

## **Sermon by Bishop Nathan, Kigali (Rwanda) – 12 July 2020**

Hello my friends at Ely Diocese

We send you greetings from Kigali Diocese, and from Saint Etienne Cathedral

Greetings to my friends Bishop Stephen, Bishop Dagmar, greetings to all of you. To Ven Hugh Mc Curdy, We join you to praise God for your nomination as a 2020 Lambeth award recipient.

We want to say that we love and pray for you from Kigali.

Since March 15th, all our church buildings have been closed because of Covid 19, I know that you have been experiencing the same and I therefore keep you in my prayers and thoughts. However in Rwanda, the lockdown is beginning to be loosened, and some businesses, especially major ones and government offices have reopened. Our airports are to resume their work on the first of August. In general, this has been a difficult time for many unprecedented changes, especially for those who suddenly had to lose jobs, sources of income or social support, and while they had little pastoral and spiritual support.

As churches, we have recently received a communication from the government with a checklist of things we need to get ready, so that our worship places may be opened in fifteen days at the discretion of a team of inspectors. In this regard, we are rearranging and marking our church pews, setting up places for hand washing and getting hand sanitisers available. We are also rescheduling our services. For example, we are going to have four services in the cathedral instead of our normal three services in order to be available for as many church members as possible.

I have been researching the history of the formal partnerships between Kigali and Ely Dioceses. They seem to date back in the 1970s, but more importantly I thank God that as some of you remember, that two young doctors played a significant role in the East African revival as missionaries with us in Rwanda. They preached the gospel, my grandmother believed, I believed as well as did other people. It is my joy to bring the gospel to you through the word of God.

This morning we are going to share from the Gospel according to Saint Matthew 12: 1 -9

It is a story that begins at a time when Jesus and his disciples went to a cornfield on sabbath, his disciples were hungry.

We see Jesus, walking with his disciples on that sabbath day. As they went through the cornfields, his very hungry disciples started picking corn in the cornfields and started eating them. This reminds me of the way we used to do the same when young on our way from school, believe it or not sometimes we picked corn from our neighbors gardens.

While disciples were eating, the Pharisees were offended and turned back to Jesus. Asking “Why do you allow your disciples to do what is unlawful on the sabbath?” Jesus replied, i am the Lord of the sabbath. That sounds a very wonderful response isn't it? But it was a big offence to people who liked to keep the law.

To give you a short background, if you remember John the Baptist who was first popular as Jesus started his ministry had just been killed by Herod and now things have started to turn against Jesus. Chapter 12 in the gospel according to St Matthew is very significant, as the time when the Jewish people begin to reject the Messiah. The events recorded in Matthew Chapter 12, mark a major turning point in Jesus' ministry focusing on the rejection of the Messiah by the Jewish people. The story hereby in this gospel recorded, starts with the birth of the King which we celebrate on Christmas, after people received this born king He is attested. Then, in chapter 12 the King is rejected before he is killed as we see in the following chapters.

One of the primary causes of Jesus' rejection was on how he observed the sabbath (Matthew 12: 1 -9).

Indeed, God had commanded the Jewish people to observe the Sabbath, (Exodus 20: 8 - 9 ) and God held them accountable on the Sabbath, as we see that in the book of Jeremiah chapter 17 and other various scriptures that show how important the sabbath was.

Interestingly, here Jesus comes out with a different important message. **I am the Lord of the sabbath.**” Jesus is the Lord of the sabbath and he is turning things around, it is like He is saying, you have observed the law for a long time and it has not helped you, now it is the time you tested grace. It is time you changed your direction.

It is like that very day when he goes and finds Peter after Jesus Resurrection with other disciples who had gone back to their fishing trade, whom in the whole night had caught nothing. When he instructed them to throw the net to the other side of the boat. When they put the net to the side Jesus had told them, the Bible says they got a lot of fish and ended up worshiping him, and recognised him.

My prayer this morning is that we realise that the son of God is the Lord of Sabbath. Yes, there are rules and procedures set on how worship is done even in our church institutions in order to bring order. These are good but are not meant to burden people. But in Jesus 'time, many regulations had been added to God's law and were burdening people.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, we live in days of grace, may the Lord bless you as you observe a proper sabbath whose Lord is Jesus, our Master. God bless you

Bishop Nathan Rusengo Amooti  
The Bishop of Kigali Diocese  
Rwanda