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The other day Lyn Mulligan gave me this newspaper scrap. It's about a Muslim Imam, Nur Warsame. Nur is the Australia's first openly gay imam. He made an appearance in The Project, a TV show on channel 10, and talked about the trials and tribulations of being a gay Muslim.

Because of his coming out, he was excommunicated by the Muslim society. He has also “suffered from Islamophobia from both the mainstream non-Muslim community and even some in the LGBTQI group, and homophobia from both the Muslim community and the mainstream society.”

As a gay imam, it's so hard for him to find a place where he feels a sense of attachment. Yes, he is marginalised and alienated. Jung Young Lee, an American theologian, describes the marginalised as follows:

The marginal person has to live in these two worlds, which are not only different but often antagonistic to each other. To be in-between two worlds means to be fully in neither. The marginal person who is placed between this two-world boundary feels like a non-being. This existential nothingness caused by the perspective of two or more dominant worlds is a root of dehumanization. Such a sense of non-existence can create self-alienation and undesirable personality development. Such self-alienation of marginal people is due to their external alienation by dominant societies. The self is split in two when they are torn between two worlds.

You know, in our society there are still many marginalised people who are living ‘in-between,’ such as refugees, migrants, aboriginal people, single mums, domestic violence victims, the homeless, sexual minorities, the bullied, and so on. They are all the people that the church should embrace and look after because Jesus our Lord came on earth to wipe their tears and heal their marginal status.

In Matthew 9:12-13, Jesus made it clear, “Who needs a doctor: the healthy or the sick? I'm after mercy, not religion. I'm here to invite outsiders, not coddle insiders.” Like his saying, he hung around a lot of outcasts, ate meals with them, and treated them like old friends.

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Matthew 10:28-39, today's Gospel reading, shows completely this purpose of Jesus' ministry. In fact, the passage isn't easy to understand. Especially, verses 34-35 make us confused. Jesus says in the passages, “Don't suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.”

This scripture runs counter to our belief that Jesus came to bring peace to all the marginalised. How can we interpret those confusing words? We can find a clue in John 20. According to John 20:19, when Jesus met his loving people for the first time after his resurrection, he greeted them, “Peace be with you.”

A few months ago I analysed the meaning of the greeting, “Peace be with you,” in a Sunday sermon. The original Greek sentence of the greeting is Εἰρήνη ὑμῖν (eirene umin). Εἰρήνη means ‘peace’ and ὑμῖν means ‘be with you.’ The word Εἰρήνη contains a few meanings, like peace, rest or calmness. But what's remarkable is that the word has also a totally different meaning in it, ‘be united.’ For it comes from a verb εἶρο which means ‘combine.’

If we apply this alternative meaning, Jesus' greeting, ‘Peace be with you,’ signifies ‘be united with one another.’ Then, the peace Jesus mentioned is expanded to ‘harmony with neighbours’ beyond inner peace in mind. Thus, Jesus' greeting, “Peace be with you,” can also mean, ‘Share the peace of God with your friends and even with strangers achieving unity in diversity.’

At this point we need to go back to the controversial verses in Matthew 10, “Don't suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I didn't come to bring peace, but a sword.” The Greek word translated into peace here is also Εἰρήνη, but the meaning of Εἰρήνη at this is different from the peace that Jesus wanted to give to his disciples.

The peace for which most people of Jesus' time had pursued was personal happiness in mind through individual power and wealth. This kind of peace tends to be indifferent to social injustice or structural evil, and this peace isn't the peace that Jesus wanted to spread. Jesus didn't come to bring such selfish shalom to the earth.

Rather, he gave us a sword to fight against injustice and inequality in our community. Fighting for the marginalised and alienated is the true peace that we

should spread as a follower of Jesus Christ. Of course the fight isn't easy at all. Interestingly, Jesus knew that our family members might be the biggest enemies in fighting against systematic discrimination and exploitation.

Yes, we are easily tempted and fall because of our selfish greed, so we need to unite and cooperate ceaselessly sharing the peace of Jesus and achieving unity in diversity.

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The last Thursday was the actual 40th birthday of the Uniting Church. We had a special Holy Communion on Thursday and a special 4R service on last Sunday for commemorating the 40 years journey of the Uniting Church. As a part of the celebration, we are having a membership service this morning for welcoming new members and revisiting the meaning of being united.

Sisters and brothers,

Why should we be uniting with others continually? For what shouldn't we stop uniting? The purpose of our uniting is to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the marginalised in our community. Fighting against any form of injustice and inequality, so making our world a better place where God's holy presence can be found is the core aim of the journey for uniting in our life.

I would like to finalise today's message by quoting a part of the Basis of Union: "The Church's call is ... to be a fellowship of reconciliation, a body within which the diverse gifts of its members are used for the building up of the whole, an instrument through which Christ may work and bear witness to himself. ... The Church is a pilgrim people, always on the way towards a promised goal." Amen.