



Disability in the African context: Towards inclusive homiletics

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Solemn declaration

I, Vida Zenobia Mutlaneng, declare herewith that the dissertation entitled: Disability in the African context: Towards inclusive homiletics, which I herewith submit to the North West University, is in compliance with the requirements set for the degree: Master of Theology with Pastoral studies is my own work, has been language-edited in accordance with the requirements and has not already been submitted to any other university.

Vida Zenobia Mutlaneng

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Abstract

This study explores disability in the African context and seeks to articulate markers for an inclusive homiletic in the African context.

The epidemiology and aetiology of disability are highlighted. It is estimated that 15 percent of the world's population has some kind of disability, making disabled persons the "world's largest minority group" (Disabled World, 2019). Significant for this study is that 80 percent of disabled persons live in developing countries (White, 2017:120). The incidence of disability is furthermore reported to be on the rise, due to aging populations and the high risk of disability in older people as well as the global increase in chronic health conditions such as stroke, cancer, diabetes and mental disorders (WHO, 2011:xi).

Although many disabled people wish to participate fully in faith communities, they face attitudinal and architectural barriers that result in their exclusion from faith communities (Anderson, 2006:37). Consequently, this study highlights the dire need for an inclusive homiletic in the African context. The African context is highlighted in a positive and mystical light, bringing to the fore the diversity and rich tapestry of African cultures, and portraying Africa as a philosophical concept (Louw, 2008:147).

This study employs Osmer's (2008:4) four tasks of practical theological interpretation. The first movement, the descriptive-empirical task, seeks to determine the status quo – what is happening in terms of disability issues and disabled persons in the light of the African context and worldview. The second movement, the interpretive task, seeks to interpret why Africans react the way they do to disability and disabled persons in church practice and preaching. The third movement, the normative task, seeks to establish ethical strategies to address issues of disability by engaging perspectives from disability theology, Scripture and homiletics. The fourth movement, the pragmatic task, seeks to articulate markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context. The pragmatic task builds on the clues provided by the normative task, and thus involves a response that can lead to necessary change. Based on the findings of the descriptive-empirical, interpretive and normative tasks, markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context are articulated.

Keywords: Disability, African context, disabled persons, disabled people, inclusive, homiletic, homiletics

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Chapter one: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

From the creation account, as reported in the book of Genesis, the Triune God created man in His own likeness (Gen. 1:26-27). On this, Averbek (2015:234) comments: “it is not like we look like God physically, but that we are physical beings who stand within the material creation as God’s stewards. We stand to serve as His authoritative representatives on this earth in His image and likeness”.

As there is no report of either Adam or Eve bearing any physical defects, it is believed that disability became known after the fall. Satterlee (2010:36) therefore suggests that disability emanated from the fallen state of creation.

The World Health Organization (2000) defines disability as an umbrella term denoting impairments, activity limitations and participation restrictions. Creamer (2003:60) states that disability is a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more of the major life activities. Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) (CRPD henceforth), explains that people with disabilities include “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on equal basis with others”.

The World Health Organisation (1990:213) also defines disability as “an impairment or abnormality of psychological, physiological or anatomical structure or function, a disability is any restriction or lack of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being”.

According to White (2017:122), there are at least four major causes of disability, namely: “individuals who are born with a limitation or a congenital disability, biological disability, socio-emotional challenges and individuals who sustained injury at work or accidents”.

1.1.1 Disability in different cultures

Each culture has a unique way of perceiving and treating disabled people. This can vary from acceptance to ignorance and from ridicule to victimisation – as history attests. According to Anang (1992:72), the ancient Greeks, for example, abandoned children who

were born with a disability to die. This cruelty endured through modern history. Coleridge (1993:56) notes, amongst others, the killing of disabled people across the ages. In this regard he refers to Martin Luther's endorsement to kill disabled babies, because they were "incarnations of the devil"; the English eugenicists' elimination of disabled people in accordance to the Darwinian evolution theory of the "survival of the fittest" and the Nazi Euthanasia Programme under Hitler of exterminating the disabled, as they were not regarded fit to make a meaningful contribution to society and only depleted the economic resources of the state.

Misplaced perceptions about disability are rife in many cultures. In Western culture, mothers of autistic babies are sometimes referred to as "refrigerator mothers" as they are considered cold and void of love for their children, hence causing their children's disability (Donvan and Zucker, 2016:74).

In the African context, from where this study emanates, most indigenous Africans have their own perception of what disability is and its causes. More often than not, witchcraft is singled out as the cause. According to Bunning, Gona, Newton and Hartley (2017:2), some locally-held beliefs ascribe disability to nature or the will of God, while others attribute a child's condition to an external force, such as a curse or evil spirits. Another belief that is strongly held is that disability is in some instances self-inflicted. For example, angering the ancestors by breaching the moral code or failing to honour their memory. Improper family relations, such as extra-marital affairs and incest, have also been cited as perceived causes of disability and the mothers are generally implicated in wrong doing. When an African woman gives birth to a disabled child, therefore, it is associated with witchcraft and this leads to isolation and stigmatisation of the woman and the disabled child (Rauter, 2016:120).

According to Haihambo (2004), the myths about the causes of disability have been found to be common among some African ethnic groups. For instance, it is believed that if a family has a disabled child, it is because they do not attend church. Disability is also attributed to witchcraft during the gestation period. In the case of albinism, it is believed that the mother has slept with a white man or a ghost.

Haihambo and Lightfoot (2010) also point out that there are other myths about disability that relate to the actions of a woman during conception or pregnancy. For instance, if a woman leaves shoes outside the hut during intercourse that leads to the conception of a child, it might result in the child having a disability. It is believed that a pregnant woman who eats a great deal of fish during pregnancy will give birth to a very hyperactive child and one that eats food spiced with hot peppers or chilli will give birth to a blind child. Haihambo and

Lightfoot (2010) also note that due to the association of disability with witchcraft, disabled people and their families are isolated, rejected or even harmed.

1.1.2 The role of the faith community

Although some cultures, as indicated in reference to the African culture above, still harbour extremely negative perceptions about disability, there is reason to believe that societies at large have come to accept people who present with different types of disabilities. The World Health Organisation (WHO 2000:3) already suggested nearly two decades ago that attitudes towards disability have steadily changed since the early 1970s, largely due to the self-organisation of disabled people and by the growing tendency to see disability as a human rights issue. In this regard the CRPD (2006) suggests that there is reasonable accommodation of disabled people in society.

Irrespective of these declarations, there is still reason to suspect that churches do not embrace people with disabilities wholeheartedly. According to Yong (2010:79), something as simple as the inaccessibility of some church buildings is indicative of the fact that faith communities are not interpreting reality from the viewpoint of disabled people, but merely accommodating disabled people rather than deeming them an integral part of the church and being inclusive in the true sense of the word.

During the Lausanne 2010 Cape Town Commitment, the Lausanne Movement committed to “make our churches places of inclusion and equality for people with disabilities and to stand alongside them in resisting prejudice and in advocating for their needs in wider society” (The Lausanne Movement, 2011).

Tutu (2010:1-7) argues that from a Christian perspective the sacredness and sanctity of all humanity, including equality, emanates from a firm belief that humanity (both nondisabled and disabled) was created in the image of God. In agreement with Tutu, White (2017:121) urges the church to seriously consider becoming involved in issues of the rights of people with disabilities as part of its mission calling.

This study attempts to respond to this appeal by investigating the phenomenon of disability within the context of African faith communities from a practical theological paradigm and the way disability is approached in the preaching of the church. The task of practical theology is defined by Swinton and Mowat (2016:7) as “critical, theological reflection on the practices of the Church as they interact with the practices of the world, with a view to ensuring and

enabling faithful participation in God's redemptive practices in, to and for the world", provides a fitting paradigm to investigate the topic at hand. More specifically, the study engages homiletics as a subfield within practical theology, as homiletics directly involves the prophetic task of the church and has the potential to transform the attitudes and practices within the faith community in order to become a truly inclusive community.

1.1.3 Disability theology and a disability homiletic

Swinton (2011:274) suggests that disability theology began with the acceptance and recognition that people with disabilities have always been regarded as a minority and at worst, completely silenced in the development of Christian theology. In agreement, Wilder (2012:203) notes that the visible presence in churches of disabled war veterans after World War II and the emergence of liberation theology heralded the beginning of what became known as disability theology.

Given the afore-mentioned, Swinton (2011:274) goes on to define disability theology as:

An attempt by disabled and nondisabled Christians to understand and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ, God, and humanity against the backdrop of the historical and contemporary experiences of people with disabilities. It has come to refer to a variety of perspectives and methods designed to give voice to the rich and diverse theological meanings of the human experience of disability.

Block (2002:132) provides the following perspective on disability theology:

When we live for God, in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, we cannot help but give hope to others, and we cannot help but be inclusive. The gospel of Jesus Christ is a call to a new world where outsiders become insiders. The church as the body of Christ is the quintessential inclusive community, where Jesus Christ, the one who is always identified with the outsider, presides as the copious host. We are called, through our baptism, to be His co-hosts.

In other words, Christians are required to be loving and compassionate to the weakest members of society, outcasts and strangers. As Vanier (2005:64) asserts:

Jesus calls us not only to welcome the weak and the rejected...but also the weak and the broken person within us and to discover the presence of Jesus within us. In order for us to be men and women who give life to others we have to live in the truth of who we are, we have to find an inner wholeness, no longer to deny or

ignore our wounds but to welcome them and to discover the presence of God in these very places of our own weakness.

Eisland (1994:87) suggests that “a liberatory theology of disability is liberating from its inception, incorporating dialogical rather than hierarchical relations...It calls the church to embody justice as its fundamental mission”. Swinton (2016:14) furthermore contends that disability itself can provide us with a hermeneutic that empowers us to see things differently.

Proclaiming the Word of God through preaching and listening to the Word of God can arguably be regarded as one of the most important elements of any congregation’s spiritual life. Pagitt (2005:25) postulates that “preaching isn’t simply something a pastor does - it’s a socialising force and a formative practice in a society”. Especially in terms of its formative function, preaching can serve as a powerful instrument in shaping perceptions and actions within the faith community and if the faith community responds to preaching and acts as the “salt and light” within society, the formative function of proclaiming the Word of God reaches well into society. It is for this reason that the focus of this study is on an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context, as it is suspected that preaching serves as one of the most powerful agents of change.

The term homiletics is derived from the Greek word *homiletikos*, which is loosely translated to mean the art of preaching or preparing a sermon. Scheidler (s.a.:4) notes that three Greek words form the root of the English word *homiletics*. These words are: *homiletikos* which comes from *Homileo*, meaning, “to be in company with, to impart insights through sharing common time together; *Homilia*, meaning “communion and conversation” and “*Homilos* which is composed of *homos* meaning “same” and *ilos* meaning “crowd” (Scheidler, s.a.:4). Scheidler (s.a.:4) goes on to suggest that these three Greek words when put together, define homiletics as “sharing insights through conversation with a crowd”. Reu (2009:11) defines homiletics as “the science that teaches the fundamental principles of public discourse as applied to the proclamation and teaching of divine truth in regular assemblies gathered for the purpose of Christian worship”. Swinton (2016:13) considers preaching an act of imagination that is not limited to concepts, values and morality. He goes on to argue that in preaching the Word of God the hearers are offered a special gift of a changed world. In other words, though the world is not practically changed, our renewed minds, as encouraged by the Apostle Paul (Rom. 12:2), help us to see it from a different perspective. In essence, this suggests an adoption of a completely new and different worldview.

A disability homiletic will therefore refer to homiletic practice that ensues from the Word of God aimed at liberating the minds and actions of the hearers, so that disabled people as well as those around them may understand and treat disability in light of the Word. This is

especially relevant to the African context, where perceptions about disability and the treatment of disabled people seem to be in need of liberation to become more accommodating and inclusive.

According to Swinton (2016:13), preaching must strive to address all aspects of today's diverse congregations. Swinton (2016) quotes Brueggemann's work on the psalms of lament, which allude to the ordinary day-to-day experiences that can undergo an abrupt and unexpected change when tragedy strikes – such as a stroke, Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson's disease and other disabilities acquired at any given time of life.

In this sense, the pastoral and healing potential of preaching comes to mind, as in the context of this study it is pleaded that preaching should heal broken ways of thinking about the brokenness of others' bodies or minds and at the same time console those suffering as a result of disability.

1.2 State of the current research (preliminary literature review)

A preliminary literature search aimed at preaching and disability in the African context has been conducted on NEXUS (the database of the National Research Foundation that provides current and completed research), SACat (the national catalogue of books and journals in South Africa), SAePublications (South African journal articles), EbscoHost (international journal articles) and ProQUEST (international theses and dissertations in full text). This revealed the following perspectives.

The work of Ugne (2012:85) focuses on the experience of social exclusion of disabled people, which results from negative perceptions and is aggravated by negative social attitudes. He argues that “the disabled encounter various barriers that are determined by the reactions of people around and their attitude towards disability”. Rohmer and Louvet (2012:733) argue in the same vein that irrespective of crucial changes in disability legislation that seeks to promote equity, disabled people are still subjected to serious discrimination.

Perspectives from a variety of different contexts seem to suggest that negative social attitudes towards the disabled are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and convictions. Razaka, (2011:316) relates how in Madagascar it is considered a shame to have a disabled person in the family as it is believed to be a curse. In order to escape this “curse”, families are

obliged to perform blood sacrifices that may include killing the disabled person in order to cleanse the family and rid it of the “curse”.

In Tanzania, a child born with a disability is viewed with suspicion. Congenital disability as well as disability acquired later in life are associated with wrongdoing on the part of the family. Unfortunately, in cases of congenital disabilities the “wrongdoing” is usually attributed to the woman. Communities in Tanzania cope with disability by resorting to infanticide, abandonment or overprotection of the disabled baby (Rutachwamagyo, 2011:364-367).

Ugandans consider a disabled person in the family a bad omen, hence disabled children are kept in seclusion to prevent the community from knowing that the family has a disabled child. Disabled people are not taken into consideration in issues of inheritance either (Seezi, 2011:393). In most of Africa, babies born with disabilities are considered a curse to both the family and the community (Matsebula, 2011:404).

In the South African context, Retief and Letšosa (2018:1) contend that disability is one of the theological fields that is uncharted and as a result people with disabilities and their real issues are disregarded. Disability continues to be seen as punishment from God for a particular sin committed by the person with a disability, his parents or ancestors.

Few resources were found that attempted to address the moral deficits regarding disability in society. Shelley (1999) cites Black (1996) on the importance of clergy to have more than a perfunctory knowledge of the illnesses and disabilities of their congregants. Louw (1998:20-21) makes a positive contribution by pointing out that the traditional formulation of pastoral work is *cura animarum*, which suggests a ministry that encompasses persons in their entirety and takes into consideration the care of the spiritual aspect of the human in all the “physical and psycho-social dimensions”. In essence, “the focal point of pastoral ministry has always been people in the totality of their existence” (Louw, 1998:21). Reynolds (2008:24) addresses the role of the clergy in making the community understand that people must and should coexist in all their uniqueness and vulnerability. They also need to deliver sermons that cut across stereotypes.

Swinton (2011:274) holds the view that in order to achieve the goal of an inclusive theology or gospel, both disabled and nondisabled Christians ought to understand and seek to interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ in line with the contemporary experiences of people with disabilities. This refers to a great variety of perspectives and methods devised to give

substance to diverse theological meanings of the human experience and encounters with disability.

Swinton (2016:19) is of the opinion that the essence of a disability homiletic is to bring hope and fresh possibilities to a situation that seems hopeless; turning it into something “reassuring and potentially beautiful”.

Retief (2016) views it from a South African perspective and focuses on a Pentecostal homiletical strategy for shaping a disability-friendly congregation. Retief’s homiletical strategy is not only confined to the Pentecostal movement, but is relevant to all churches that endeavour to create an inclusive homiletical experience for every member in their congregations.

A critical assessment of the literature, however, has shown a void in literature regarding an inclusive African disability homiletic. Persisting beliefs amongst indigenous Africans that disabled people are cursed or bewitched; together with the persisting connection in churches between sin and disability; evil spirits or demon possession suggest that ongoing study on the theme is necessary (Reynolds, 2008:28).

Churches that practice faith healing perpetuate the mistaken belief that conflates sin with disability, thereby implying that disability is a test of faith and punishment from God. Growing interest and attention in the area of disability theology indicates that it is imperative for all congregations to strive towards creating inclusive congregations (Anderson, 2013; Black, 1996; Block, 2002; Brock & Swinton, 2012; Carter, 2007; Creamer, 2003, 2012; Eisland, 1994, 2004; Swinton, 2012, 2016, Webb-Mitchell, 1994, 1996, 2010; Yong, 2008, 2010, 2016). Osmer (2008:36) quotes Tubbs-Tisdale who avers that preachers must make a concerted effort of learning “methods for ‘exegeting’ the congregation in all its sociocultural particularity”. Ongoing research to promote such abilities of preachers is hence imperative in order to work towards the inclusion of the disabled as whole persons.

1.3 Main research question

In the light of the afore-going, the main research question of this study can be formulated as:

What are some of the markers for an inclusive disability homiletic through which current perceptions and beliefs about disability in African faith communities can be addressed?

Subsequent research questions emanating from this are:

- How is the phenomenon of disability perceived in African society and faith communities in light of African beliefs and worldviews?
- How is disability currently addressed through preaching in the African context?
- How does Scripture inform an African disability homiletic?
- What would an inclusive disability homiletic aimed at the African context entail?

1.4 Aim

The main aim of this study is to propose an inclusive disability homiletic in reference to the African context. In so doing the study hopes to serve as catalyst to stimulate change in this particular dimension of preaching in the African context.

