**Gathering of Partners Latin America and the Caribbean**

**Sermon delivered by The Rev. Glenda McQueen**

**Building Neighborhoods, Leadership and Financial Capacity in IARCA October 27, 2017**

As a young child, my brothers and I played and teased my maternal grandfather. We would ask:

Who built the Canal? Making reference to the Panama Canal. Who built the Canal? In addition, someone replied – grandfather. My maternal great grandparents migrated from the Caribbean Islands of Jamaica, Martinique and Barbados to the towns of Port Limon in Costa Rica, Bocas del Toro and Colon in Panama during the first part of the 1900’s. They migrated because the economic and social situation in the islands had become deplorable after the fall of the sugar industry and several natural disasters. They were young and held the hope of finding work. The Dawkins in Costa Rica were farmers. They planted cocoa. The McQueen’s in Panama worked with the Fruit Company and the Brown’s with the Canal. They as well as many other young men and women of their time, in the face of hopelessness, the absence of the basics for life, dreaming that by taking the risk a better future is possible migrated to other areas of the world in search of hope. They arrived in Central America: Belize, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama. They brought along their languages, culture and God, their capacities, skills and their gist for life. Even with the difficulties they were facing they decided to stay, establish and make their homes, Churches and new neighborhoods. To be invited to this Encounter and to preach in the land of my ancestors is a way to honor them and a blessing of God to my life. It is my prayer that these words may also be a blessing for you.

In today’s Scriptures, we hear the hopelessness: there is lack of; there is hunger, death, fear. The widow of Zarephath presents the human condition in a dramatic way “…I have nothing baked, only a handful of meal…and a little oil…for myself and my son, that we may eat it and die…” These words touch the depth of our hearts, and they are part of our Central America reality where children in indigenous and farming communities die for lack of food and access to medical care. Where the fear of gangs and violence does not allow life. All is left is to die in the barrio, join the gang or gather the resources you can from family and friends and borrowing to take the risk and cross the border or as the statistics say IMMIGRATE. The story of Elijah and the Zarephath widow help us feel the reality of those who are most vulnerable in the midst of countries disasters or conflicts weather they are created by nature or by human beings. The story of Elijah and the Zarephath widow shows the face of hopelessness caused by economic and social injustice that today has grown as a spiral to levels never before seen and whose tentacles are taking root, becoming “the normal” and “that is just how things are”, becoming what is repudiated today.

Faced with the need to feed the people and for them to find rest, Jesus says to his disciples, “…you give them something to eat…” Jesus says to his disciples today, Jesus says to the Church, “you give them something to eat”. Jesus led his disciples to understand that the mission is to plant hope where there is no hope. And this is the bases that supports our actions as a Church. When we speak about building neighborhoods, we begin by recognizing who is my neighbor. We are not speaking about building private neighborhoods with tall walls that separate us from others and we find them today in new urbanizations. We are not speaking about separating; on the contrary, we are trying to meet our neighbor. We are speaking about relationships. We are speaking about neighborhoods that welcome the migrant, the stranger. We are speaking about spaces of participation for all, where children and youth find life alternatives, where the aged feel respected and valued.

Jesus challenges the leaders gathered today in this beautiful Caribbean Island of Jamaica, men and women, laymen and women, clergy and bishops. Let us hear the words of the Psalmist that says, I am with you, I will always be with you, and thou you walk through the worst of the valleys I your God and your pastor will be with you. You have a new task and that is to look for and develop a new generation of leaders who will keep the essentials of the faith and of Anglicanism, and they will bring new rhythms and cadences, they are the ones that will articulate a spirituality for our times. “You give them something to eat” is also about making space to receive and integrate those who are new. It means been open to accept that they do not think the way you do, they see things from a different perspective and that is good. Just as Jesus’s disciples they are going to make mistakes and some may even betray you and will go to form other groups. However, some will remain and will take the mission forward.

“We only have five loaves and two fishes”. The disciples could not see how far fives loaves and two fishes could go. Feeding the people requires resources. Jesus invites the disciples to look at and value what they have and see the potential in the resources available. Yes, we need financial resources to move the mission forward. Let us begin by effectively using what we have as a blessing. Let us find allies and strategic partners. Let us take time to plan, organize, and let us open the ideas, organization and management so that others can support. They are many people with capacities in our midst, let us invite them to get involved and participate.

Today’s Scriptures present an image of a God that provides and is always aware of the most vulnerable. A God that makes visible the needs and injustices, who provides resources and sends disciples to feed the people, to plant hope. Above all, God says we have in abundance, enough for all, let us share in such a way that there is none without and all are satisfied. God invites us to plant hope.

The Church has the challenge and the opportunity to work building neighborhoods, leadership and financial capacity in each of our regions. As we do, so may we always have present those migrants that move through our countries and the many that stay, the widows and other vulnerable peoples. May our leadership be prophetic and willing to risk all for the truth of the Gospel and may the resources and capacities of the Church serve to advance mission.