TOGETHER WE CAN...FIGHT AGAINST HIV & AIDS

“Everything is possible for him who believes” Mark 9:14-29

Today is a special Sunday since we observe it as “AIDS Sunday”. For some of us this may be the first time we are participating in “AIDS Sunday” and for many others probably every year we have gone through the ritual of observing “AIDS Sunday”. The theme this year is “Together we can fight against HIV & AIDS”. The text for reflection is taken from Mark 9:14-29 which in verse 23 Jesus says “EVERYTHING” is possible for him who believes”. Everything implies EVERYTHING, excludes nothing and this includes the victory over the “Fight against the HIV & AIDS” in today’s context.

The World AIDS Day calls on leaders to “Stop AIDS and Keep the Promise”. Taking the global theme of leadership from World AIDS Day, faith leaders and the communities which they are a part of can help articulate a vision, build relationships and take concrete action in solidarity with all people committed to reaching the universal goal of HIV prevention, access to treatment and care. Linda Hartke says, “Leadership can imply the power and authority to make a difference, to lead by action and example.” There are two parts to this statement (1) the power and authority to make a difference by leadership (2) to lead by action and example. Who are these Leaders today: IT IS YOU AND ME.

WHY “fight together” against HIV & AIDS?

When we say “together” who are all the people that we think it comprises of or includes? And why has this become a theme in itself?

It is now nearly three decades since “HIV & AIDS” has become a major endemic that threatens the world and the world is yet to find a solution to this problem, be it the scientific community, technocrats, medical doctors, social scientists, economists, the political and religious leaders or any other group or individual. We have yet to hear an official announcement of a “CURE” for AIDS or invention of a preventable vaccine for HIV. The numbers have been increasing significantly that the HIV & AIDS infected and affected persons may be closer to each one of us than we would have imagined a few years ago.
Many of us tend to think AIDS is in Africa or only in some “particular places” in India where there is commercialized sexual activities or only in places where the practice of abuse of drugs is common.

But today HIV & AIDS is at our doorstep. None of us are immune to this infection, neither the Church nor Christians. In fact, there are clear evidences that there could be some infected people in our congregations as well.

Many of us continue with our judgmental attitudes of condemning people and tend to look for HIV positive people outside the Church. Today we have seen the tentacles of HIV infection in our society. It is both in and near our congregations and we have no more time to be indifferent, ignorant or apathetic. Thus this year’s theme calls each one of us as a Christian and member of this congregation to Fight against HIV & AIDS. The prevention and intervention efforts against HIV & AIDS in India, in Africa and in the universe proves that no single individual (e.g. Bill Gates) or single government (for the instance USA, or India) or a single organization (say National AIDS Control Organization-NACO) or a single Church denomination (for e.g. our own Church) can combat the HIV/AIDS issue alone. A collective effort is required. AIDS is not just a medical disease or a clinical problem. This is a medical, clinical, social, economical, cultural and a spiritual problem which affects everyone. Men, women, children, families, communities, societies, nations, everyone can feel the effect of this infection and not just the infected. Those around the infected are also discriminated against.

**WHO are our partners in this fight against HIV and AIDS?**

What have been our experiences in this fight against HIV and AIDS? In many communities in India and across the nations, the infected and the affected are left alone to fight the battle. It is absolutely difficult for the infected and the affected to fight AIDS alone and they require a supportive environment and partners. Doctors, nurses, the other health workers and allied health professionals like the lab technicians, the nutrition expert and so on. And not just medical professionals but social workers, program managers, pastors, evangelists, opinion leaders, influencers, teachers and all Church members and concerned individuals in the society. But would this “human strength” alone suffice in our fight against HIV & AIDS?

We have an eternal partner in this fight against HIV and AIDS:

Jesus Christ when he was on earth demonstrated “His power to heal”, “His power over all unclean spirits” and “His power over death.” There are a number of examples we find in Mark 1:34, Mark 5:40-42, John11:38-44. He Himself had victory over death and each one of us has experienced his healing touch. Today we need Him in this fight against HIV & AIDS. We are not alone and the God who was with Moses when He brought the Israelites from Egypt and showed signs and wonders against Pharaoh is with us. Jesus Christ who is the same yesterday, today and forever is with us in our fight
against this Pharaoh (HIV & AIDS) of today, and gives victory over the threat of HIV and victory over the death by AIDS. Is anything too hard for the Lord?

“Everything is possible for him who believes”

But with all these human efforts, are we in a position to give hope for the infected and life for the AIDS patients?

What is it that the infected person is hoping for - a cure? a healthy life? acceptance by his spouse, family and friends? What is that AIDS patients are looking for - a long life? a new life? a peaceful death? life beyond death?

The Bible says …“Everything is possible for him who believes”. There is total inclusion of things possible and no exclusion. The key is “It is possible for him/her only when he/she believes. Belief in Jesus Christ. It is not belief in any doctrine but in life. Abraham came to the point where belief in God was taught to him as the only way to life and not as a doctrine. But before life, there has to be suffering, problems, and pain, and there has to be a “belief” too. The doctors offer medical or clinical solutions that only attempt to cure the opportunistic infections, and help the infected to delay the conditions of full-blown AIDS, or prolong the life of AIDS patients. Human efforts cannot give life beyond death. Everyone falls sick and when we are really sick we go to someone we believe can help us to get well. In Mark 9: 14-29, a man brought his son to Jesus’ disciples expecting healing as the world expects for HIV & AIDS from us today. When the son was not cured the man complained to Jesus (v.17) saying, “Teacher, I brought you my son…I asked your disciples to drive out the spirit, but they could not”. Jesus responded that this kind can come out only by prayer (v.29). Jesus emphasizes the need for belief from the crowd and prayer of His disciples.

Everything is possible for him who believes. A cure and healing for AIDS is not excluded, it is everything. Let us hope that in the near future there is a preventable vaccine for HIV and a medicine to cure AIDS but would that be ultimate healing? Will that give hope to prevent death and assurance of eternal life? Are the HIV infected or the AIDS patient just looking for “cure from disease” or for a “total healing” of his/her physical, emotional, social, economical and spiritual conditions? Only Jesus Christ offers total healing. Jesus said, “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John 10:10).

Our call as a Christian and as a Church to respond to HIV/AIDS:

When the world so far has no cure for HIV & AIDS we are called by Jesus to be a “Believing Generation”, a congregation of faith, a healing community and be ceaseless in our prayers. We are not fighting this battle alone.
Together with Jesus, we can fight against HIV & AIDS and be assured of victory. He will give us strength to live with HIV, live with AIDS, strength to look life beyond the infection and hope of a life beyond the fear of AIDS.

When we cry like the father of the son (v. 24), help me to overcome my unbelief and understand the secret of the success in this healing ministry everything will be possible. “EVERYTHING IS POSSIBLE FOR HIM WHO BELIEVES.” DO WE BELIEVE THIS TODAY? If we believe this we can be assured today that “Everything is possible for Him”. Only in Jesus Christ is there total healing and eternal hope for and beyond this life – an everlasting life. Let this be our message today for those who are infected with HIV and affected by AIDS and to everyone in our society.

Sources:


2. Jesus Christ, has the power and authority to make a difference, as a disciple, we can imitate this authority

3. Dr. Daniel Fountain, “God, Medicine and Miracles”

*The Bible references are taken from: The Holy Bible, New International Version, Zondervan