1.5 Objectives

- To engage the phenomenon of disability in the light of the African context and worldview
- To investigate how disability is addressed in the African context through preaching
- To investigate disability theology and Scripture in order to articulate basis theoretical points of departure for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context
- To suggest markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context

1.6 Central theoretical argument

The central theoretical argument of the study is that an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context can contribute towards nurturing a faith community and society that is welcoming to disabled people in this unique context.

1.7 Research method

Practical theology is seen as a “rich and diverse discipline” that incorporates research approaches from different fields of study (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:3). Swinton and Mowat (2016:4-5) suggest that practical theology ensures that faith is not only professed with the

lips but is seen in action. Hence, practical theology takes day-to-day human experiences seriously. Practical theology “locates itself within the diversity of human spiritual and mundane experience” and fits easily into all that human beings have come to know (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:3).

The goal of practical theology is to develop theories that can empower the church to communicate Scripture in an effective way that enables believers to grow spiritually. In essence, practical theology is about applying Scripture to the way we live in the world today, through leading by example as Jesus did. It therefore aims to transcend theological doctrines that we may “contribute to the world’s becoming what God intends it to be” (Enns, 2014:12). In this sense practical theology is missiological in nature as it takes its “purpose, motivation and dynamic from acknowledging and working out what it means to participate faithfully in God’s mission” (Swinton & Mowat, 2016:26).

Although there are a number of approaches to practical theological research, such as the models of Zerfass (1974), Cochrane, De Gruchy and Peterson (1991) as well as Muller (2005), this study favours the approach of Osmer (2008). More particularly, the suggested movements of Osmer are executed by means of a literature study that includes Scriptural perspectives on disability. The research engages scholarly literature on the phenomenon of disability in the African context and preaching in African faith communities. At least the following databases are consulted in the further execution of the study: NEXUS (the database of the NRF providing current and completed research), SACat (national catalogue of books and journals in South Africa), SAePublications (South African journal articles), EbscoHost (international journal articles) and ProQUEST (international theses and dissertations in full text).

In the deployment of the research, the four tasks of practical theological research as proposed by Osmer (2008) are followed, as it is suspected that they are well suited to answer the main and subsequent research questions posed by this study.

1.7.1 The descriptive-empirical task

The descriptive-empirical task requires determining the status quo – that is, “What is going on?” The information gathered for this task should assist in determining “patterns and dynamics” in certain “situations or contexts” (Osmer, 2008:4). According to Osmer (2008:28), the descriptive-empirical task is a “form of priestly listening, grounded in a spirituality of presence: attending to others in their particularity within the presence of God”. Osmer

(2008:35) attributes priestly listening to the entire Christian community and not just its leaders. To this end, every member of a congregation can practice priestly listening by being open to change, diversity and learning new ways of doing things.

Osmer (2008:36) also points out the importance of priestly listening in preaching, since preachers need to stay cognisant of the diverse circumstances of their hearers. "Preaching speaks to particular people in the concrete circumstances of their lives" (Osmer, 2008:36). Osmer (2008:39) contends that qualitative research methods are in harmony with priestly listening, as they do not objectify people. According to Swinton and Mowat (2016:30-31), qualitative research acknowledges "the world" as a place of intricate "interpretive processes" in which human beings grapple with making sense of their everyday experiences, "including their experiences of God". Osmer (2008:37-38) portrays the relationship between the descriptive-empirical task of practical theological interpretation and spirituality of presence on a continuum where informal attending is on the one end, semiformal attending in the middle and formal attending on the other end. Informal attending is said to be difficult and requires an "openness, attentiveness and prayerfulness" to enable us to attend to others in God's presence. Semiformal attending entails the use of specific approaches and actions that offer some sort of structure. Formal attending investigates specific situations and backgrounds through empirical research. In this research, however, the descriptive function is pursued by attending to literature that can elucidate the focus of the study.

1.7.2 The interpretive task

This movement follows the descriptive task in order to understand why things are the way they are: "Why is this going on?" Osmer (2008:4) alludes to the interpretive task as "drawing on theories of the arts and sciences to better understand and explain why these patterns and dynamics are occurring". According to Osmer (2008: 28), the interpretive task is a "form of wise judgment, grounded in a spirituality of sagely wisdom: guiding others in how to live within God's royal rule".

It is desirable for leaders of congregations to guide congregations wisely through the challenges of everyday life, making use of theories of the arts and sciences. Sagely wisdom requires, according to Osmer (2008:82), three essential qualities: thoughtfulness, theoretical interpretation and wise judgment. These he also portrays on a continuum.

In this study, the interpretive task seeks to find answers to why certain attitudes exist towards disability in the African context, attitudes which deny disabled persons the same acceptance

as able-bodied persons. Since it is suspected that deeply engrained beliefs about disability endure in the African context and culture, these beliefs are engaged. The interpretive task should provide clues for an appropriate response in terms of an inclusive homiletic.

1.7.3 The normative task

This task involves “using theological concepts to interpret particular episodes, situations, or contexts, constructing ethical norms to guide our responses, and learning from ‘good practice’” (Osmer, 2008:4). As such, it intends to establish what the ideal response towards a certain phenomenon would look like. We have a prime example in Jesus and how He constantly sought to include all social groups considered outcasts, His preaching liberating all. According to Osmer (2008:29), the normative task is a “form of prophetic discernment, grounded in a spirituality of discernment: helping others hear and heed God’s Word in the particular circumstances of their lives and world”. Osmer (2008:135) further alludes to Jesus Christ as “the full and unsurpassable revelation of God”.

In seeking the ideal, the study engages so-called disability theology and the Scriptures. An interesting perspective on disability theology provided by Swinton (2016:13) is that “disability theology is based on the premise that if we listen to voices that are often excluded from the ways in which we understand Scripture and develop theology and tradition, we will be surprised, and that surprise will be a blessing to the whole people of God”.

In striving towards inclusive congregations, the mission of the church should endeavour to emulate Jesus who relentlessly reached out to marginalised groups and patiently and lovingly “listened to their voices” (Bayes, 2015), touching their lives in meaningful ways that left them accepted, loved, valued and blessed each time they encountered Him. In fact, Jesus was “absolutely revolutionary in whom He welcomed” (Bayes, 2015).

In His ministry, Jesus welcomed disabled people (Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 8:23; Luke 7:21; John 5:1-18); contagious people (Mark 1:40-42); social outcasts (Mark 2:14); foreigners (Matt. 8:5-13); marginalised women (Luke 10:39) and adulterers (John 8:1-11). It is no wonder then that in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pronounced blessed all those who were deemed cursed by society.

1.7.4 The pragmatic task

This task requires “determining strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable” (Osmer, 2008:4). Essentially, this fourth movement involves a response or responses that can lead to change.

Within the focus of this study it pertains to articulating markers for an inclusive homiletic for the African context with the disabled in mind. Based on the findings of the empirical, hermeneutical and normative movements, an inclusive homiletic must now be imagined.

1.8 Estimated risk level

This study employs a literature study aimed at proposing an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context. As the study does not engage human participants, it is anticipated that there is no risk involved in the execution of the study.

1.9 Chapter division

The study unfolds as follows:

Chapter 2: Disability in the light of the African context and worldview

In this chapter the descriptive task of practical theological research of Osmer (2008) is pursued. To this end the phenomenon of disability in the light of the African context and worldview is engaged by means of a literature study.

Chapter 3: Disability in the African context, church practice and preaching

The goal of the third chapter is to investigate how disability is currently addressed in the African context through preaching.

Chapter 4: Perspectives from disability theology, Scripture and homiletics

This chapter investigates disability theology and Scripture in order to articulate basis-theoretical points of departure for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context.

Chapter 5: Markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context

The fifth chapter suggests markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context by formulating deductions from the literature studies of the previous chapters.

Chapter 6: Summary and conclusions

The last chapter presents the summary and conclusions of the study.

Chapter two: Disability in the light of the African context and worldview

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to engage the phenomenon of disability in the light of the African context and worldview in order to indicate how disability is perceived within this particular framework. Although disability is a universal phenomenon, the way in which it is perceived varies in different cultures. As became evident from the literature overview, African culture generally takes a harsh and negative stance towards disability. This is grounded in a specific belief and value system that emanates from a worldview that is embedded in a particular context. This chapter thus engages disability within this framework in order to identify some of the reasons why disability is shrouded in mystery and prejudice in the African mind – and why disabled people are often marginalised, even in the church and preaching. This engagement aligns with the descriptive task of practical theological investigation by attempting to establish what is going on with regards to the phenomenon of disability.

2.2 Disability as a universal phenomenon

The universal phenomenon of disability is present among all people, irrespective of ethnicity or gender. Definitions of disability are themselves a highly contested subject, due to the varied meanings ascribed to terms used to define disability. According to Campbell and Oliver (2013:54), the meaning of disability is not primarily located within the individual, but is socially constructed within material structures, ideologies and discourses.

Historically, the word “disability” did not exist in Western or African traditions. It is not found in the Bible either, due to the Judeo-Christian tradition describing people according to their specific infirmities. According to Kabue (2011:4), the notion of disability and its many derivatives emerged from caregivers in an attempt to have organised care for people who were seen by society to require care and attention.

At different times, various categories of people have defined disability in different ways (Kabue, 2011:4). Consequently, it is evident that the very notion of disability is a complex construct that reflects on the interaction between features of an individual’s body and perceptions of the society in which he or she lives. Effectively, the burdens of a physical or mental disability can be multiplied by the communities in which they live if such communities pose more challenges to disabled people as a result of prejudice or ignorance. An

organisation such as the UN thus recognised that disability is an “evolving” concept that not only points to a physical phenomenon, but also to one where disabled people are further “disabled” by the attitudes and environmental barriers posed by society that “hinders their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others” (CRPD, Article 4).

Such barriers may include, but are not limited to the inability to acquire assistive devices and technology due to their prohibitive cost, “inaccessible public spaces and transportation, and discriminatory prejudice in society” (World Bank, 2018:1). These barriers further exacerbate the exclusion of disabled people, thereby imposing “a higher welfare burden on governments, highlighting the costs of exclusion, which are estimated to range from 3 to 7 percent of GDP” (Buckup, 2009:51).

2.3 Models of disability

Blackdisability.org (2019) asserts that models of disability are tools that define impairment and provide a basis for government and society to devise means of catering for the needs of disabled people. In the quest for a better understanding of disability, so-called “models of disability” emerged in disability research (Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000:157).

A model represents a particular type of theory, namely structural, which seeks to explain the phenomena by reference to an abstract system and mechanism...It is important to remember that models may help to generate an explanation in some way, but they do not themselves constitute an explanation (Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000:157).

Examples of some of the different models of disability that can be referred to are the religious/moral model, where disability is considered an act of God as punishment for sin committed either by the disabled person or their parents; the medical model, where disability is viewed as a disease and disabled people are assumed to be in need of a “fix” or “cure”; the social model that portrays disability as a socially constructed phenomenon; the cultural model, where disability is considered as a culture; the charity model, where disability is believed to be victimhood and disabled people are considered to be objects of charity entirely dependent on social grants without any chance of contributing positively to the economy; the human rights model, which acknowledges that disabled people have rights just like their nondisabled counterparts. In the present study, only three models of disability will be highlighted, namely: the religious/moral, medical and social models.

2.3.1The religious/moral model of disability

The religious/moral model is historically the oldest model of disability. Although this model is not as prevalent today, it has contributed to many diverse cultures still associating disability with sin and guilt. The religious/moral model perceives disability as a punishment from God inflicted on the disabled person or their family due to sins that they may have committed (Blackdisability.org, 2019). According to Henderson and Bryan (2011:7), the religious/moral model of disability is believed to be “based upon the assumption that some disabilities are the result of punishment from an all-powerful entity...that the punishment is for an act or acts of transgression against prevailing moral and/or religious edicts”.

Such punishment can be the result of misdemeanours committed by the disabled person, a family member or even someone in the community. Conditions such as Schizophrenia are attributed to the presence of “evil thoughts” and hence:

acts of exorcism or sacrifice may be performed to expel the negative influence, or recourse made to persecution or even death of the individual who is “different”...Conversely, it can be seen as necessary affliction to be suffered before some future spiritual reward (Blackdisability.org, 2019).

Black (1996:30) also alludes to the suffering of disabled people as bringing them spiritually closer “to the divine will”, thus referring to such suffering as “redemptive suffering” and thereby pointing out that disability is the will of God. Furthermore, Black (1996:27) asserts that difficulties experienced by disabled people are considered to be occasioned by God in order to develop or strengthen attributes such as courage and perseverance. Hence, disabled people and their families are granted the “opportunity to redeem themselves through their endurance, resilience, and piety” (Niemann, 2005:106).

In agreement with the afore-said, Tada (2011:17-18) captures suffering in disability this way:

God redeems suffering. The God of life is the only one who can conquer death by embracing it. And so death no longer has the victory, and neither does suffering. Christ has given it meaning, not only for salvation but also for sanctification, and that is the best part. It tells us we are no longer alone in our hardships, our disabilities...People with disabilities, unlike others, are driven to the cross by the overwhelming conviction that they have nowhere else to go.

Churches that practice faith healing consider disability as a test of the disabled person's faith, purporting that when the disabled person is not healed it is sign that he or she does not have faith or that their faith is not strong enough. This tends to focus embarrassing attention on disabled people in the presence of their congregations, leaving disabled people with feelings of tremendous shame and anger. Faith healing may exacerbate feelings of shame, denial and anger for some disabled people with acquired disabilities, who are still struggling to come to terms with their condition. Hence, some disabled people shy away from church attendance, in order to avoid being made a spectacle in church.

2.3.2 The medical model of disability

Llewellyn and Hogan (2000:158) assert that "the general framework of the so-called medical model emanates from the disease model used in medicine", which predisposes practitioners to think of a "condition", which needs appropriate "treatment". This model concentrates on the disabled individual as it holds that the individual is "flexible and alterable while society is fixed and unalterable" (Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000:158). The medical model of disability portrays disability in a negative light, as it maintains that disability is a disease or defect and resides within the individual. It is for this reason that Thomas and Woods (2003:15) point out that the medical model is often referred to as the "personal tragedy" model. This model sees disability and disabled people as a problem or burden to society. Hence, according to this model, disabled people need to be "cured" or "fixed", as they deviate from the norm.

Thomas and Woods (2003:15) indicate erring on the part of medical professionals who condone the medical model, as they fail to take into consideration diverse aspects that are related to the person's life holistically, mainly because they treat the person as a problem that needs to be solved. According to Creamer (2009:22), the medical model is responsible for terms such as "handicapped", "cripple", "spastic", "invalid" and "retarded".

It must be noted that the medical model has had a ubiquitous impact on the field of psychology, as it also utilises "clinical diagnostic criteria such as standardised measures of intelligence or self-concept" (Llewellyn & Hogan, 2000:159). To this end, Thomas and Woods (2003:15) go on to point out the enormous authority the medical model has designated to the people who offer these diagnoses.

2.3.3 The social model of disability

To counter the medical model of disability, the social model seeks the cause for disability in the individual rather with the society. This model was initiated by the campaigns of disabled people's movement in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s; against "historical oppression and exclusion" (Campbell & Oliver, 2013:56). Disabled people with various disabilities were united in "a shared experience of oppression rather than the particularity of experiences" (Swinton, 2012:174). Historically, challenges faced by disabled people were explained as "divine punishment, karma, moral failing, or biological deficit" (Shakespeare, 1996:195). These explanations of disability, together with witchcraft, also prevailed in the African context.

Whereas the medical model focuses on finding fault with the individual, disability movements focus their attention on "social oppression, cultural discourse and environmental barriers" (Shakespeare, 1996:196). This model accentuates the fact that it is not impairments that disable disabled people, but society through the barriers that it has created to deny disabled people full inclusion and participation in society. Therefore, the social model of disability promotes the notion that disability is socially constructed, hence the term "disabled". Priestly (1999:3) affirms that "it is impossible to disentangle the lived experience of disability from the context of disabling societies" as they are intertwined.

To a great extent, the social model of disability has impacted profoundly on the way in which disability is perceived in this day and age. Oliver (1996:33) contends that the social model sees disability as nothing but "all the things that impose restrictions on disabled people". These "things" include but are not limited to segregation in school systems, individual discrimination and prejudice.

Swinton (2012:175) asserts that the social model of disability continues to be "a highly influential and formative theoretical perspective on disability", even though it is presently under challenge from certain quarters.

The disability movement has come a long way in sensitising communities about viewing disabled people as human beings who are disabled by society and not as objects that need to be "fixed". In uniting in "a shared experience of oppression rather than the particularity of experiences" (Swinton, 2012:174), disabled people have sought to prove that they too could lead successful happy lives when afforded reasonable accommodation instead of pity.

In the light of these explanations, disability represents a complex phenomenon that at the very least comprises of physical, psychosocial, visual, hearing as well as learning impairments.

2.4 Epidemiology and aetiology

According to the Disability Inclusion and Accountability Framework of the World Bank (2018:1), it is estimated that globally over a billion people – or – approximately 15 percent of the world's population – have some disability. This is reportedly the “world's largest minority group” (Disabled World, 2019). WHO (2011:xi) reports that the incidence of disability is on the rise and that it would thus be an even greater concern in years to come. “This is due to ageing populations and the higher risk of disability in older people as well as the global increase in chronic health conditions such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease, cancer and mental health disorders” (WHO, 2011:xi). Other factors contributing to the rise in the incidence of disability are accidents, injury, violence, war and conflict as well as chronic diseases with potentially disabling effects like hypertension or HIV/AIDS. In addition, as the global ageing population grows, the risk of acquiring disabling conditions over time also increases (Groce, 2018:724).

