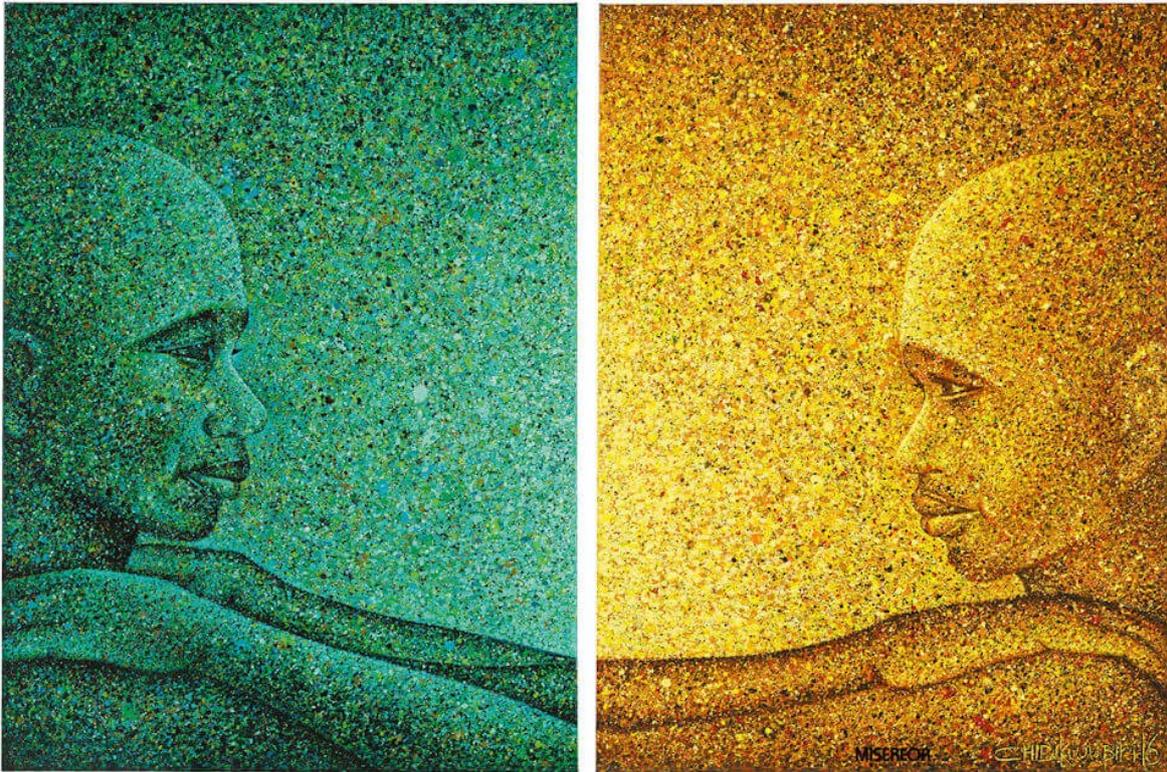


Ubuntu: I Am Because You Are...

All-age Worship 13 August 2017



<https://www.misereor.de/mitmachen/fastenaktion/hungertuch>

Introduction

Every other year Bread for the World and Miserior, two German Christian Aid organizations, ask an artist from somewhere in this fascinating wide world to produce a meditation cloth. The idea is to use it in churches and schools to share our common faith and the world wide issues of believers around the globe.

The meditation cloth which you can see in this impressive size up front here today, was painted by a Nigerian painter.

His name is Chidi Kwubiri.

He gave it the title “I am because you are...” – reflecting an African proverb which says: “I am because we are; and because we are I am...”

In other words: it is part of being human to live in relationships, to belong to a network. Nobody should be alone. As God’s creatures in his world we are all belonging to a family system...

Music

people are invited to meditate on the painting in the front of the church

Activity: What Do You See?

What do we see?

Look at the painting again...

Take a little note paper and write down what you see.

Then form small groups of 5 or 6 and share your ideas with the others.

One person per group collects all that is shared on a big sheet of paper.

Song

TS 51

Bind Us Together, Lord

Sharing of Ideas and Impressions...

One person per group is invited to come to the microphone and share the ideas and impressions of the group with all the others in the room.

The lay down the papers in front of the huge painting standing here.

Song

MH 127

Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah

Reflection 1

I think there is nothing more fascinating in this world than human faces. And this is what we have here...

Two human faces... two people looking each other in the eye. Two people carefully touching each other. Two people overcoming a boundary... they carefully get close to each other, influence and shape each other, but at the same time remain their own selves...

One of them is green and the other one is yellow.

Let us listen to the voice of the artist for a few moments.

Chidi Kwubiri says: "What inspired me to paint this painting are the two longest rivers in Nigeria: the streams Niger and Benue. Despite their two different origins they flow together at some point, and from there on exist peacefully and much stronger of course.

To me they are an example of nature showing us that when two powers come together, they influence and strengthen each other, they look at each other and say: I am because you are..."

In our painting yellow turns toward green, they look at each other, they move towards each other, and they say to each other "I am because you are..."

The panting wants to express diversity and unity.

Even though we come from different origins, even though we have different identities, we all together are forming a big WE. We look each other in the face and say: I m because you are..."

