts and leadership of those from historically marginalized communities?The living water Christ offers flows freely without discrimination.

4. The Living Water Leads from Bondage to Freedom

Jesus told the Samaritan woman,“Whoever drinks the water that I will give will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”This living water represents the transforming work of the Holy Spirit.Bondage is not only political or economic.People may also live under the bondage of fear, shame, addiction, prejudice, hatred, despair, or hopelessness.Christ came to bring freedom in every dimension of life.The freedom He gives begins in the heart but extends into relationships, communities, and society.When people receive Christ, they discover a new identity.They are no longer defined by oppression but by God’s love.They are no longer prisoners of the past but children of God.The Church therefore has a mission to become a channel of this living water.We are called to walk alongside the oppressed, advocate for justice, strengthen the weak, educate the marginalized, empower communities, and proclaim the Gospel that brings true freedom.Dalit and Adivasi Sunday is not merely an annual observance.It is a reminder of the Church’s ongoing calling to participate in God’s mission of liberation, reconciliation, and hope.The same God who led Israel out of Egypt continues to walk with those who long for justice today.

Conclusion

Today’s Scriptures proclaim one consistent message: God walks with the oppressed.In Deuteronomy, He hears the cries of slaves and leads them into freedom.In Psalm 146, He upholds the weak, feeds the hungry, and establishes justice.In Philemon, the Gospel transforms relationships from domination to brotherhood.In John’s Gospel, Jesus crosses every barrier to offer living water to one whom society had rejected.This is the God we worship.He is not distant from human suffering.He enters it.He redeems it.He transforms it.As followers of Christ, we are called to reflect His heart in our words, our worship, and our witness.On this Dalit and Adivasi Sunday, let us renew our commitment to become a Church where every person is welcomed with dignity, every voice is valued, every gift is recognized, and every barrier that divides people is broken by the love of Christ.May we never ignore the cries of those who suffer injustice. Instead, may we become faithful instruments of God’s compassion, courageously standing for truth, peace, equality, and reconciliation.And may the living water of Christ continue to flow through His Church, bringing freedom to those in bondage, hope to the discouraged, dignity to the marginalized, and eternal life to all who believe.For our identity is not built upon caste, tribe, language, status, or wealth, but upon the redeeming grace of Jesus Christ, who calls all people into one family, one faith, and one hope.May God grant us the courage to walk where Christ walks, to love whom Christ loves, and to serve those whom Christ came to save.

Amen.