The high incidence of disability in developing countries is occasionally attributed to poverty. For instance, poverty may lead to the development of a health condition that may in turn result in disability if the affected is too poor to afford medical treatment. In addition, inadequate health resources for immunisation; poor living conditions with no safe drinking water and sanitation and unsafe buildings that are prone to collapse during natural disasters all contribute to the incidence of disability (World Bank, 2011:10).

According to WHO (2011:xxi),

Despite the magnitude of the issue, both awareness of and scientific information on disability issues are lacking. There is no agreement on definitions and little internationally comparable information on the incidence, distribution and trends of disability.

Of the estimated number of people presenting with some form of disability, women are reported to be significantly more affected than men (WHO, 2011:35), with the gender gap between three to five percentage points (World Bank, 2011:34). Disabled women are said

to be “multiply disadvantaged” because of their gender and disability. Nuñez (2015) points out that disabled women are especially vulnerable to abuse. Referring to a study conducted in Orissa, India in 2004, Nuñez (2015) affirms that “pretty much all women and girls who had a disability had been beaten at home, 25 percent of those with intellectual disabilities had been raped, and 6 percent of those with disability had been forcibly sterilized”.

It is important to note that although tireless efforts are made to measure disability, it is very difficult. For instance, “older persons may not self-identify as having a disability, despite having significant difficulties in functioning, because they consider their level of functioning appropriate to their age” (WHO, 2011:24). Furthermore, the high disability rates reported among older people indicate an “accumulation of health risks across lifespan of disease, injury, and chronic illness” (WHO, 2011:35).

Where children are involved, there are further complexities. “Parents or caregivers – the natural proxy responders in surveys – may not accurately represent the experience of the child” (WHO, 2011:24). In developing countries, pregnant women who lack access to healthcare have an increased risk of giving birth to disabled children (Nuñez, 2015) and children under the age of five are exposed to “multiple risks, including poverty, malnutrition, poor health, and unstimulating home environments, which can impair cognitive, motor, and social-emotional development” (WHO, 2011:35).

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), an organisation made up of developed countries, conducted a study which indicated that disabled people had lower “educational attainment” (Nuñez, 2015). It goes without saying that developed countries are better resourced than developing countries, yet if there is an educational disparity even in developed countries, the situation is even bleaker in developing countries where specialised services and programmes are lacking.

Given the aforesaid, the estimates of disability prevalence presented in the World Health Organisation and World Bank report “should be taken not as definitive but as reflecting current knowledge and available data (WHO, 2011:25).

Important for this study, is the observation that 80 percent of people with disabilities live in developing countries (White, 2017:120). According to Disability News: Africa (2018), it is estimated that 350-500 people worldwide become amputees each day due to landmines that they encounter while walking, farming, or playing. Disability News: Africa (2018) further estimates that approximately 60-80 million people are disabled in Africa, accounting for approximately “10 percent of the general African population, but possibly as high as 20

percent in the poorer regions” (Disabled News: Africa, 2018). Although the causes of some disabilities are still unknown, in Africa especially, the prevalence of disability is affected by a variety of factors such as “malnutrition and disease, environmental hazards, natural disasters, traffic and industrial accidents, civil conflict and war”. White (2017:122) indicates that visual, hearing, psychosocial and physical impairments are the most prevalent types of disabilities worldwide.

2.5 Types of disabilities

The construct of disability refers to different impairments. The Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities in South Africa (2013) adopted the following five broad categories:

- Physical/mobility disability
- Hearing disability
- Visual disability
- Learning disability
- Psychosocial disability

The word “disability” tends to conjure up images of wheelchairs, crutches, a white cane or a guide dog. However, disabilities come in many varied forms. Amongst the abovementioned broad categories of disability, there are visible and invisible disabilities.

2.5.1 Visible disabilities

Visible disabilities are disabilities that are immediately noticeable to onlookers. For instance, the use of a wheelchair, crutches, a white cane or a guide dog cannot escape the naked eye. A visible disability can be noticed by merely looking at a disabled individual. Apart from people who are mobility impaired and cannot walk, the disabled individual may have involuntary shaking as in the case of people who present with Tourette Syndrome, whilst for others the facial features may show the disability as in the case of people who present with Down Syndrome. Almost always, visible disabilities tend to be considered the only disabilities as the majority of people erringly assume that conditions that are invisible cannot be disabling. Examples of visible disabilities are:

- Paralysis – paraplegia, quadriplegia, stroke – wheelchairs, crutches and other mobility aids can be utilised
- Down Syndrome
- Tourette Syndrome
- Cerebral Palsy
- Total blindness

2.5.2 Invisible disabilities

Invisible disabilities are disabilities that are not obvious to the naked eye. According to Disabled World (2019), “Invisible Disability, or hidden disability, is an umbrella term that captures a whole spectrum of hidden disabilities or challenges that are primarily neurological in nature”. Apart from invisible and hidden, these disabilities are also called silent disabilities. Some individuals who present with visual impairment but do not wear spectacles and those who present with hearing impairment but do not wear hearing aids are not obviously disabled. Others with visual disabilities do not wear spectacles as they would not have any corrective effects on their vision, whilst others wear contact lenses. All such individuals are mostly assumed to be faking disability, when in fact they present with very serious degenerative conditions. Epilepsy can also be classified under invisible disabilities.

Some persons with invisible disabilities are perceived to be strange or odd. This can be attributed to the way in which their disabilities affect their thinking, hearing, speech and interaction with others. One of the biggest challenges with invisible disabilities is that people who present with such disabilities are mostly misunderstood. Disabled World (2019) points out that people who present with invisible disabilities are easy targets for bullying, because it is difficult for people to recognise or acknowledge their disabilities. Part of the reason for this is because people are generally more accepting of visible disabilities as they are obvious to the naked eye. Disabled World (2019) cautions that people should refrain from making assumptions on whether someone does or does not have a disability “as it can be imperceptible and indistinguishable”. Hence, they encourage that people should be treated with kindness and patience. “Just because the disability is not evident does not mean it does not exist. Be kind to everyone!” (Disabled World, 2019)

People with psychosocial and learning impairments make up the majority of the invisibly disabled population (Disabled World, 2019). Some of these people can function well without much assistance and can even work, as long as they take their prescribed medication, whilst

others cannot attend school or work. Disabled World (2019) furthermore indicates that invisible disabilities “make daily living more difficult for many people worldwide. Invisible disabilities can include chronic illnesses such as renal failure...if those diseases significantly impair normal activities of daily living”.

Disabled World (2019) also highlights the fact that invisible disabilities, such as learning and psychosocial disabilities as well as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), are the “most common type of disability among college students” and that these students “may request accommodations even though they do not appear to have a disability”.

It must be noted that whilst it is difficult to have visible disabilities in Africa, having invisible disabilities is even worse. The majority of African children who present with learning disabilities have been excluded from the education system simply because these disabilities are not readily understood. Learning impaired children in first-world countries have a better chance of starting and completing school and even proceeding to tertiary institutions, all because they have the necessary resources and support to progress in school.

Examples of invisible disabilities are:

- Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Attention Deficit Disorder
- Asperger’s syndrome
- Bipolar disorder
- Autism
- Epilepsy

2.6 General social attitudes towards disabled people

A report by the World Health Organisation (WHO, 2000:3) records that social attitudes towards disability have changed since the 1970s, prompted largely by the self-organisation of disabled people and by the growing tendency to see disability as a human rights issue. As concerns about disabled people intensified in the new millennium, disability found its way from obscured places like institutions, special schools and back rooms in homes where disabled family members were confined; to parliaments and highly recognised institutions such as the United Nations. This has inevitably resulted in disability becoming a key issue for policymakers in rich and poor countries alike.

2.7 Changes in thinking about disability as reflected in different typologies

That the general society is at least developing a greater sensitivity towards people with disability, is reflected in the typologies or names that are used by society to refer to people with disabilities. For instance, the use of derogatory terms such as “retard”, “moron”, “schizo” and many more, are no longer utilised and disabled people are taking charge of how they would like to be referred to.

It was not that long ago when terms such as “retard” (learning disability), “spastic”, “cripple”, (physical disability) and “schizo” (mental ill-health) were relatively common terms that were used to label and stigmatise those with a variety of disabilities, legitimizing many forms of “treatment” that today would seem barbaric and make care professionals recoil in horror (Barber, 2019:3).

2.7.1 From “handicapped” to “disabled”

The word “handicapped” was first used in the 1800s as a way of depicting various disadvantages that could be imposed on a person by the environment, such as economic, moral or social handicaps. It originated from the sport of horse racing where horses that were superior to others were given a handicap to put them on the same par with other horses (Okrent, 2015).

However, with the birth of disability movements the word handicapped was rejected in favour of disabled, as disabled people started taking over the power that controlled their lives from social workers and started to run their programmes. The term “disabled” originated in the early 1980s at the birth of Disabled People’s International (DPI)¹, a cross disability international non-governmental organisation. It was coined by disabled people themselves when they organised themselves to advocate for their human rights (Hurst, 2005). Those who prefer the identity-first language (disabled people) contend that this fits the social model even better than does people-first language (people with disabilities/PWDs), as it emphasises that the person is disabled not by their body, but by a world that does not

¹ Disabled Peoples International (DPI) is a human rights organisation committed to the protection of the rights of people with disabilities and the promotion of their full and equal participation in society. Established in 1981, DPI is represented through active membership of national organisations of disabled people in over 130 countries

accommodate them, but shuts them out with architectural and attitudinal barriers). The present study utilises the two terms interchangeably.

The etymological form of the word “disabled” means “rendered incapable” (Okrent, 2015). Indeed, disabled people are “rendered incapable” by society with all the obstacles placed in their way, thereby hampering their full inclusion and participation in society. Disabled people did not want to identify with terms forced on them by agencies as they no longer had to be institutionalised, but could live in the same communities as the rest of their families and thrive there. Also, the word handicap conjured the idea of a beggar with a cap in hand unacceptable to disabled people who fought to be recognised as active participants in the economy (Okrent, 2015).

2.7.2 From “differently abled” to “disabled”

In an attempt to be polite to disabled people, many err in referring to them as “differently abled”. This term was utilised for a long time by the World Council of Churches in its work on issues of disability. Disabled people resent this term, arguing “Who in this case is not ‘differently abled’ in the entire world population?” (Kabue, 2011:6).

According to the Interim statement of the World Council of Churches (2003), “the disabled” have struggled hard to become recognised as ‘disabled people’. The fight was worthwhile for two reasons. First, throughout history, disabled people have been de-personalised and perceived as a problem to be dealt with. Second, they are often seen as a homogenous group whose individual differences do not need to be respected” (WCC, 2003).

2.8 Disability culture

Barnes and Mercer (2003:517) affirm that throughout history disabled people in mainstream society have been characterised by “stressing their significant ‘abnormalities’”. On the definition of disability culture, the same authors (2003:522) assert that “disability culture presumes a sense of common identity and interests that unite disabled people and separate them from their nondisabled counterparts”.

Barnes and Mecer (2003:528) acknowledge that African nations have also contributed to developments in disabled people's organisations:

While the growth of the disabled people's movement has progressed significantly on a worldwide basis, the Euro-American literature on disability has been slow to acknowledge and review non-Western approaches to disability, including the form and character of disability culture(s)...This Eurocentric tendency to categorise notions of disability in other parts of the world, where most people (disabled and nondisabled) are thought of as "primitive" or variants on a "personal tragedy," is an approach that has not been seriously addressed by disability writers.

In one of her articles in Britannica.com, Susan Peters (2014) asserts that studies of disability culture "indicate that people who have impairments often define themselves not by their impairments but in relation to disablement in cultural contexts". Thus, the primary impetus of the beginning of the disability culture can be attributed to the rise of disability rights movements, as disabled people came together in different parts of the world to fight against their institutionalisation and segregation. The World Health Organisation (WHO) (2000:3) indicates that attitudes towards disability have steadily changed since the early 1970s, largely due to the self-organisation of disabled people and by the growing tendency to see disability as a human rights issue.

According to Peters (Britannica.com, 2014):

The 1970s saw remarkable growth in disabled communities, an expansion that ultimately spawned what became known as disability culture. In Africa during that decade, young disabled people in Zimbabwe were institutionalized in residential missionary schools. Isolated from their families and geographically removed from society at large, young people with impairments formed strong ties with each other and a support system among themselves. At one school, in Nguboyenia, self-described "inmates" decided to start a social club, through which they organized excursions and held discussions that enabled them to become aware of their solidarity and the common injustices they experienced. They launched a countrywide campaign and membership drive. Eventually they established clubs in every district of Zimbabwe and a headquarters in the city of Bulawayo that they called Freedom House, where they could congregate as a community and develop a shared group identity. The organization later became known as the National Council of Disabled Persons of Zimbabwe.

Further, Barnes and Mecer (2003:522) assert that

disability consciousness is enhanced when there is agreement on the source of their collective social exclusion. This division between “insiders” and “outsiders” is developed and maintained by specific cultural styles, customs, and social interaction such as in segregated, residential schooling or from a distinctive language (as with Deaf culture).

Barnes and Mecer (2003:522) also point out that a disability culture does not consider “the notion of impairment-difference as a symbol of shame or self-pity and stresses instead solidarity as a positive identification”.

2.9 The impact of disability on individuals and families

Whereas provision for disabled people was previously made through solutions that segregated them, such as special schools and residential institutions, currently the shift is towards mainstreaming and inclusion, both in education and community services (WHO, 2011:3). This shift is due to the recognition of disabled people as rights holders and has culminated “in 2006 with the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)” (WHO, 2011:3). The CRPD is a landmark treaty, now ratified by more than 170 countries, which has warranted “a concomitant shift in global initiatives, most notably the 2015 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)” (Groce, 2018:724).

Disabled people and their families encounter a lot of discrimination. According to the Evangelical dictionary of theology, discrimination is defined as: “Treating people unfairly because they are members of a group marked by certain physical, religious, or social characteristics” (Treier & Elwell, 2017:247). Having a disabled family member can take a toll on the entire family and can thus either make or break the family. For instance, fathers of children born with disabilities may either abandon their families or family cohesion may be strengthened. Disability impacts on individuals and families in different ways such as physically, emotionally and economically. This impact cuts across disability type, age as well as country. It does tend to be worse in developing countries, as opposed to developed countries, due to a general lack of resources.

2.9.1 Physical impact

As a result of discrimination, disabled people and their families constantly encounter barriers due to the way buildings are designed and constructed. Prior to the ratification of treaties, such as the UNCRPD (2006), disabled people were either kept in back rooms in their homes or institutionalised. The exclusionary way of providing support for disabled people confined them to special schools and institutions, removing them from their communities. Therefore, they were never part of the broader society. Exclusion of disabled people resulted in infrastructure and facilities being designed only for nondisabled people, thereby not accessible to disabled people. For instance, a building which has stairs and no ramp at the entrance excludes disabled people who utilise wheelchairs as their means of mobility. When disabled people are not taken into consideration at the stage of design, they will remain excluded from many public spaces and services, even those that claim to be inclusive. To this end, having a disabled family member poses challenges for families, especially those that do not have their own means of transport. Depending on public transport and government hospital emergency services compromises the health and by extension, the lives of disabled people.

2.9.2 Economic impact

The economic impact of disability on individuals and families cannot be underestimated. Disability can “consume a disproportionate share of a family’s resources of time, energy and money, so that other individual and family needs go unmet” (Singhi, Goyal, Pershad, Singhi & Walia, 1990:178). For instance, costs incurred by disabled people and their families include, but are not limited to, modifying the home, additional medical and transport costs as well as acquisition of assistive devices and personal assistance. Although some services may be publicly funded, “knowing what services and programs one is eligible for and then working with a bureaucracy to certify that eligibility (often repeatedly) is another major challenge faced by families” (Sloper & Turner, 1992:264). In some instances, a family member (usually female) has to forego a career to care for a disabled family member.

2.9.3 Emotional impact

Increased caretaking demands placed on families of disabled people result in enormous stress and fatigue, which are emotionally and physically strenuous on disabled people and

their families. This pressure tends to be more severe in individuals with acquired disabilities and families as they grieve the loss of ability and are uncertain about what to expect in the future in terms of the level of dependency and caring for their loved ones. Hence, there is an “increased risk of psychological and behavioural symptoms in the family members of persons with disabilities” (Singer & Powers, 1993:10). People may react negatively towards disability by “avoidance, disparaging remarks or looks, or overt efforts to exclude people with disabilities and their families” (Patterson, Jernell, Leonard & Titus, 1994:152). It is worth noting that families often indicate that although caring for a disabled family member may be challenging, the burden comes mostly from “dealing with people in the community whose attitudes and behaviours are judgmental, stigmatising, and rejecting of the disabled individual and his or her family” (Turnbull, Patterson, Behr, Murphy, Marquis, & Blue-Banning, 1993:36). Despite numerous challenges involved in taking care of disabled family members, many families with a disabled member have an adaptive capacity to cope with caring for a disabled member and this is referred to as “family resilience” (Singer & Powers, 1993:12).

In the African culture, families who have disabled members often experience “social stigma by association” referred to as “courtesy stigma” or “affiliate stigma” (Bunning et al., 2017:3), because they are no longer referred to by their real or family name, but are labelled with derogative names like the family with the “cripple” or “schizo” child, mother or father.

For example, if John has a visual impairment, it is easier for society to identify him with his disability than his real name. Similarly, the whole family in which they are found is thus labelled (*abalema, ababofu, abasilu, abatimbe balia; amakara, amatonde kalia* [Those lame, blind, deaf, cripples, albinos]) (Shiriko, 2011:173).

2.10 Disability in the African context

2.10.1 The African context

The African context is a complex phenomenon. Brunsdon (2017:111) contests that the African context cannot be typified in a “generic manner”. Instead, he affirms the “plurality within Africa in terms of faith, beliefs and understanding”, as well as the representation of heterogeneous groups “in terms of ethnicity and expression of cultural practices and beliefs” as characteristic of the African context (2017:111).