Activity: I Am because You Are...

Let us try that...

Let us turn to our neighbours – left and right -, front and back – and say “I am because you are...”

Maybe we can even stretch out our hands and put them on the shoulders of the person opposite... Just as the two in the painting do...

Reflection 2

What did it feel like? ...looking each other in the eye and carefully putting our hands on the other person’s shoulders?

Closeness but yet uniqueness...

Relationship but also freedom...

Touch and tenderness...

“I am because you are...” is an African proverb. It is the well-known African tradition of Ubuntu: “A person is a person through other persons...”

Many African cultures know Ubuntu.

I first came across it when I read the books of Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu. Ubuntu means over all that human beings only exist with each other. We belong together from a social, an economic and a political point of view.

We develop best, or humanity develops best, when our dependence, our independence, and our interdependence are accepted and respected fact of our human existence.

In other words: life is best, when we are not living alone... when our lives or the threads of our lives are happily and colourfully woven into other peoples’ lives.

People belong together.

“And the deepest purpose of our human existence,” says Desmond Tutu, “is our togetherness.”

Our lives want to be open towards others, reaching out towards each other, and sharing with each other.

“To be human is not your own little private affair,” says a philosopher of the University of Nairobi whose name seems unpronounceable to me...

Our humanity, the quality of our individual lives, is always mirrored in the quality of the lives of others; this is true here in this church, it is true for the country in which we live, and it has its impacts world wide!

There are not only the posh houses of rich Europeans, but also the poor shacks of the Cape Town townships, the drying out fields of the farmers in Somalia’s south, and the sicknesses of the children in the slums of Nairobi.

Ubuntu is an ethical and moral idea of life. A red thread that wants to give direction to our shared humanity. It knits us together and let’s us grow in

wisdom and justice, and let's us discover who God wants us to be, and how he calls us to care for this world in deep gratitude. Let us express this by speaking Psalm 8 together:

Psalm 8

**(all) God, how beautiful is the sky you made,
with sun and moon and stars.**

**The earth and skies
are like a huge house
for us tiny human beings.**

You have given us so much.

You make us rich.

All this is for us:

**fish and birds, sheep and cows,
cats and dogs, wind and clouds too.**

For us, from you, our great God.

Meditation 3

A second African proverb says: "If you want to walk fast, go alone; but if you want to walk wide, then go together with others."

...and yet another African proverb says: "One finger alone cannot catch a louse..."

All those proverbs state that people depend on each other and need each other.

Ubuntu is an African idea. And it is genuinely Christian too. The biblical image of men and women, of their being created in God's image, of their partnership with each other and with God, and of their task to care for each other and the earth, seems deeply rooted in the ideas of Ubuntu.

Nothing can exist alone. All life belongs together.

Let us discover that when we share in reading the next reading...

Reading: Genesis 1

Then God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the wild animals of the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth."

**So God created humankind in his image,
in the image of God he created them;
male and female he created them.**

God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth and care for it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

God said, "See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit;

you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.”

And it was so.

God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.

Meditation 4

Ubuntu means: we are family. All of us. Every human being in this world. And nature is included too.

This is a challenge we must face.

It is not enough to confirm our mutual humanity in theory... Our God-given task is to defend and repair each others' humanity, to feel responsible for it. And to understand and accept that if the humanity of one single person is hurt, we all are hurting. If one individual suffers, the whole planet is in tears...

Our shared humanity calls us to be caring and responsible for each other.

Who is my sister?

Who is my brother?

Where are they?

In which part of the human house do they live? What do their lives look like?

Ubuntu calls us to be there for each other, to solve tensions between different individuals and different cultures, to overcome separation, and to sow seeds of peace, harmony and hospitality.

Let us confirm that by singing St Francis' prayer: Make me a channel of your peace...

Song

TS 348

Make Me a Channel of Your Peace

Reading: John 13:34

(all) I give you a new commandment, that you love one another.

Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another.

Meditation 5

We can grow as individuals, as a community and as a world wide family, when we accept our mutual love for each other and our belonging to each other. Only then can we understand the richness that lies in our diversity and our togetherness.

This is the message Chidi Kwubiri sends to us in this stunning painting...

Let us express that we understand him in an artistic way. Let us go together in pairs and fill in with yellows and greens one of those little sheets with two human faces looking each other in the eye, touch carefully and discovering that they belong together.

Activity: Painting Time

Music

While music is played, come and fix your coloured in sheets onto the green and yellow cartons over there on the wall...

Prayer & The Lord's Prayer

We thank you for so many forms of beauty in this world, O God.

One is the beauty of all these faces gathered here in worship.

...the beauty and fullness of all the hopes and expectations with which we are here today.

Make us aware of the beauty of our community,

Let us recognise each other's similarities and differences as something that makes us rich and blesses us.

Let us recognise you in each other,

you – our maker, our mother and father, the purpose of our lives.

You have made us and endowed us with your own features, your own desire to love and be loved.

Let this time here in this church be a time of true worship and fellowship and deep meaning for us, as we feel and see your presence in our midst, shining in our hearts and glowing in our faces:

A presence that was made known to us so fully in Jesus Christ, who taught us how to pray: *Our Father...*