

## 'LENT THREE'

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O le matāfaioi a Keriso o le maluapapa.

Lent is a six-week reflective period which precludes our embracing of the Good News the Resurrection of Christ. Without paying attention, and reflecting on the suffering of Christ through this period by prayer, fasting, and sacrifices we will miss the opportunity to reflect on Christ's *matāfaioi* as the *maluapapa* for humanity.

I wish to explore the Samoan concept of *matāfaioi* responsibility and *maluapapa* sheltering rock to enable a reflection on Jesus excruciating journey that leads him to the cross. Hoping this concept enables a new outlook on our *matāfaioi* as stewards of God's creation.

*Matāfaioi* is made up of two words, *matāfai* translates as responsibility, and *oi* means pain. For an example *o le matāfaioi a le itupa o tane o le ta ina o le vao* – it is men's responsibility to work the land. The responsibility of working the land in Samoa is a task assigned to men, due to the extreme nature of this task. The word '*oi*' therefore is an indication of the pain one has to bear in extreme conditions when working the land.

Maluapapa, also consists of two words, *malu* means sheltered. The '*a*' in between the two words is a preposition, signaling the relationship between the two; and *papa* means rock. *Maluapapa* translate as sheltering rock.

In fulfilling this *matāfaioi*, Jesus would be persecuted, humiliated, and crucified, there was no alternative. The beating, the thorn crown, the nails were all real; the journey from Pilots court yard to the hills of Calvary was not your usual walk in the park. Jesus fulfilment of the *matāfaioi* as *maluapapa* for humanity should model our behavior towards one another as clearly pointed out by Bishop Robert Baron. "*In the economy of grace, God may use our suffering to bear the burden of another member of the Body of Christ, just as one system can take up the work of another, or one organ can support another*"

There's a beautiful Samoan story about the son of a king who takes the *matāfaioi* upon himself to be the *maluapapa* for his suffering people. The story is about young prince Poluleuligaga, whom bravery sacrificed himself to save his people from his father's cannibalism. Whilst out fishing one morning Poluleuligaga heard two young men crying for their lives. They were brothers Paiatea and Paialala from the Island of Savai'i. "*The redness of the dawn reminds me of my blood that is to be shed today*" cried the younger brother.

Poluleuligaga heard their cry, driven by the need to seek justice he offers to sacrifice himself. "I am Poluleuligaga, Malietoa's son, cut down that coconut leaf," he ordered. "Now weave me in it and carry me to my father." The young prince offers himself as the *maluapapa* and takes on this monumental *matāfaioi* to save two lives, which in the end became the nation. From the abundance of the economy of grace, Poluleuligaga bears the burden for others; his *matāfaioi* was to be the *maluapapa*.

The Gospel of Luke 13:31-35, here the author paints a beautiful portrait of a determined, unwilling to be derailed son of God Jesus Christ. Unmoved by the news of his possible death, Jesus remains steadfast, focused on his *matāfaioi* to be the *maluapapa* for all humanity.

When the United Nations consulted the late Mahatma Gandhi on his view on Declaration of Human Rights he responded, "*the Ganges of rights originates in the Himalayan of responsibilities*". I have not and probably will not ever touch the river Ganga, nor climb the Himalayans. However, Gandhi's response is profound from an India point of view that the Ganga river has social, cultural, religious and economic significance for Indian people. Because in essence he is simply saying that the

Himalayan mountains hold the glaciers that feed the river Ganges, therefore a Ganges without the Himalayan mountains will simply be a large hole without purpose.

At the 73<sup>rd</sup> General Assembly, Tuilaepa Sailele Malielegaoi had this to say to the United Nations. “As we have expressed to the United Nations, climate change is one of the most pressing security challenges for the Island nations. Affecting food security, access to safe water; fundamentally affecting our ability to draw sustenance from pristine ocean and seas that surrounds us.” He went on to say... “when the future existence of sovereign islands nations, populations and culture are at stake then there is a moral imperative for the world to act decisively and collectively.” Tuilaepa challenges the big nations to take there *matafaioi* seriously in providing the *maluapapa* for the smaller nations.

There’s a profound message in Poluleuligaga’s sacrifice, fueled by compassion finds himself weaved because he took on the *matāfaioi* to provide *maluapapa* for the people he loves.

The Samoan concept of *matāfaioi* and *maluapapa* offers a profound Lent challenge for our global village community.

We have compassion and a sense of *matāfaioi* responsibility for our places of belonging in the Pacific and we also have responsibilities in Aotearoa New Zealand. The Lent calendar gives some suggestions for what we can do here to contribute to stopping pollution of the oceans and atmosphere: cutting back on plastic packaging, being careful with water, reducing meat and buying more local food for families and parish gatherings. Responsibility has so many dimensions - it is about our relationships, it is about churches and education, and also about policy and business.

We can link *matāfaioi* and *maluapapa* to face the challenges and uncertainties of climate change.

Like Paiatea and Paialala, our next generation face a tunnel without an opening of hope. However, Gandhi’ response holds an important key, the established nations hold the glaciers that feeds smaller vulnerable nations. The fulfillment of *matāfaioi* in order for all of God’s creation to find *maluapapa* is a duty belonging to us all. Our future as a people, our economies, culture and religion depends on it.

*Matāfaioi* and *Maluapapa* is a concept that speaks to me during Lent leading to our embracing of the Good News.

Prayer:

Creator God

plant in us a sense of responsibility for your creation,

plant a sense of care within us all

Guide us, so we don’t take more than what we can use

Equip us to be responsible citizens of your creation,

We pray that you continue to be the glacier on the mountain tops

that continues to feed us with your everlasting river love.

Amen.

Ia manuia lau matafaoi *may your responsibilities be blessed.*

Paulo Ieli