As diverse as African people may be, Brunsdon (2017:111-112) however also asserts that Africans as a collective do share some similarities. Hence, it is possible to “talk about aspects of an African worldview and African culture which many Africans share, irrespective of their specific contexts”.

Furthermore, Brunsdon (2017:112) contends that:

The African context must be understood as any location with a concentration of African people, thus creating a specific context. An African context thus not only exists in Ghana, Kenya or any other African country, but also in a multicultural country like South Africa.

Louw (2008:147) asserts that the concept of “Africa” does not necessarily indicate “a continent, race, ethnicity or merely a culture”. He further captures what constitutes Africa as follows:

“Africa” is a philosophical concept which describes the complexity and diversity of different cultural, local and contextual settings as related to a state of being and mind. The reference to “Africa” is an attempt to describe the unique contribution of the high diversity of modes of being in Africa to a global world.

Given the aforesaid, Louw (2008:147) argues that Africa cannot just be assumed to denote “one homogenous group,” but that Africans are a diverse people, with completely different cultural backgrounds and ways of life.

Furthermore, Louw (2008:147) goes on to depict Africa as a spiritual construct:

Africa is also a spiritual category. It is an inclusive category describing the “spirit” of people living in Africa. Africa functions as a hermeneutical paradigm indicating a unique approach to life that differs from the analytical approach emanating from Western thinking and Hellenism. Africa is an attempt to describe and interpret how different cultures contribute to a better understanding of the dominant features of a mode of living and a philosophy of life, it refers to, among other things, the needs and unique struggles of people in this continent.

2.10.2 African worldview, beliefs and culture

Wherever an African context is found, it is carried by a particular worldview that can also be typified as an African worldview.

According to Taves, Asprey and Ihm (2018:208)

We understand worldviews as a complex set of representations related to questions such as ontology (what exists, what is real), epistemology (how do we know what is true), axiology (what is the good that we should strive for), praxeology (what actions should we take) and cosmology (where do we come from and where are we going).

To Barker (1999:522) worldview is a way that a person is inclined to understand his or her relationships with nature, objects and other people and even with spirituality. When we narrow it down to be in line with this study, Asante (1987:23) indicates that an African worldview is mostly based on cultural beliefs, practices and value systems. In agreement with the afore-mentioned, Van der Walt (2001:67) reminds us that unlike the West that is concerned with the past, the present and the future, an African worldview emphasises the past. In other words, current issues that confront Africans are mostly dealt with through frameworks formed in the past. Encountering the unfamiliar and phenomena that deviate from the norm are thus judged according to past frameworks of knowledge and understanding. Not surprising, therefore, is the issue of how Africans treat disabled people relates to beliefs passed on from generation to generation.

Hand in hand with the African worldview, is the African culture that is expressive of the unique worldview of Africans. Barker (1999:114) strongly believes that culture includes issues of customs, values, ideology and religious behaviour of a particular group of people or society. In agreement with Barker and expanding this concept, Krenawi & Graham (2003:9-10) suggests that culture is “the totality of ideas, beliefs, values, knowledge and a way of life of a group of people who share a certain historical, religious, racial, linguistic, ethnic or social background”.

Eskay, Onu, Igbo, Obiyo and Ugwuanyi (2012:475) believe that many cultural anthropologists deem culture as a total way of life of a society, its traditions, habits and beliefs. They go on to state that “culture denotes an identifiable pattern of behaviour exhibited in response to diverse phenomena in the environment”. However, Van der Walt (2008:477) contends that tradition should be tampered with in a traditional African society. It is a bond that holds a society in one grip and as such, members of that particular society

cannot risk straying away from that fixed tradition. In other words, the existing order to which they position themselves is sustained by various myths and rituals.

Similarly, Cant, Brink and Brijball (2006:56) also propound that culture is not a narrow outlook of society's activities, but rather encompasses all those activities that embody the behaviour of a particular society – the way they talk, their appearance and their general social patterns. For his part and in agreement with the afore-going, Walters (2010:38) views culture as a collective encoding or indoctrination of the mind that distinguishes members of one category of society from members of another category. In agreement with Walters, Anagwo (2014:280) sees culture as that complex total which comprises knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

Intertwined with the African worldview and culture, beliefs that are unique to Africans are also distinguishable. Ndlovu (2016:31) suggests that “African indigenous beliefs are an indispensable part of an intricate network of ideas, knowledge, values, ethics, art, attitudes, norms, rituals, taboos, social traditions and institutions that constitute the main ingredients of the total way of life of African people”. This view expressed by Ndlovu is not surprising at all. In fact, Maluleke (2010:371) also makes a very interesting observation. According to him, African beliefs are so important that almost all contemporary African societies including Muslims and Christians, continue to uphold, cherish and integrate them into all aspects of their lives.

While it seems possible to differentiate between different aspects of African life, like worldview, culture and beliefs from a theoretical point of view, it is however difficult to distinguish these aspects in the daily life and practices of African people. All these aspects culminate and work together to produce what can broadly be regarded as an African way of life where life and the issues and challenges of life are dealt with in a unique way, distinguishing itself from ways found in other cultures or societies. From this framework, the next section attempts to articulate how Africans think about and act towards the disabled based on their unique worldview, culture and beliefs.

2.10.3 Disability in the African context

In the ensuing discussion, disability is viewed in the African context, where the idea of context is inclusive of the African worldview, culture and beliefs as discussed above.

Ndlovu (2016:32) holds the view that indigenous African beliefs are inconsistent on the issue of disability, because they portray disability and people with disabilities both negatively and positively. The negative aspect arises when disability is characterised as an affliction that should be counteracted in every way possible. Bayat (2014:38) picks up the negative aspect. According to him, children with disabilities in some parts of Cote d'Ivoire are considered cursed. They are sometimes referred to as serpent children, because of the belief that the said children turn into snakes at night and if any disaster was to befall the community, it would be attributed to them because of an evil spirit. He points out an example of a family that was forced to immigrate to Abidjan after the small Ivorian community had continuously put pressure on them to kill their disabled son. The community insisted that killing the disabled son would cleanse the whole community of the curse.

Lintvelt (2015:288) notes that in some parts of Malawi, Swaziland and Lesotho there is the belief that having sexual intercourse with a disabled person can cure HIV/AIDS. He goes on to report that albino women in those countries are frequently raped due to their white skin colour and a desire on the part of some black men to sleep with a white woman.

The affliction that Ndlovu (2016) is referring to is also presented by Mageza (1997:193) who argues that such afflictions are attributed to curses and witchcraft or worse still, that there is some sort of displeasure between the natural and ancestral spirits. An example of this is the belief by most African societies that mental illness is an affliction caused predominantly by witchcraft. On the other hand, healthy children are considered a blessing for manifesting a harmonious relationship between ancestral spirits and natural spirits. Healthy children are viewed as mediums of hope, hope of bringing prosperity to the parents. Lintvelt (2015:291) agrees with Mageza, noting that in some communities in South Africa epileptic fits are considered a visitation by the devil or spirits.

Chisale (2018:2) has observed that people with disabilities among the Ndebele of Matetsi community in Zimbabwe are not afforded the same opportunities as other people. In fact, some are prohibited from living what is considered a normal life. Chisale also notes that women with disabilities among that tribe are not allowed to be married or have their own biological children, as they are perceived to be dependent and helpless. Similarly, Lintvelt (2015:288) observes that in the Masai community in East Africa:

for many parents, having a child with a disability is equal to having something broken, useless and worthless. The son with disability will still have some use maybe as a goat herder or beggar but the disabled girl is of no use...a female child with a disability will mean nothing to the family as she is seen as nothing more than a burden, even something to get rid of as soon as possible.

Mbah-Ndam (1998:251-252) maintains that in most African communities, disability is viewed as punishment from the gods or even a kind of bad omen. He goes on to argue that as a consequence of these beliefs, in some communities such people are either rejected or abandoned. This view is in line with Van der Walt (1997:53) who believes that

African thought exists and differs from Western thought in that Western thought generally ignores the spiritual dimension of phenomena and focuses on the visible, measurable physical reality...Africa does not ignore the supernatural side of reality as the West does. African ontology is concerned with the spiritual world and the forces that play a role in it. Africans regard supernatural causes as the explanation for everything.

Almost in total agreement with Mbah-Ndam, Stone-MacDonald (2012:6) indicates that in the main there are three categories under which the causes of disability are classified. He points out those categories as: 1. traditional animism that views disability as a punishment from God for bad deeds or a spell of witchcraft; 2. those who are more on the religious side, perceive disability as an act of God's will and 3. There are some who believe that disability is caused by modern medicine.

These beliefs emanate from years of oral tradition, while some emanate from the traditional religions of the affected people and societies and have come to be considered as part of their culture.

Ogechi and Ruto (2002:62) bring up the interesting factor of taboos. According to them, some Africans believe that disability is caused by ignorance or the breaking of taboos. One of these taboos is that a pregnant woman would give birth to a disabled child if she had sexual intercourse whilst pregnant. Another example they cite is that of the Nandi community in Kenya, who believe that if a husband of a pregnant woman killed any animal without a good reason, the child carried by his wife would be born with a disability. According to Ogechi and Ruto (2002:63), a family may be punished with a disabled child for any wrong that family commits. In one Ethiopian family, a husband blamed his wife for the disability of their children after the wife had disclosed that she had seen someone with distorted features in the street.

Like in the rest of the world, people with disabilities still encounter various challenges. Ogechi and Ruto (2002:64) observe that it is illegal in Kenya for a person with hearing or visual impairments to be a president of that country. It is illegal, because one of the requirements for being president is that he must be able to read kiSwahili and English and that should not be in Braille or sign language. Lintvelt (2015:290) records that in Zimbabwe, Ghana and Zambia deaf people are not allowed to obtain a driver's licence simply because they are

perceived to be unsafe drivers, whilst in Egypt they are not allowed to vote. Similarly, people with any mental illness in Tanzania are also not allowed to participate in the electoral process, which Lintvelt (2015:291) asserts is a clear indication that disabled people are viewed as incapable of making any sound decisions.

However, Stone-MacDonald (2012:13) is of the opinion that some African societies are slowly changing their beliefs with regards to disability. He argues that in East Africa the number of people who believe disability is caused by witchcraft or retribution from God is slowly decreasing.

Earlier on, Ndlovu is cited as indicating that disability is portrayed as both negatively and positively. On the issue of disability being viewed positively, Ndlovu (2016:35) states that “there are many African proverbs, sayings, and ethical teachings that enjoin society to treat people with disabilities humanely, respectfully and empathetically. The social teaching of Ubuntu is a case in point”. On the very issue of Ubuntu, Biri (2014: 236) notes that it is part of the ethics that encourage a notion of a holistic personhood, the dignity of the other. Mbiti (1989:59) argues that Ubuntu is the essence of the cardinal principle that posits “I am because we are, and since we are therefore I am”.

As an example of disabled people being treated with respect, Ndlovu (2016:36) cites three sayings in Swaziland that warn against treating disabled people with disrespect. They are: “1. Should you laugh at a disabled person, you will also be disabled in future, 2. Should you laugh at a person with albinism, you will also have a child with albinism and 3. One should never make fun of another person’s wound.”

Grobbelaar-du Plessis (2007:412) is emphatic that in some societies disability has a religious as well as moral significance, because it is believed that those born with disabilities are to inspire or redeem others. In fact, in Botswana the birth of a disabled child is considered a blessing, because it is believed that God trusts the parents’ ability to take care of such a child. Still on the issue of religion and in agreement with Grobbelaar-du Plessis, Chataika (2013:122-123) believes that

One of the basic principles of Islam is to believe in the wisdom of Allah, who does not create anything in vain. Also, Allah does not decree anything in which there is not some benefit. By His wisdom, Allah tests parents through having a disabled child. Hence, society should recognise the blessing bestowed upon disabled children and give thanks to Allah’s blessing and pray for good health.

Disabled people are perceived differently in different parts of Africa. Interestingly, the degree to which culture plays a role in people's understanding of disability appears to a large extent to be mediated by the individual's exposure to disabled people. Bunning *et al.* (2017:1) are of the view that in some African communities "disability is attributed to human transgression of social conventions, particularly concerning inappropriate family relations which invoke a curse, supernatural forces affecting the child, the will of God, unexplained events and biomedical factors".

Moore (2004:5) asserts that the father of British Anthropology, Tyler, defines culture this way: "Culture or Civilisation, taken in its wide ethnographic sense, is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society".

Given the afore-said, disability and culture are at times very crucial in determining the position or status that the individual is accorded in society. Eskay *et al.* (2012:476) postulate that "cultural understanding is shaped by the meanings attached to various behaviours by the social and economic organisation of a given society or by other internal and external cultural dynamics, a culture imposes standards upon all citizens of that given culture".

It is important to note that a great number the standards that Eskay *et al.* (2012) are referring to are built on and sustained by various myths and rituals, as already alluded to by Van der Walt (2008).

In South Africa, especially amongst the Sotho-Tswana communities, there are certain expectations attached to a person as a member of the human race. In the main, those expectations are closely linked to the contribution that one can make in the sustenance of the broader community. According to Ntsimane (2012:255), in the Sotho-Tswana communities the definition of a person is at times divided along gender lines. For example, for a man the definition would state: "Monna ke kgomo", meaning a man must possess cattle to indicate his capacity not only to pay *lobola* but also to feed a family. On the other hand, the worth of a female would be determined by her capacity to retain her virginity until marriage. One Tswana idiom states: "mosadi tshwene o jewa mabogo", meaning a woman even though ugly, must be industrious.

Ntsimane's view is completely in line with sentiments expressed by the African theologian Gabriel Setiloane (1986:15) who argues that even one's dignity depends upon what one can do for the broader community. He asserts:

Physically perceived the human person is like a live electric wire which is ever exuding force or energy in all directions. The force that is thus exuded is called “seriti”. Seriti has often been translated to mean dignity or personality. It is like an aura around a person, an invisible shadow, cloud or mist forming something like a magnetic or radar field. While physically its seat is understood to be inside the human body, in the blood, its source is beyond and outside the human physical body.

In other words, both Ntsimane and Setiloane suggest that in the African context, particularly amongst the Sotho-Tswana communities, disabled people who have deformities that prevent them from procreating or participating in activities associated with the sustenance of the broader community have no dignity. In fact, Ntsimane (2012:256) points out plainly that “if seriti (dignity) is what makes someone a motho (person), then people who do not participate in procreation and food production will be regarded in Sotho-Tswana categorisations as less than a motho, a human person”.

This means that disabled people are not accorded the same status as everyone else in the community, thereby classifying them as subhuman. The Tswana indigenous knowledge systems specialist Meiki Masuku told Ngoetjana (2007:52) that:

at times and almost all the time when a (disabled) person does not follow socially and culturally acceptable norms and manners of public behaviour, it was understood in a caring and not patronising way and they would be duly protected from suffering the consequences of the offence.

Bunning *et al.* (2017:16) point out that in countries like Malawi, Zimbabwe, Tanzania and Namibia, where disability is associated or attributed to the flouting of moral values such as incest, the predominant perception of a child born with disability is that the child is a flawed being.

Still on the issue of perceptions, Seezi (2011:393) indicates that in Uganda various ethnic groups traditionally regard disabled people as inferior. It is considered a bad omen when a family has a disabled child. This results in families going to great lengths to hide disabled children from the public eye, also never making them heirs. Therefore, in the past and to some extent currently, disabled people were not taken into consideration when family land is shared amongst children in families, because Seezi (2011:393) points out it was believed that a disabled person could not marry and raise children.

From the above discussion, it transpires that disability in the African context is treated with suspicion and superstition as it is considered a phenomenon that deviates from the norm. This translates to the experience of being excluded and unwanted, as opposed to being fully included as a whole person. The question that emanates from this is how these views of disability are transferred to African faith communities.

2.10.4 Disability and African churches

Anderson (2003:7) postulates that “there is a new *kairos* that is before us”. This statement alludes to the general global tendency of disabled people being welcomed into mainstream society. His view is supported by things such as pro-disability legislation that makes access to education, healthcare and other public facilities possible. However, Anderson then indicates that the same winds of change are not visible in the church, a simple symptom of church – churches that physically remain inaccessible to disabled people in this day and age (Anderson, 2003:9).

Although some studies support the view of the black church as “a major resource for African American families with a disabled family member”, Truclear (1996:20) disputes such claims by indicating that the church could not claim to be a just institution as long as remains unable to come to terms with differences within the community and full inclusion in the life of the church: “That which was once sacred space for African Americans to affirm their worth as human beings has become a place of exclusion for persons with disabilities.” This exclusion of disabled people from church is tantamount to discrimination and is not right, as it is contrary to the will of God for His children. Treier and Elwell (2017:247) emphasise the moral objectionability of discrimination for Christians, “not only because of evil consequences but also because it violates the fundamental biblical motif of love, which assumes the equal worth of all humans”.

Eisland (2002:10) also maintains that in general the church cannot claim to be blameless in the way it treats disabled people, stating that “sadly, rather than offering empowerment, the church has more often supported societal structures and attitudes that have treated people with disabilities as objects of pity and paternalism”. Barber (2019:12) emphasises that there is a difference between a church that provides parking spaces for disabled people and one that possesses a “fully-inclusive attitude and practice within the spiritual, liturgical and social life of the church”.

Whilst some churches would like to be seen as inclusive, disabled people still remain isolated and excluded even within the church community, making them feel even more out of place and without a sense of belonging. This is because even though disabled people may attend church, they are never engaged when they come to church. No wonder many disabled people merely stay at home. Swinton (2012:182-183) points out that the difference between inclusion and belonging is important and asserts, "The law is important and can be central to the process of inclusion. However, while law can change structures it simply cannot change hearts. *The law can legislate for inclusion, but it cannot help people to belong*" (emphasis in original).

Many disabled people wish to participate fully in their faith communities, according to Anderson (2006:37), but face unique barriers that are far greater than those they face in the public sector. For her part, Eisland (2004:584) points out that the sad part of it all is that instead of empowering people with disabilities, the church has adopted societal structures and attitudes that seek to portray people with disabilities as objects of pity and paternalism.

Möller (2013:132) is of the view that practices in churches or faith communities that hinder the inclusion of disabled people include lack of respect for the person concerned, lack of proper understanding of what disability is as well as patronising attitudes. Anderson (2003:38) says that this behaviour is perpetuated by a lack of understanding on the part of those who perceive themselves as nondisabled. He feels that disability should not only be viewed as rooted in the individual's body, but also how it is intricately linked with how society in general has structured itself to respond to human bodies. The view expressed by Anderson (2003) is in line with what Webb-Mitchell (1996:126) observed. He affirms that "a disability is whatever a particular group of people defines as a disability. In other words, every disabling condition is a cultural invention or social construction rather than a personal or private problem".

Earlier on, Stone-MacDonald (2012:6) is cited as alluding to the fact that in some instances Africans hold the belief that disability is a punishment from God for bad deeds or a spell of witchcraft. Eisland (2004:584-585) contends that at times these beliefs are fuelled by certain Biblical texts that communicate a very strong message that physical disability is a distortion of the image of God. Physical disability is presented as a symbol of uncleanness and as a result has to be kept on the periphery of the community. Eisland (2004) goes on to cite Leviticus 21:18-20 that prohibits anyone "blind or lame, or a man that is brokenfooted, or brokenhanded, or crookbackt, or a dwarf, or that hath a blemish in his eye" (Bible, 1991, KJV) from performing priestly duties.

Due to the lack of a proper understanding of what disability is, one of the practices of certain churches is to pray for the “normalisation” or healing of disabled people. Treloar (2000:16) observes that these “normalisation prayers” emanate from the interpretation of some Biblical texts. Such interpretations suggest that disability is punishment for sin and confession is thus required for healing or normalisation. In agreement, Möller (2013:140) is emphatic that those Bible interpretations or misinterpretations have a very oppressing effect on people with disabilities and make them feel completely excluded from churches.

According to Reinders (2013:36), many people in faith communities still hold the view that people with disabilities are defective human beings and their disability is accurate proof of such defect. They still believe that there must be something wrong with a disabled person, because they wouldn’t be disabled otherwise. Lintvelt (2015:292) considers it unfortunate that the discrimination and alienation prevalent in society have found their way into faith communities to the extent that people with disabilities are regarded as broken. Almost in response to Reinders and Lintvelt, Creamer (1995:83) poses the following very pertinent and profound questions:

If our disabilities are taken as a sign of physical brokenness, and this physical brokenness is an indicator of spiritual brokenness, then what can the kingdom of God hold for us? Does salvation require us to become something other than what we are? We will be whole in heaven, but does that mean that I will not have my disability? Yet I consider my disability to be a central part of who I am. I cannot be whole without it.

Webb-Mitchel (2010:30-31) argues that there are many Bible texts, both in the Old and New Testaments, which speak to the inclusion as opposed to exclusion of disabled people. He makes reference to Isaiah 43:4-8 in which God commands the prophet to gather all people. In part it states: “Bring forth the blind people that have eyes, and the deaf that have ears.” Webb-Mitchel (2010:30-31) also makes reference to Galatians 3:28, which says: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female.” His emphasis is on the latter part of the verse, which says “ye are all one in Christ Jesus”. He deems “all” to include disabled as well as nondisabled people. In agreement, Lintvelt (2015:297) affirms that through the cross of Jesus Christ, all human-imposed inequality amongst people was taken away.

God, through His only begotten Son Jesus, has given us the greatest gift by loving and redeeming us from sin, thereby, making us all one in Christ. To that end, Christians ought to love one another in such a way that they become one in Jesus Christ. It is in loving one

another that we can comprehend the true image of God in each human being, irrespective of all our imperfections. Swinton (2012:186) asserts that:

Spiritual love helps us to look properly, to look into, at, past, and through difference and towards Jesus, the one who lives within each human person. It is as we look to Jesus and as we learn to look at one another as Jesus looks at us, that we learn what it means to love one another in and all of our differences.

Instead of segregating people with disabilities, churches ought to foster unconditional acceptance of disabled people. Eisland (2004:586) suggests that

We must come to see disability neither as a symptom of sin nor as an opportunity for virtuous suffering or charitable action. The Christian community as a whole must open itself to the gifts of persons with disabilities, who like other minority groups, call the church to repentance and transformation.

In fact, Carter (2007:23) postulates that such acceptance will lead to churches being hospitable beyond a simple greeting, demonstrated by authentic and substantial gestures that signify the importance of being together. In other words, what Carter means is that real and lasting relationships must be built in churches to accommodate people with disabilities. Carter (2007:33) adds that “a church that wants to be inclusive will work for a balance where people with disabilities are not only recipients of services, but also have a chance to serve others”.

Webb-Mitchel (2010:18) contends that disabled people are rightfully demanding full and total inclusion within faith communities. He also points out that total inclusion means much more than simply adding ramps outside church buildings and designating parking spaces. According to Webb-Mitchel (2010:18),

The Latin root of the word inclusion is roughly translated as to shut in or enclose. In other words, people with disabilities are demanding equal right to be included and thus shut in or be enclosed within faith communities of their choice, like the rest of us who self-identify as nondisabled are within communities of faith.

African churches, especially those that are charismatic in nature, are mostly focused on preaching about prosperity and healing, and this kind of preaching has been viewed by some as “an impetus for delusion” (Togarasei, 2011:337). Togarasei (2011:341) points out that prosperity is not only about money but health as well. Disability is the least of their concern as disabled people are still marginalised and considered a burden and not an integral part of the church. This is very unfortunate because disability is part of the human experience – it

can happen to anyone at any time. That is, no one has a guarantee that it will never happen to them. The prosperity gospel further excludes people with disabilities, as most of them are poor, dependent on social grants and struggling to make ends meet. Togarasei (2011:336) defines poverty as “the lack of basic needs for survival”. The basic needs identified by Togarasei are “food, water, shelter, health care and education”. The focus on prosperity shuts disabled people out because, whilst they are expected to “sow a seed” by contributing with tithes and offerings, they are in need of assistance for basic necessities such as food, clothing shelter, access to health care and education. The focus on healing smacks of an insult to disabled people, because it does not accept that the image of God is still the same in them but tarnished or broken. In worst case scenarios, the focus on healing in preaching may even send the message that the image of God has nothing to do with disabled people, as they are defective and God is perfect. Instead, it emphasises sin and inadequate faith. The rapid growth of charismatic churches and the reality of abject poverty in Africa is a paradox (Togarasei, 2011:336). According to the prosperity gospel, “getting rich is seen as God’s will and an outward manifestation of blessings”. The only requirement according to the prosperity gospel, is faith in God (Togarasei, 2011:339). Bible texts are cited to support the prosperity gospel; namely Deuteronomy 8:18² and John 10:10³. A disability does not characterise “abundant” life as there are a lot of challenges, which in themselves require additional costs, further depleting what meagre resources disabled people may have. As African governments promote democracy, national unity and human rights which include disability rights, likewise the church should also endeavour to look out for disabled people not just to objectify them, but to acknowledge, empower and tap into their gifts in order to enrich God’s service.

2.11 Preliminary synthesis

This chapter has executed the first of Osmer’s (2008:4) four practical theological investigation tasks – the descriptive-empirical task that requires determining the status quo and thus poses the question: “What is going on?” Collecting relevant information and observation are key to this task as they reveal “patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situation or contexts” (Osmer, 2008:4). To that end, it has highlighted the phenomenon of disability as a universal and complex evolving concept, its epidemiology, different typologies and aetiology; its physical, economic and emotional impacts; the unfair burden placed on individuals and families as well as the tectonic focus on disability issues that the past three decades have

² It is God who gives power to get wealth

³ The abundant life promised by God is one of wealth

witnessed. It is worth mentioning that executing the descriptive-empirical task has unearthed critical aspects, such as the fact that the cost of exclusion outweighs the cost of inclusion. It sheds light on how disability is perceived in the African context in the light of African culture, beliefs and worldviews. The African context was denoted as a philosophical and spiritual construct, thereby highlighting it positively as a rich construct instead of highlighting only what is underdeveloped and negative about the African continent. The descriptive-empirical task places a responsibility on preachers to be cognisant of their hearers' diverse situations.

Chapter three seeks to look into the phenomenon of disability in the African context, church practice and preaching to thereby engage the interpretive task of practical theological investigation that poses the question: "Why is this going on?"

Chapter three: Disability in the African context, church practice and preaching

3.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the phenomenon of disability within the framework of the African context, church practice and preaching. Whilst chapter two attempted to describe the phenomenon of disability in the African context, this chapter pursues the hermeneutical function of practical theological investigation, namely to come to an understanding of why disability is treated in church practice and preaching in the way it was described in the previous chapter. This pursuit aligns with the interpretive task in seeking to understand why church practice and preaching in the African context do not endeavour to debunk the myths surrounding the phenomenon of disability, but instead seem to perpetuate them. The interpretive task necessitates “sagely wisdom” on the part of the researcher (Osmer, 2008:49-53). Thus, the interpretive task should provide pointers for an appropriate response in terms of an inclusive homiletic in the African context.

The task of this chapter is thus to understand or to interpret why the state of affairs is the way it is. In seeking to understand or to interpret the status quo, Osmer’s second task of “why is this going on?” (Osmer, 2008:4) engages the reality of disability as well as the impact of the African context, culture, beliefs and worldview on church practice and preaching.

3.2 Disability in African culture and beliefs

As discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear that disability is also a reality amongst Africans. It however seems that protecting, promoting and addressing the rights of disabled people are still not receiving the urgent attention that they deserve. The myths and suspicions surrounding disability play a critical role in how disabled people are perceived and treated in their homes, communities as well as faith communities. The past three decades have witnessed significant, decisive action taken by disabled people by organising themselves to fight against discrimination and stigma. The self-organisation of disabled people has led to the ratification of treaties such as the CRPD (2006) by different countries around the globe (WHO, 2011).

However, a great deal of suspicion and prejudice against people with disabilities persist. This can be attributed to preconceived ideas, myths, superstitions and beliefs about disabilities and disabled people held by many Africans. For instance, the belief that disabled people are cursed has resulted in infanticide, isolation and/or rejection of disabled people together with

their families. Devlieger (1995:101) notes that the belief in witchcraft places the problem of disability on the family rather than on the individual, thus families with disabled members lose their identity and experience “affiliate stigma” (Bunning *et al.*, 2017:3).

Indeed, there are many complexities associated with disability. The physical, economic and emotional impacts of disability on individuals and their families are far reaching, often resulting in families being fatigued and a reluctance to go out in public and face “affiliate stigma”. Although governments may provide social grants and tax rebates for the disabled, disabled people and their families are still burdened by direct personal costs, resulting in disadvantaged financial circumstances. Hence, disabled persons continue to be economically disadvantaged.

Despite national and international attention that has been focused on issues of disability for the past three decades, which helped to bring about positive change in the treatment and status of disabled persons, most African cultures still hold the view that disability is linked to witchcraft, a curse or a bad omen (Munyi, 2012) and thus some families find it difficult to accept that the birth of a disabled child is not associated with witchcraft (Stone-MacDonald, 2012:6). African beliefs about disability can also contribute to a rift between neighbours and communities, as they promote the notion that disabled people are not only a curse or bad omen to their immediate families but to the entire village/community. In order to evade such a curse, a blood sacrifice had to be performed. This blood sacrifice “at times involved killing the person with disability (PWD from henceforth) so as to remove the ‘curse’” (Razaka, 2011:316).

Earlier on, Walters (2010:38) was cited as proposing that culture is a collective encoding or indoctrination of the mind that distinguishes members of one category of society from members of another category. More specifically, Thabede (2014:234) postulates that “African culture refers to the customs, beliefs, values, knowledge, habits and a way of life of the African people”.

Oguntoye (2012:180) is of the view that even though culture is perceived as a powerful tool in the existence and survival of humanity, it is still fragile because it is constantly changing to adapt or easily lost. In agreement, Du Plessis (2017:6) asserts that indeed “every culture has the potential to change and while certain deeds or acts can be changed by learning new behaviour, real change in a culture is only possible when the deepest layer (religion) is changed”.

Culture, beliefs, church practice and preaching are intricately interwoven in Africa. At heart, Africans are people who maintain a spiritual worldview, linking ordinary life to their

understanding of the divine. Although some African countries can be said to be more Westernised and/or Christianised, such as South Africa, “the majority of South Africans are of African descent” (Brunsdon, 2019:3) and hence, culture and beliefs impact significantly on church practice and preaching. Du Plessis (2017:5) points out the importance of human beings serving “God in and with their culture; they cannot do it outside of their own culture”. Otherwise it “will not be relevant to their situation and results in dualism”.

Brown (1995:314-315) contends that “apart from culture there could be no religions...wherever nature or God touches the human, culture becomes a factor”. Simply put, culture is an integral part of human existence.

Niebuhr (1956:58-228) conceptualises the relationship between Christ and culture by making use of five viewpoints or models, namely:

- Christ against culture – the rejection and anti-model
- Christ of/within culture – the accommodation model
- Christ above culture – the synthesis model (for instance, Christ is Lord over culture but still regards the relevance of culture)
- Christ and culture in paradoxical tension – the dualistic model
- Christ the transformer of culture – the operational model

Although the first of Niebuhr’s five models gives the impression of antagonism between Christ and culture, the subsequent models highlight the fact that Christ is not repulsed by culture, but as Lord of all creation, Christ accommodates culture and “it appears that Christ serves only to enhance culture and beauty” (Brown, 1995:317). It is an awe-inspiring realisation that Christ in His Lordship does not look down on culture nor seeks to condemn or annihilate it, as the early missionaries did by perceiving of African culture as “heathen culture” and attempted to Christianise Africans in a way that entailed dissociating them from anything that did not make sense to them. Gifford (2008:31) indicates that

The uniqueness and freshness of Jesus’ teaching concerns his emphasis of the need to rise above ethnic, racial, class and hierarchical barriers. Jesus showed no discrimination towards people he came into contact with...by urging his followers to acknowledge the dignity and cultural integrity of other people he established a new community and gave it a new identity...The uniqueness of Christian faith is derived from its universal appeal, which, ideally, goes so far as to ensure that no culture has ascendancy over any other, but rather that the equal validity of all is affirmed.

Louw (2008:153) posits that according to the “African perspective the human being cannot be understood separate from cultural issues and values. Humans are embedded in culture”.

Brown (1995:316) observes that “among post liberal theologians, there is no denying that the Christian story is itself in some sense cultural; but its values are seen as independent of, and often contrary to, those of culture at large”. Simply put, whether people are Christians or not, culture will always be an indispensable part of human existence.

The following assertion by Theuri (2002:193-194) paints a clear picture of the state of affairs in Africa before the arrival of missionaries:

African development was holistic and inclusive, it was always guided by fundamental values of generosity, solidarity and hospitality to all...Everyone was “equal” to each other; resources were well and equally distributed among all. The sick, the orphaned, the widows, the Africans lived in the model that is only reflective of the Early Church...African communities practised more or less what the early church practised (Acts 4, 1ff). Bearing this argument in mind, one can say with certainty that Africa was developed in all aspects of life...Everyone did what was best for the community regardless of their personal gains...the African traditional system thus seems in many ways to be the ideal one.

Africans tend to perceive Christ as foreign to African Christianity and continue to rely on ancestors and traditional African medical practitioners for answers to whatever challenge they encounter (Magezi & Magezi, 2017:2). The continued reliance of African Christians on ancestors and traditional African medical practitioners is attributed to the “unrelatedness of Christ with African Christians” and so they turn to what they know for sure instead of turning to Christ – they think that Christ cannot be considered an answer to all of life’s challenges (Magezi & Magezi 2017:2). The insecurity in most African Christians is the result of their inability to bring Jesus Christ to their everyday life and take him as the Saviour who can save them “from the terrors and fears that they experience in their traditional worldview” (Bediako, 2004:23).

3.2.1 Ancestors/Amadlozi/Badimo

Theron (1996:45) is of the opinion that the belief in ancestors has not disappeared and that ancestors still play an important role in the lives of African Christians.

It must be noted that in the world of ancestors/*amadlozi/badimo* not all people attain the same status. Mkhize (2017) explains that not all elders who have passed on

are categorised as *amadlozi* in a positive sense...This doesn't mean that this person is necessarily cursed or pushed aside, but rather they don't become the central figure when family rituals and sacrifices are being made. An ancestor...was known for evilness and so on, is often seen as *idlozi elibi* (evil ancestor)...becomes an ancestor by virtue of blood ties only, but for all intents and purposes, has a diminished status in the world of the living as well as that of the living-dead.

Furthermore, Mkhize (2017) refers to ancestors/*amadlozi/badimo* as a "life-giving force", and also affirms that "the living are dead without their beloved, and revered living-dead". This denotes the importance of ancestors in the African culture. Although missionaries taught Africans, when they introduced Christianity, to do away with their traditional beliefs and culture, there are Christians who believe strongly in *amadlozi* even in this day and age.

Catholics for instance find that their veneration of their ancestors is similar to the idea of asking saints to intercede between them and God. There is clearly no confusion about substituting the ancestors for God. God is always seen as the supreme being and the creator of heaven and earth while ancestors are seen to be spiritual intermediaries (Mkhize, 2017).

Whenever individuals or families experience a series of misfortunes, some of them and even people in the community attribute misfortune to "*ulaka lwabaphansi/bohale ba badimo*" (wrath of the ancestors) and this leads to the suggestion to appease the ancestors. More often than not, appeasing ancestors involves the slaughtering of an animal such as a goat, cow or even a chicken. In line with this, Mkhize (2017) posits that "another way of expressing a similar sentiment in hard times is that of *ukulungisa* or *ukuqinisa umsamo*, the reinforcement and cleansing of one's spiritual centre or pillar".

In agreement with Mkhize, Wanamaker (1997:294) affirms:

The major role of an ancestor is the opposite to that of bringing about misfortune to maintain good behaviour and social order. The ancestor is also a source of benefit, a giver and sustainer of the life of his descendants. Jesus after his death performs this task continuously for his living family, the church.

Bediako (1995:228) seeks to portray ancestral veneration of Africans in a positive light and links it to Scripture by remarking that

It is such an appropriation of Scriptures, rooted in a positive theology of ancestors, which enables us to read the Gospel as having something to do with us in the

present. The relevance of the Scriptures as the interpreter of the past, therefore, establishes their validity for the present. A theology of ancestors connects with an Ancestor-Christology in which Christ features as Lord among the ancestors too. In this way, the continued significance of ancestors within the life of African Christianity comes to pass through the prism of Christology, revealing in the process, the many-sided manner in which the ancestors have been part of the story of the making of Christian Africa.

On the other hand, Turaki (1999:254) draws African Christians to the reality and supremacy of God by affirming that Jesus is the only mediator between God and man and that nothing will change this. Hence, Turaki cautions against the idolatry of considering ancestors as intermediaries who receive “prayers, libation or invocation” and thereby taking Christ’s place of mediating between God and man.

Given the aforesaid, it is understandable why most Africans experience some confusion when they become Christians – they want to be seen as “true” Christians who do not have anything to do with cultural practices, whilst they continue to engage in cultural rituals/ceremonies in secret such as *mokete/mosebetsi oa badimo* (feast of the ancestors) or *mpho ya badimo* (gift of the ancestors) that requires slaughtering animals and making traditional beer in order to offer food and drink to the ancestors. According to Mbiti (1978:152), Africans do not “worship” ancestors as is commonly believed by Westerners. Instead he indicates that offering food and drink to the ancestors is a sign of fellowship, communion and remembrance. Be that as it may, it is clear that the cultural immersion of Africans has a substantial influence on how they perceive and interpret real-life issues that seem to be out of the ordinary.

The confusion most Africans experience in this regard may relate to the way they perceive Christianity. “Africans thought that they should accept Western cultural forms to enable them to be genuine Christians” (Van der Walt, 1994:14). In other words, although most Africans endeavour to live a virtuous Christian life of faith, they are still caught between the Christian life and their culture, fearing to anger their ancestors and also trying to please God. According to Theron (1996:40), in Protestant churches notions regarding ancestor veneration vary from total opposition, to neutrality, to accommodation. Also, that since Protestant churches still have a tendency to reject ancestor veneration or to express negative attitudes towards it, it does not deter church members from their belief in ancestors and performing the rites of ancestor veneration in secret.

Thus, the relationship between culture and the living of the Christian faith is a complex one for most Africans. On the one hand, there are those who dissociate themselves from their culture and embrace Western culture in a bid to please church leaders who condemn any association with African cultural practices and consider everything African barbaric and backward. "It is erroneous to think that Western culture is morally superior to African culture, and that western customs are consistent with the Christian faith while African customs are not" (Mugambi, 1989:137).

Long before the Christian era, African understanding and conception of divinity existed. Vilanculo (2009:234-235) explains as follows:

In many instances, African beliefs, culture, practices, and faith traditions are strikingly akin to the biblical images and notions of God in the Old Testament, the faith practices, culture and traditions of Israel as God's chosen nation. In the history of the Christian faith, Africa has once been home to a strong, vibrant, and dynamic culture and tradition of Christianity.

According to Kanyandago (2002:50),

the African has been hurt and humiliated in what constitutes his/her world and system of values, especially his/her symbolic structure...This has led to ...all forms of self-denial by Africans as they express and live hatred for what is African because this is perceived as primitive and backward. This is the worst form of poverty because it attacks the African in what makes him/her African; this is anthropological poverty.

This is due to centuries of "negative discourse on Africa" as well as the historical and ideological representation of Africa as "the dark continent" (Maluleke, 2010:371). Mugambi (1989:22) asserts that Africans should be proudly African and "do not have to choose between being Christian and being African. They can be both Christian and African at the same time". Louw (2008:153) also disagrees with the rejection of culture and asserts that "culture in itself is an expression of the creative and imaginative human spirit. In itself it can be viewed as a sacred endeavour".

What again comes to the fore is that human beings and culture are inseparable. Hence, Du Plessis (2017:2) cogently avers that "we can work towards confirming the good in the different cultures with true understanding. The outcome can be a culture where the covenant relationship with Yahweh can find expression in moral action and upright living".

The role that culture plays in the perception of disabled persons in the African context should not be underestimated. “Culture also defines the boundaries of inclusion and exclusion” (Ogada, Ikenye and Mukadi, 2019:69) and therefore readily welcoming, accepting and including disabled people in church practice and preaching are hampered by existing African worldviews and beliefs, as culture “defines” and dictates how things should be done in the African context or any other context.

However, Thabede (2014:233-234) deems the African worldview as a yardstick that has been used to describe the cultural norms and values of indigenous Africans. In other words, it is primarily the worldview that informs Africans as to how they should handle and or relate to any challenge that confronts them, including the phenomenon of disability.

3.3 The impact of context and worldviews on church practice and preaching

Van der Walt (2008) argues that in our understanding of reality the impact of the worldview evident in particular contexts, should not be underestimated, but rather used as a hermeneutical key in order to understand practices and realities.

This requires us to enquire on a deeper level into the African context and worldview in order to establish more directly the influence it has on church practice and preaching.

The term “African-centred worldview” or “Afrocentric/Africentric worldview” has been used to describe the cultural values of people of African origin and African descent throughout the world (Graham, 2010:370). From time immemorial Africans have had a belief system that governs their everyday life. They have always believed that life cannot just be lived in a vacuum and that there needs to be a structural order. The foundation and cornerstone of that structural order were and are still their traditions, culture and customs. These traditions, culture and customs were and are still so entrenched in communities that they form their worldview and are therefore passed on through stories and myths and at times enforced without question.

If we are to take an earlier suggestion of Walters (2010) that culture is an encoding of the mind, it would then mean that culture and beliefs relate to each other in an intrinsic way. Thabede (2014) argues that a worldview can be perceived as a yardstick that is used to describe cultural norms. It is therefore safe to assume that the African worldview originates from what Africans believe on a deep level.

According to Haihambo (2004), as highlighted earlier on, the myths about the causes of disability have been found to be common among some African ethnic groups. For instance, a disabled child is the result of the family's failure to attend church. Disability is also attributed to witchcraft during the gestation period. In the case of albinism, it is believed that the mother has slept with a white man or a ghost.

The African worldview and beliefs found their way into the church. Hence, the negative views of disability also permeated practices in African churches. Fundamentally, worldview, beliefs and an African understanding of sin work together to create a belief that disability is a result of sin.

Earlier on, Yong (2010:79) is cited as saying that as a consequence of the aforementioned, something as simple as the inaccessibility of some church buildings is indicative of the fact that faith communities are not interpreting reality from the viewpoint of disabled people – hence merely accommodating disabled people, rather than thinking about them as an integral part of the church and being inclusive in the true sense of the word.

This happened because, as Chilcote and Warner (2008:15) put it, the church conveniently forgot that it exists for the world and that the world does not exist for the church. Instead of accepting and bowing to different worldviews, the church as a giver of life should rather push for the world to embrace its worldview. Hollinger (2004:41) believes that “the Christian worldview helps believers to define their relationships, but it also impacts on their whole lives as it enables them to relate their faith to all spheres of life”.

In other words, Hollinger is saying that the Christian worldview is vital in assisting believers to come to the realisation that they are called in their individual capacities to serve God full time and in all spheres of life. It is a worldview that helps Christians to understand and internalise the fact that they are called to be agents of reformation in their societies. This is of critical importance since creation, especially since humanity was deformed by the fall in the Garden of Eden.

Longchar (2011:47) asserts that “a rather negative theology” towards disabled people still exists. Furthermore, Longchar (2011:47) posits that seemingly “Christian theology is a reflection of faith primarily by able-bodied people for the able bodied”. Hence, Christians conflate disability with sin or wrong doing and consider the birth of disabled children punishment for sins committed by parents, the will of God, a curse or bad omen (Blackdisability.org, 2019). Ndurumo (1993:3) points out that the fate of children born with disabilities in African societies was unfavourable and that in most cases “the child was killed and sent back to God so that He might send another child without disability. Such children

were killed with the full approval of the community and the question of infanticide never arose". As a result, disabled people still experience a great deal of prejudice, suspicion and superstition in the way they are treated.

3.3.1 Prosperity gospel

Although disability is a reality in Africa, it remains taboo in church practice and preaching as many preachers and faith communities tread rather cautiously when it comes to issues of disability and that good examples of a disability homiletic are absent. Churches in general, including African independent or initiated churches (AICs henceforth), go about ecclesiastical practice and preaching as if disability and/or disabled persons do not exist (Ishola-Esan, 2016:117). In the event that disabled people join faith communities, they are either ignored or avoided completely (Webb-Mitchell, 1994:11). In the African context, this may explain why a great deal of attention is rather focused on healing and the prosperity gospel. So-called "healing smacks" in African sermons relates to the idea that people that do not confirm to the norm are in need of a "cure" or a "fix", rather than using preaching as a medium for consolation and acceptance. Instead, the healing and prosperity gospel teaches that good health and resources are there for everyone to claim and that "God provided them for humanity therefore no one should experience poverty" or weakness of any kind (Togarasei, 2011:344). The focus on prosperity pressures members to "sow seeds of prosperity", assuring them that the more "seeds they sow, the more plentiful their harvest would be" (Togarasei, 2011:341).

The gospel of healing and prosperity in Africa affirms the belief that people bring ill health, disability and poverty on themselves. This impression further creates a paradox since Africa is one of the poorest continents and also ravaged by many pandemics (Togarasei, 2011:342). Poverty is a harsh reality in Africa and instead of taking Africans out of poverty, the prosperity gospel puts more strain on the limited resources of Africans by encouraging them to "sow a seed" and to do so generously. Ironically, the prosperity gospel is quite popular in the African context. The question that comes to the fore is how "a gospel that equates faith with prosperity is popular in a context of extreme poverty?" (Togarasei, 2011:342) One possibility might be that Africans fall into the trap of believing the promise of prosperity so as to be rescued from the dire situations they already find themselves in. In a way, they are gullible and desperate to do anything to emancipate themselves from severe poverty. Adherents of prosperity gospel are said to be "deluded in three ways: that they should patiently wait for the day when wealth will manifest, that they are personally

responsible for lack of prosperity through sin and through failure to ‘sow seeds of prosperity’” (Togarasei, 2011:343).

3.3.2 Healing ministry

Many err in claiming to emulate Jesus by focusing on a healing ministry to disabled people. A ministry that focuses on healing creates numerous challenges, which in turn lead to the disgruntlement of disabled persons who do not receive healing. Apart from creating the impression that disabled people who do not receive healing have little or no faith, it also sends a negative message that all church members must be perfect and, therefore, nondisabled. It further sends the message that there is no place for disabled persons in church. Betenbaugh (2000:208) affirms that lack of access to church buildings segregates disabled persons. She further cogently asserts and is thus quoted at length:

We are told by architecture and environment that we are unwanted, inferior. We are told that we have an obligation to be *cured* by the prayers of the church rather than *healed* by people’s acceptance of us as we are. Ableism is a pathology, just like ageism, just like racism. We demonize those bodily states that we fear. Many persons with permanent disabilities fall away, discouraged and disgusted by the church’s inability to separate healing and cure and to recognize that a person can be healed, whole, and still live in a visibly broken, “malfunctioning” body. The church, by its teachings both explicit and implicit, says that we are the visible objectifications of sin, victims, needing the patronization, the pity, and “charity” of the church, rather than a source of wisdom, of an experience of God and the Holy Spirit that May be far deeper, far richer, and far fuller than that of the “normal” person (emphasis in original).

It then follows that disabled persons should not only be accepted, but appreciated as they are - for who they are – without any attempts to change them. Indeed, if nondisabled people could always remember that like death, disability can strike anyone at any time, irrespective of age, gender, race or social standing, then surely issues of inclusion and the full participation of disabled people would be handled differently. In fact, as if to warn those who perpetuate the stigma and discrimination of disabled people, Yong (2015:25) indicates that people who are not disabled are “temporarily nondisabled”. That thought alone, should propel us all to champion the cause of disabled people.

3.3.3 Toxic ministry – toxic faith

The status quo of disabled people in churches is to a great extent exacerbated by church leaders who practice and promote a toxic ministry. Toxic ministry in turn perpetuates toxic faith. According to Arterburn and Felton (2011:19), toxic faith is “a destructive and dangerous involvement in a religion that allows the religion, not a relationship with God, to control a person’s life”. This is an indication that instead of focusing on building good relationships between congregants and God, preachers focus on issues that are not beneficial for the salvation of their congregations. Preachers have a divine mandate to ensure that nothing comes between God and an individual. They are to win souls for God in a manner that is constructive and presents an accurate view of God as a loving God. In other words, God’s unconditional love is to overrule everything else, so that disabled people also feel that indeed God loves them and is not hell-bent on punishing them for some transgression they or their families may have committed.

Arterburn and Felton (2011:36-78) have identified the following 21 common beliefs of a toxic faith):

1. God’s love and favour depend on my behaviour
2. When tragedy strikes, true believers should have real peace about it
3. If I have real faith, God will heal me or someone I am praying for
4. All ministers are men and women of God and can be trusted
5. Material blessings are a sign of spiritual strength
6. The more money I give to God, the more money He will give to me
7. I can work my way to heaven
8. Problems in my life result from some particular sin
9. I must not stop meeting others’ needs
10. I must always submit to authority
11. God uses only spiritual giants
12. True faith means waiting for God to help me and doing nothing until He does
13. If it’s not in the Bible, it isn’t relevant
14. God will find me a perfect mate
15. Everything that happens to me is good
16. A strong faith will protect me from problems and pain
17. God hates sinners, is angry with me and wants to punish me
18. Christ was merely a great teacher
19. God is too big to care about me
20. More than anything else, God wants me to be happy

21. I can become God

These common beliefs of toxic faith create a chasm between a Christian and God, especially the first one – “God’s love and favour depend on my behaviour”; number three – “if I have real faith, God will heal me or someone I am praying for”; number four – “all ministers are men and women of God and can be trusted”; number six – “the more money I give to God, the more money He will give to me”; number eight – “problems in my life result from some particular sin”; and number 16 – “a strong faith will protect me from problems and pain”. These toxic faith beliefs further perpetuate what prosperity and healing gospels want people to believe. When a failed attempt at healing has left all blame on the disabled person, he or she ends up convinced of toxic belief number 19 - “God is too big to care about me”, hence I am not healed. This kind of attitude is cogently expressed by Arterburn and Felton (2011:4) as follows: “Those who possess a toxic faith have stepped across the line from a balanced perspective of God to an unbalanced faith in a weak, powerless or uncaring God. They seek a God to fix every mess, prevent every hurt and mend every conflict”.

3.4 The impact of the African culture on church practice and preaching

The African proverb “it takes a village to raise a child” denotes that African culture is communal in nature. For instance, when a young couple welcomes a baby into the family, older men and women in the community rally around the new parents to support them in every way they can. This support does not end with the parents, but even extends to community members constituted by neighbours, teachers, pastors, church members, nurses, doctors and others nurturing and guiding the new born as he or she grows up. This is done because a child in the African context is considered to belong not only to his or her biological family, but to the community as a whole, hence he or she is said to have “communal obligation to society” (Rutachwamagyo, 2011:363). However, the birth of disabled babies “is viewed with suspicion” because it is associated with wrongs committed and the same suspicion is portrayed should disability occur “later in life” (Rutachwamagyo, 2011:364). In order to avoid disabled children, infanticide was the answer. Rutachwamagyo (2011:365) notes that after assisting a woman in labour, the traditional birth attendant would break the news to the family. “Reporting that *Mtoto si riziki, bahati mbaya* (child is not a blessing, bad luck) means the born baby has been suffocated outright – on noting signs of severe impairments” (Rutachwamagyo, 2011:365). On the other hand, a disabled child is a shock to the family and after the initial signs of disbelief and sadness, the family may display

overprotection of the child “wanting to protect it from any real or perceived danger or discomfort” (Shiriko, 2011:176).

Africa and the African context are not as easy to understand as it seems. Maluleke (2010:373) cautions against the mistaken notion about the homogeneity of Africa and Africans. He posits that

The idea that Africa is one country and that Africans are one and the same people yesterday, today and forever, refuses to die and it keeps resurfacing both inside and outside Africa. This mistaken assumption was mostly promoted by the historic marginalisation and simplification of Africans for the purposes of subjugation – literal and metaphorical subjugation.

Maluleke (2010:372-373) sheds further light on the diversity of Africa:

Africa is too vast and too diverse a geographical entity for any homogenising or homogenous notion about it to be sustainable. It is the world’s largest and second most populous continent after Asia...Inside Africa is to be found thousands of languages, hundreds of cultures and dozens of religions.

The current status quo of disabled people in African churches – where disabled people are avoided and issues of disability are neglected – can be attributed to “hundreds of cultures and dozens of religions” referred to by Maluleke (2010). There is a lot of negativity and deep rooted fear of disabilities and disabled people. This fear is exacerbated by the multi- and cross-cultural perceptions of disability in Africa. Some persistent beliefs and attitudes towards disability and disabled persons reflect indifference, overprotection, tolerance, fear, hatred, love, discrimination, pity, disgust, reverence, revulsion and outright hostility (Munyi, 2012).

3.5 The impact of African beliefs on church practice and preaching

As noted above, disability is still considered taboo in the African context and thus does not enjoy the same attention as healing and prosperity in preaching. Africans are highly superstitious and thus very uncomfortable with addressing issues considered out of the

ordinary such as disability and disease and would rather avoid it than preach or talk about it, lest the same fate befall them. Even though the cause of illness and/or disability is clear and known in some cases, such as a car accident, due to their belief in spiritual powers, Africans more often than not attribute misfortune, disability and/or illness to an act of God or *ulaka lwabaphansi*/wrath of the ancestors. For Africans, nothing happens accidentally, there must always be an explanation. In other words, witchcraft is also considered as one of the causes of the inexplicable to Africans. Hence, *Inyangas* or *Sangomas* are consulted to make sense of the inexplicable as well as to remove bad spells (Magezi & Magezi, 2017:3-6). The African's belief in *Inyangas* or *Sangomas* is mindboggling since Africans know that *Inyangas* and *Sangomas* do not necessarily have the answers to their predicaments, but instead seem to cause more conflict and “condones wrong conduct, since the diviner can decide that something was caused by some ancestor and the real culprit is exempted from his responsibility” (Van der Walt, 2008:180).

As indicated in the previous chapter, Louw (2008:147) captures the uniqueness of Africa in a mystical and positive light. Once more, it is worth noting that Louw (2008) does not negate the wide differences of non-occidental societies and cultures. Instead, he focuses on what unites them as well as on the hidden beauty that contributes to Africa's rich tapestry:

Africa is a philosophical concept which describes the complexity and diversity of different cultural, local and contextual settings as related to a state of being and mind...Africa is also a spiritual category. It is an inclusive category describing the “spirit” of people living in Africa. Africa functions as a hermeneutical paradigm indicating a unique approach to life that differs from the analytical approach emanating from Western thinking and Hellenism.

The scepticism and negativity that are always focused on Africa are put aside for a change and a rare wealth of Africa is highlighted. Scepticism and negativity about and towards Africa have contributed to “Afro-phobia”, which is witnessed in “the general mistrust of Africans and things African by both Africans and non-Africans alike” (Maluleke, 2010:371).

3.6 Preliminary synthesis

In executing the second of Osmer's (2008:4) four practical theological investigation tasks – the interpretive task that requires determining why things are what they are - “why is this

going on?”, the salient issues in this chapter have been the impact of context, culture, beliefs, worldviews on church practice and preaching. Indeed, the African context is intricate and philosophical in nature. African beliefs, worldviews and culture play a pivotal role in the lives of Africans and should not in any way be underestimated. Hence, in order to truly understand Africans and to have an impactful ministry amongst Africans, their beliefs, worldviews and culture should be studied, respected and embraced. The influence/hold that African beliefs, worldviews and culture have on Africans was highlighted, thereby indicating the intricacy in living the Christian life for Africans. This chapter has also sought to understand why Africans still hold their living dead in high esteem and relating ancestral veneration to a meaningful Christian life. The second task of practical theological investigation calls for preachers to exhibit an attitude of sagely wisdom that endeavours to assist people to “make sense of the circumstances of their lives and world” (Osmer, 2008:82).

Chapter four will engage the normative task of practical theological investigation, which poses the question: “What ought to be going on?”

Chapter four: Perspectives from disability theology, Scriptures and homiletics

4.1. Introduction

In striving towards congregations that are truly inclusive of disabled persons, the mission of the church should endeavour to emulate Jesus. He always reached out to the marginalised, patiently and lovingly listening to their voices and touching their lives in meaningful ways that left them accepted, loved, valued and blessed each time they encountered Him.

The previous chapter described the phenomenon of disability in the African context, church practice and preaching. This chapter seeks to study the phenomenon of disability within the framework of disability theology, selections from Scripture and homiletic theory. In so doing, it aims to engage Osmer's third task of practical theological interpretation or the normative task that poses the question: "What ought to be going on?" This task involves "the use of theological concepts to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts" (Osmer, 2008:131). As such, it intends to uncover principles that can guide an appropriate response towards an inclusive homiletic for the African context.

According to Osmer, (2008:29) the normative task is a "form of prophetic discernment, grounded in a spirituality of discernment: helping others hear and heed God's Word in the particular circumstances of their lives and world". Furthermore, Osmer (2008:135) defines prophetic discernment as portraying Jesus Christ as the one and only unparalleled "revelation of God". Thus, prophetic discernment is an undertaking to heed God's Word and to apply it to real-life situations, especially those that can impact the practices of current-day worshippers. Given Osmer's definition of prophetic discernment, it is clear that issues of disability and by extension inclusive homiletics should be taken seriously not only in the secular sphere, but in religious spheres as well.

The essence of this chapter is thus to examine disability theology, the Scriptures and homiletics theory for clues upon which the next chapter will be based, namely, "How are we going to respond?"

4.2 Disability Theology

As disabled and nondisabled Christians come together to enquire of Scripture and the status quo in order to enable "the whole people of God in all of its diversity to see the world

differently and to come to comprehend the broad range of possibilities that make up the essence of humanness”, (Creamer, 2012:339) disability theology came into existence. Creamer affirms that disability theology seeks to delve into the manner in which “religious traditions” have employed or failed to employ “notions of disability and impairment, and offers constructive possibilities for inclusive theological work in the future” (Creamer, 2012:339).

Disability theology has a multidisciplinary approach in that it does not only emanate from different schools of theology such as “practical, systematic and moral theology”, but also from fields outside theology like “ethics, psychology, sociology and philosophy” (Swinton, 2011:275). Disability theology developed through the efforts of disabled and nondisabled Christians to “understand and interpret the gospel of Jesus Christ” as well as the concepts of God and humanity “against the backdrop of the historical and contemporary experiences of people with disabilities” (Swinton, 2011:275). It seeks to “give voice to the rich and diverse theological meanings of the human experience of disability” (Swinton, 2011:274). In this regard, disability theology can also learn from liberation theology as it condemns injustice, whilst it advocates for the afflicted and by extension the marginalised, helping to ensure that their voice is heard (Fast, 2012:428).

According to Arrais (2007:91), the church as a divine institution “should be an example to the world where there is so much injustice”. Faith communities have a divine imperative to not only integrate but fully include and “welcome people with disabilities as participants in community life” (Anderson, 2006:33). Northway (1997:158-164) asserts that in terms of the two terms integration and inclusion the latter is preferable, as it accentuates the fact that disabled people have the right to be included with nondisabled people, without the requirement to change, whilst integration suggests a requirement to change in order to earn the right to be included.

In the previous chapter, we learned that due to lack of proper understanding of disability, some churches see disability as a sickness that should be cured and as such pray for the “normalisation” of disabled people. Treolar (2000:16) observes that these prayers for normalisation emanate from the interpretation of certain Biblical texts. Those interpretations seek to portray disability as punishment for sin and, therefore, confession is required for healing or normalisation. This kind of impression is mainly exacerbated by the fact that more often than not disability is “caricaturized” rather than being engaged complexly as it is (Creamer, 2012:340).

In agreement, Reynolds (2008:28) notes that in some Christian circles disability is viewed as something that needs to be healed or eradicated, a lesson in faith deficiency and a hopeless object of pity and ridicule. Concurring with both Treolar and Reynolds, Creamer (2012:341-342) affirms that although “Christianity can be described as a religion of the body”, mind-sets “toward disability and impairment” are indeed intricate and mostly undesirable. Furthermore, Creamer highlights the fact that in Christian settings disability is still assumed to be a “punishment for sin, a test of faith, an opportunity to inspire others, a potential demonstration of God’s healing power or simply a mysterious act of God”.

The “normalisation prayers” Treolar refers to, have no effect, more often than not after being paraded before the congregation, a disabled person is not only left with shame but with deep rooted resentment towards both the church and God. In line with the afore-said, Reynolds (2008:24) is of the view that these practices are disturbing because they reveal a very uneasy relationship between Christianity and disability. As a person with a disability, Arne Fritzson (2011:1) makes a very passionate plea to broader society and the church to allow disabled persons to “share your world!” as there is only one world and there is nowhere else disabled persons can go, especially to escape the hostility of the world at large. In agreement with Fritzson, Reynolds (2008:26) is emphatic that disabled people should never be viewed either as a defect nor a social burden that always necessitates dependence upon others. It is evident to Reynolds that disabled people have a say and whilst they may be viewed as defective, they are quite capable of making a positive and constructive contribution to society.

Creamer (2009:36) notes that “while many people with disabilities have found welcome in the church, many others still wait outside the gates”. Anderson (2013: xvi) argues that the church has generally evaded the responsibility of reaching out to the approximately 15 percent of the world’s population who are living with disability, prompting him to assert that “[people with disabilities] form the largest unreached people group in the world”. Nondisabled people exacerbate the alienation of people with disabilities by regarding them as “people who are insignificant, not worthy of attention, unable to contribute in any beneficial manner” (Anderson, 2013:xix).

4.3 Disability theology and the current status quo in the church and society

McColl and Ascough (2009:1) hold the view that even though disability and disabled people were not explicitly and intentionally discriminated against, serious attention to disability issues in Christian circles or communities worldwide was raised in 1968 when the World

Council of Churches issued a mandate for an inclusive Christian community. Kabue (2006:113) notes that following that mandate, a preliminary statement was drafted in 1971 calling for a theological scrutiny of services rendered to disabled people. However, not much was done or achieved until 1998 when the Ecumenical Disabilities Advocates Network (EDAN henceforth) was established.

Embarrassingly, the church has associated itself with socio-political and economic structures and institutions that together function to exclude people with disabilities from full participation in church and by extension in society. According to Webb-Mitchell (1994:1), what aggravates this behaviour is that disabled people are still considered strange and different in a society that is primarily comfortable with those who look, sound and act in a way considered “normal”.

It is crucial to always remember that God bids us to “strengthen the weak hands” (Is. 35:3-4). We are to follow Christ’s example of reaching out to the marginalised groups of society, especially disabled people. This means leaving our comfort zones to better understand their plight. The fact of the matter is that we are all made in the image of God and “all” means every human being, regardless of disability. The image of God is in no way diminished in disabled people.

However, Webb-Mitchell (1994:11) cautions that in embracing people with disabilities, the church should not send the wrong message of rejection with an over-accepting reaction, which in practical terms is to swarm over people with disabilities, proud to have them as tokens. The point that Webb-Mitchell is making is that in welcoming disabled people, the church has to be genuine in accepting them for who and what they truly are as well as remove the stigma and labelling of “us” and “them”.

The reality is that the great commission of Jesus, the basis on which the church is formed, does not discriminate but beseeches Christians to make disciples of all nations. Making of disciples is a process rather than an event. Bosch (2011:82) calls the life of a disciple a journey of continually discovering new dimensions of loving God and neighbour and practicing it.

Loving of the neighbour is not optional, since it is equated to loving God and the fulfilment of the law (Gal. 5:14). Since this is not optional, it is also not descriptive as to which neighbour is to be loved and which one is not to be loved. It can therefore be suggested that as one accepts and embraces one’s neighbour, then the same principle should apply in church.

The commitment to the gospel calls on disciples or Christians to at times ignore culture and social order to ensure that the gospel of Jesus is communicated effectively. Kraus (2012:12)

suggests that sociologically the church has been organised as a voluntary religious charitable institution focused on the family and for the preservation and dissemination of spiritual and moral values of the middle class. However, Christ's call to discipleship beckons us beyond the boundary of charity and requires compassionate social justice.

Munroe (2009:177) concurs with Kraus by stating "you were created to serve the world around you with Kingdom compassion and Kingdom energy". The Kingdom of God is characterised by a culture of servanthood and Jesus is the prime example of this kind of servanthood. He cautioned His disciples that they should not look for status or high positions and that they should not lord it over other people, but rather serve others. Serve others with the belief and understanding that as Christians we are a unit. The Apostle Paul defines church members as the body of Christ, pointing out that the body is made up of many parts, not only one, and that each part serves an important purpose, even those parts of the body which are considered weak. The Apostle Paul emphasises the necessity of all the parts of the body to work together towards one common goal, even the parts that appear "feeble", for each part is integral to the optimal functionality of the body. Hence, each should play its role, in cohesion with other parts, because when one part collapses, the entire body suffers (cf. 1 Cor. 12:22-31). Accordingly, it is the same with church members, unique as we all may be, we are all precious and acceptable before Jesus and we each have varied and unique gifts and can thus contribute in different ways to the success of the mission of the church.

Angrosino (2001:89) poses the challenge to the church to consider the capabilities of disabled people in order to determine the roles people with various disabilities might play in a church that is the positive contributions that disabled persons can bring to the church.

Irrespective of what took place in the early church and what is currently prevalent, Eisland (1994:74-75) expresses the view that instead of protecting persons with disabilities, Christian theology had made them more vulnerable to stigma and discrimination by the tendency to conflate disability with sin. Eisland says that disability should rather be taken as "an ordinary life to be lived".

4.4. Perspectives from disability theology

If the plea for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context is heeded, disability theology will become an indispensable partner in the quest for the authentic inclusion of the disabled in African churches. From the above, it should be clear that disability theology can play a pivotal role in sensitising church leadership and faith communities to this vulnerable

group that has always been on the periphery. Apart from the purpose of sensitising the church; it presents itself as a responsible approach to this sensitive issue, as it wants to provide theological perspectives that can penetrate long-standing beliefs that are merely rooted in culture and popular beliefs. This is especially important in the African context where this study has thus far uncovered the powerful influence of culture on the way in which Africans perceive disability and express themselves towards the disabled in public and church life. In this regard it can put African churches on the path to a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, seeking new ways of understanding the phenomenon of disability based on the Bible. If disability theology can accomplish this, it will mean that Christ will prevail over culture and renew the limiting thinking imposed on Africans when it comes to this matter.

Disability theology also brings the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to theology to the fore, as it reminds of the importance of meta-theory in the quest for a theological understanding of disability. The way in which the African church informs its practices and preaching should become cognisant of the findings of disciplines such as psychology, social work and such that can be conversation partners when doing theology.

Lastly, the insights from disability theologians referred to in the foregoing sections can inform a disability homiletic that embraces the body metaphor for the African church anew. It poses the all-important question of how the African church can be re-imagined through preaching that invokes an understanding for the disabled – and above all convinces the faith community to include all members with disability unconditionally, so that their particular gifts can also be employed to the benefit of the whole congregation or body.

The focus of this chapter now shifts to the Old and New Testament. Due to the brevity of this thesis and the specific focus of the study in seeking an inclusive disability homiletic for the African context, the next section sets out to uncover in an eclectic fashion examples of how the disabled was approached in Biblical antiquity and how different theologians reflected on the meanings of such encounters in order to articulate principles that can work towards an appropriate inclusive homiletic.

4.5 Scriptural perspectives on disability

4.5.1 Disability in the Old Testament

In seeking to steer faith communities towards inclusive homiletics, it is imperative to examine Scriptural perspectives on disability. Black (1996:140) asserts that approaching Scripture in

ways that take into account encounters and viewpoints of disabled persons is key, as it acknowledges that disabled persons are not merely objects of pity or charity, but “agents in their own right”. This kind of approach resonates with the human rights model of disability, alluded to in chapter two, which accentuates the fact that disabled persons have rights, just like their able-bodied counterparts. On a theological level such point of departure is seated in the belief that all human beings, including disabled persons, are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-28), also known as the *imago Dei*. While it is true that the Christian notion of the *imago Dei* is understood differently among people, it posits the principle that in each individual the image of an infinite God resonates. Subsequently, Hedges-Goettl (2008: 16) says:

Being made in the likeness of an infinite God allows for the infinite variety found in humanity, a variety in which vulnerability, dependence and disability are not perversions of God’s creation, but rather may be an integral part of its essential infinite variety which God has declared very good.

Anderson (2013:31) affirms that whoever and whatever we are, we all belong to the “human family” in which each and every person “is the image of God”. Genesis 1:26-28 is critical to this argument as it paints a picture of the human race as well as how things were in the beginning as they came from the Creator’s hands.

The notion that each person, including those born with disability, or even became disabled during the course of life, relates to this study in at least two ways. Firstly, it underscores that God loves, treasures and protects all of His creation. It reminds of Psalms 124:8, 146:6 and 138:8 which state that God is true to the whole of His creation and that He keeps it and all that is in it, in His hands. Secondly, it relates to human dignity which is seated in being created in God’s likeness. According to Louw (2016:69) human dignity or *dignitas* relates to the issue of honour. Because humans are created in the image of God, being a “microcosm of God” (Louw 2016:69) we are called to honour all of God’s creation. Hence human dignity and humanity (*dignitas* and *humanitas*) can even be construed as synonyms. Relating this to the African context, it should be clear that many cultural perceptions of disability directly refute and ignore this fundamental truth relating to the creation narrative that starts in the Old Testament.

Unfortunately, these perceptions became part of the narratives of many faith communities who perceive disability as a misrepresentation and tarnishing of the image of God (Reynolds, 2008:177). Consequently, the researcher set out to find Scriptural perspectives that could support a positive stance on disability, while at the same time not denying that there are perspectives that relate disability to punishment (see for example Gen. 19:11, Lev. 26:14-16,

Judges 16:21, Acts 13:4-12). It is however argued here that the often forced cultural association between disability and sin is discriminatory and thus regrettable. Rather, it is accepted that disability should be understood against the background of the broken reality that came to be with the fall. Since Genesis has no record of any disability in Adam or Eve, it is widely believed that disability came into being after the fall of man. In fact, Satterlee (2010:36) believes that disabilities are a result of the fallen state of creation.

On closer inspection, the Old Testament seems to take a protective stance towards the disabled. This is evident in Leviticus 19:14: “Thou shalt not curse the deaf, nor put a stumbling block before the blind.” This text serves as an important principle that assists to guide faith communities on best practice. This can be applied not only to hearing (deaf) and visual (blind) disabilities, but to other disabilities as well. Simply put, this helps to educate nondisabled persons on how to treat disabled persons – that they should be considered and consulted whenever any action is taken. For instance, architectural and liturgical modifications – this will ensure that such modifications are beneficial, instead of symbols of wasteful expenditure and hence, the motto of Disabled Peoples’ International (DPI) as well as Disabled People South Africa⁴ (DPSA): “Nothing about us without us”.

Yong (2007:24) insists that disability and sickness have to be understood in service of a greater purpose that God uses to share His covenant with His people.

In this regard, the story of Jacob is cited. It should be recalled that after cheating his elder brother Esau of their father Isaac’s blessings, (Gen. 32:24-32), Jacob fled to his uncle Laban in Haran. There he worked for his uncle and even went on to marry his two cousins and amassed considerable wealth. After some years, Jacob decided to go back to his homeland.

It is whilst he was on his way back to his homeland that disability (Gen. 32:24-32) befell him. After wrestling with God the entire night “and as he passed over Penuel the sun rose upon him, and he halted upon his thigh” (Gen. 32:31). According to Yong (2011:31), Jacob’s disability was a sign not just of one who had shown strength in wrestling with another, but of one who had prevailed against God Himself. It should be recalled that it is during this very incident that God blessed Jacob and changed his name to Israel.

Yong (2011:32) makes the observation that Jacob’s disability neither dehumanised nor emasculated his character, but that it rather served as a sign of God’s covenant with him. Thus Jacob’s disability cannot be considered from the narrow point of view of it being a

⁴Disabled People South Africa (DPSA) is an advocacy and self-help organisation, aligned with the ruling African National Congress. It was established in 1984.

punishment from God, especially since it became a sign of God's covenant and also since he became such a prominent figure in the history of Israel and the Christian faith.

To that end, Jacob's disability portrays his strength rather than feebleness. Additionally, it highlights both his physical strength and his exceptional strength of character, hence the great resolve with which he wrestled despite his thigh being "out of joint" (Gen. 32:25), ignored the plea "let me go, for the day breaketh" and vowed not to let go unless he was blessed (Gen. 32:26). Indeed, Wynn (2007:101) affirms that from the wrestling incident at Penuel, Jacob had "a lifelong reminder of what happened there". He gained first-hand knowledge of God's grace, loving kindness and tender mercies and that intensified his relationship with God. Assuredly, this blessing showered upon Jacob at Penuel did not only end with him, but continued for generations to come. To mention just one instance, this is evident in the blessings pronounced on Israel by Balaam when he was summoned by Balak to curse Israel (Num. 23-24).

Correspondingly, Moses was a man with a speech impairment, yet that did not deter God from engaging him on the crucial mission of bringing the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (Ex. 4:10-12). This suggests that disabled persons do have a critical role to play in churches – putting their God-given talents to good use. Disabled and nondisabled church members have a lot to learn and benefit from one another. The fact that God chose Moses as His ambassador and even spoke to him face to face (Num. 12:8) is yet another indication about how God uses disabled people – He believes in them and comes to their defence (Num. 12:9-10) – that they can make a positive impact in the ministry and achieve just as much as nondisabled people.

Moses is one of the good examples of the productive and successful lives disabled people can lead. Undoubtedly, he needed human support when insecure and self-conscious about his speech impairment and terrified to speak to Pharaoh (Ex. 4:16), which God granted him. The conversation between God and Moses is indicative of the sound relationship they had – Moses kept trying to talk God out of sending him, giving him one excuse after another, and God assured him that He would be with him, because He as Creator understands all there is to know about disabilities (Ex. 4:11) and even grants him a mouth piece in Aaron to demonstrate that He was on his side. It is worth noting that Moses' reluctance to take up the call irritated God at some point (Ex. 4:14). The fact that God was resolute to use Moses shows that people's disabilities are not necessarily hindrances to them carrying out critical tasks in the "history of God's people" (Bayes, 2015) – from Old and New Testament times to date.

David reached out to his friend Jonathan's disabled son Mephibosheth, who became physically disabled as a result of falling with his nurse whilst fleeing to escape danger (2 Sam. 9). When he looked for anyone from Saul's house in order to show kindness for Jonathan's sake, David was informed by Saul's servant about Jonathan's son who was "lame on *his* feet" (2 Sam. 9:3, emphasis in original). Interestingly, he did not pity Mephibosheth but treated him with respect and dignity, invited him to dine at his table "continually" and adopted him "as one of the king's sons" (2 Sam. 9:7, 11). This he did despite Mephibosheth labelling himself "a dead dog" (2 Sam. 9:8). It was a rare thing to converse with a monarch, let alone to dine with him daily. Admittedly, it was a great honour that was bestowed upon Mephibosheth.

David's kind gesture towards Mephibosheth set a positive example to his servants as well as all the people in his kingdom. In so doing, he negated the negative perceptions and attitudes towards disability and disabled people, which as might be imagined should have been harsher at that time, just as they still persist despite all policies and treaties. Indeed, David upheld what God had told the prophet Samuel about looking "on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Mephibosheth's disability did not cause David to recoil from showing kindness, neither did he look down on him as a person of no value (Anderson, 2013:130). Instead, he treated him like royalty and even restored Saul's land to him and gave instruction that the land should be tilled for Mephibosheth. Assuredly, David exemplified restorative justice.

The prophet Elijah was zealous for God and it is clear that in the process, he neglected his personal needs. This led to him running for his life, threatened by Jezebel, forgetting that God was still with him. He lost all hope and pleaded with God "to take away" his life (1 Kings 19:4). Elijah undoubtedly showed signs of depression and fatigue, not realising that he needed to rest in order to stay mentally alert and so the angel of the Lord woke him up and ministered to his physical needs with a "cake baked on the coals, and a cruse of water" (1 Kings 19:6). Just as Elijah became depressed, Christians who neglect themselves and underestimate the importance of rest can experience depression. It is not a disability that cannot be managed, yet it leads to stigmatisation by "fellow-believers" (Bayes, 2015).

Assuredly, causing blind persons to "wander out of the way" was considered a serious offence that even warranted a curse (Deut. 27:18). This text simply cautions sighted people from intentionally misleading the blind. In a way, it indicates that they should be allowed to live their lives in public and not hide away. For the most part, disabled people do not need pity but support.

It becomes clear from the prophet Isaiah that in the case of disability, like with all other signs of brokenness that came with the fall, these challenges will end when the Messiah comes.

In Isaiah 35:5-6, he states boldly: “Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then shall the lame *man* leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing” (Bible, 1991, KJV, emphasis in original). From an eschatological viewpoint then, the Old Testament vision is that brokenness is finite and it will also be healed when the Lord establishes His final rule in this broken world.

4.5.2 Perspectives from the Old Testament

From the above discussion of some of the Old Testament passages, the following preliminary perspectives from the Old Testament for an inclusive disability homiletic for the African context can be deducted. Disability in its many different forms does not exist in the world today through the wrong-doing of the people who suffer from it, but can be regarded as part of the broken reality that resulted from the fall. This perspective is very important within the African context, as it was shown that cultural beliefs and presuppositions based on worldviews most often govern the attitude many Africans harbour towards people with disabilities. The Old Testament seems to contravene such a pre-supposition.

From the protective stance towards people with any form of disability in the Old Testament, it can also be said that faith communities should assume the same protective stance as point of departure, seeking ways in which to promote the interests of those who suffer in any way from disability. Understanding that the covenant of God was served in the lives of those who suffered adversities and challenges should also help the church to seek God’s purpose in the lives of disabled persons to whom the church ministers. The church’s actions towards disabled persons must therefore not contravene God’s covenant love for the disabled, but rather support it, especially in light of revelation history that shows how God has employed people like Moses who suffered a speech impairment, and seek ways to employ the spiritual gifts of less-abled believers in the church. This would also align with the respect that Old Testament figures such as David extended to someone such as Mephibosheth.

It seems then that the Old Testament provides positive perspectives on disability, encouraging a positive theological framework for the church’s thinking and practices regarding disabled persons in the church. More so in light of the fact that disability, along with other manifestations of the broken reality, are subjected to the coming of the Messiah, where brokenness will have to make way for the restorative glory and eternal healing of the Lord.

4.5.3 Disability in the New Testament

Given the prophet Isaiah's proclamation, Sheerin (2013:65) says that Jesus' birth signifies a turning point in the association between God and mankind since God became one of us, "taking on life, pain and suffering". According to the Apostle Paul, Jesus came to redeem us from the law (cf. Gal. 4:5). The Jesus Christ that the Apostle Paul is referring to here is the same one who gave the great commission of making all nations disciples in Matthew 28:19-20.

Chapter 9 of the Gospel according to John records the encounter between Jesus and the man who was born blind. His disciples enquired of Him whether the man was blind as a result of his own sin or that of his parents. Jesus' answer was an emphatic "no". He explained that neither the man nor his parents had sinned, but that he was born blind so that the glory of God may be seen in him. Deland (1999:56) explains that Jesus categorically refutes that sin was the cause of the man's blindness and instead stands up for the piety of the blind man. Furthermore, Jesus perceives the man's blindness as an occasion for God's redemptive action and that is the "central act of the entire Biblical drama" (Deland, 1999:56). This text is also indicative that when God heals a person, faith is not necessarily a prerequisite as perpetuated by the healing ministry alluded to earlier in this study.

In this narrative of a blind man we see the wonders of God's own work. Instead of being an object of punishment for his sin or that committed by his ancestors, the man is seen as a tool for demonstrating God's miracles. Jesus' explanation of God's glory being seen in the blind man's condition may be regarded as a mystery. Yet, the fact that blind people can live independent lives irrespective of their disability is a testimony of God's amazing grace, glory and greatness.

Sheerin (2013:67) notes that in performing miracles, expressing love and benevolence to disabled persons Jesus was fulfilling the task foretold by the prophets. Thus in essence, the New Testament Scriptures identify and symbolise the unification of all in Jesus as being pivotal to His mission. Earlier on Nkomazana was cited in reference to the book of Luke 4:18-21 in which Jesus proclaimed:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord.

Indeed, in line with this proclamation, Jesus dealt with disabilities and embraced disabled people and all other marginalised groups in society. Throughout His ministry, He ensured the inclusion of all, especially vulnerable groups. He publicly addressed a Samaritan woman⁵; defended a woman condemned due to adultery⁶, dined with tax collectors and sinners⁷; touched lepers⁸ and welcomed and blessed little children who were being turned away by His disciples⁹.

The Apostle Paul affirms in 1 Corinthians 1:25-29 that God has a special place even for persons with varied disabilities. He goes on to state that God can take those things or people that are considered of no significance to glorify Himself “that no flesh should glory in his presence”.

Furthermore, the Apostle Paul alludes to the church as “the body of Christ” (1 Cor. 12), pointing out that each member of the body serves a specific and critical function, thereby accentuating the crucial role that disabled persons play in faith communities. Ordinarily, disabled persons are considered a burden by their nondisabled fellow believers, but Paul’s analogy of the “body of Christ” show them to be anything but burdens. The human body has members that differ in “form, function and appearance” and yet they do not operate independently – they function “interdependently” (Temple & Ball, 2012:74-75). O’Ffill (2007:90) likens church members to “an orchestra. Though the orchestra is diverse, each instrument is significant only if it is in tune and plays together with the other instruments the same music under the direction of the conductor”.

Similarly, human beings are also diverse. “We’re diverse as a society, as a church, and even as families” (O’Ffill, 2007:89). It is essential to consider the talents that disabled persons have and find ways in which they can be incorporated into the faith community. As a rule, nondisabled church members tend to focus on the disability and not on the contribution that the person with the disability can make to the church (Angrosino, 2001:89). The failure to see beyond a person’s disability leads to “missing out on the gifting that God has provided to our church”, and is in effect tantamount to “disabling that church” (Temple & Ball, 2012:74). This is because the opinions abled believers have of disabled believers are mostly impulsive and uninformed, yet they presumably “know what they need” (Temple & Ball, 2012:74).

⁵John 4:7-26

⁶John 8:1-11

⁷Matthew 9:10-13

⁸Matthew 8:3

⁹Matthew 19:14

When 1 Corinthians 12 is read in the literal sense – how the body cannot efficiently function without one of its members and how other members suffer in the event that one member is lost – it supports the notion that all members are expected to make a contribution to the faith community.

The Apostle Paul was said to have been given “a thorn in the flesh” for which he pleaded with God three times to remove it, but instead God promised him: “My grace is sufficient for thee” (2 Cor. 12:7, 9). Some commentaries (blueletterbible.org) suggest that Paul had some kind of disability, hence he made use of “various amanuenses to do the actual writing of at least some of his epistles” (blueletterbible.org). One of the amanuenses that Paul used was Tertius, and he mentions that he wrote “*this* epistle” (Rom. 16:22, emphasis in original). Another indication that Paul’s “thorn in the flesh” was a visual impairment, is when he refers to his large handwriting (Gal. 6:11) and points out in Galatians 4:15, how, if possible, the believers, would have pulled out their eyes to give them to him. Additionally, Paul called a member of the Sanhedrin a “white-washed wall”, and when asked why he disrespected the high priest, indicated that he did not realise it was the high priest. Once more, this was an indication of how poor Paul’s vision was (Acts 23:3-5). Yet, as can be noted, God used him in profound ways to take the gospel to many different places. Just as God used Paul, He can still use disabled persons today and therefore efforts to include disabled persons should be on the agenda of faith communities.

It must be noted that there are faith communities that are doing their best to truly welcome and include disabled persons. Be that as it may, it is equally important to note that many other disabled persons are yet to be welcomed and included in faith communities (Creamer, 2009:36). Comparatively, disabled persons are hugely neglected and excluded and not much effort is made to include them. This is because disabled persons are considered to be a burden and incapable of any meaningful contribution in the faith community (Anderson, 2013:xvi–xix).

The story of Zacchaeus conjures up images of a man presenting with dwarfism, hence he had to “climb up into a sycamore tree” to get a glimpse of Jesus. Whitworth (2016:31) points out that Jesus saw a pair of small legs, and the body was equally small, and when Zacchaeus climbed out of the sycamore tree, it was obvious to the throng following Jesus that he was not a small boy but a man, an older man for that matter. From this description, Whitworth (2016) infers that Zacchaeus indeed presented with dwarfism. Once more, Jesus reaches out to Zacchaeus and gives him the great honour of hosting Him (cf. Luke 19:1-10). It is evident that Jesus knew how the throng would react, but he resolutely embraced a man who was notorious for defrauding people and thereby “making himself feel ‘big’” (Bayes, 2015).

Zacchaeus did not have to play “big” with Jesus, because Jesus genuinely loved and treasured him for who he was – within as well as without. With such unconditional love and the honour of being in Jesus’ presence, Zacchaeus was “enabled to change and become generous” (Bayes, 2015). This story indicates that by deliberately reaching out to marginalised persons, Jesus loves them immeasurably and desires to save them, thereby including them in His kingdom.

Jesus shared the parable of the great feast in Luke 14:16-24 as a way of conscientising faith communities of the importance of inclusion of all groups of society. Whilst dining with “one of the chief Pharisees” (Luke 14:1), Jesus counselled His host on the kind of people he should and should not invite when he hosts a banquet or dinner (Luke 14:12). Jesus informed His host that inviting people who clearly could not invite him to their homes would make him happy and that he would receive his reward “at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14). Admittedly, what Jesus meant was that treating disabled people humanely was both good for disabled people and for those who treat them well (Bayes, 2015). Jesus was thoughtful and exemplary in welcoming and including all persons in His ministry – He knew that marginalised groups could not “recompense” Him. In other words, Jesus reached out to the marginalised with no hope for a recompense. He was compelled by the love He had for each human being.

Faith communities are to follow in Jesus’ footsteps by opening their doors to disabled persons. This can be done by paying attention to not only architectural issues, but attitudinal ones as well. More often than not, it is attitudinal barriers that isolate disabled persons from playing active roles in faith communities (Black, 1996:122). Instead of utilising church resources to enhance church structures and welcome disabled persons, most faith communities make no effort in this regard (Beates, 2012:54). Making efforts to welcome and include disabled persons in faith communities would serve to draw disabled persons to church and by extension, to God (cf. Matt. 15:30). When disabled persons come to church, they should not be assumed to be there for healing or to get rid of their disabilities, instead it should be acknowledged that they too need spiritual nurturing and healing just like their nondisabled fellow believers (Anderson, 2013:97).

It is essential to note that whilst multitudes were wont to follow Jesus and to bring disabled persons to Him for healing, Jesus’ emphasis was more on spiritual healing rather than physical cure. The great propitiation Jesus afforded human beings does not exempt them from the cares of this world such as “illness, accidents or disability, it brought us from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light” (Anderson, 2013, 97).

O'Fall (2007:62) distinctly captures the life of Jesus, while on earth: "Jesus had both a message and a ministry. His message was God-centred and His ministry was people-centred". This is the ideal for ministers who shepherd God's flock. He further says that the intent of the gospel is "not to bring God down to people but to bring people back up to where God meant for them to be when He created them in the beginning – in His likeness and in His image".

We should seek to emulate Jesus by refusing to perpetuate discriminatory customs, thereby showing no partiality and being inclusive in our congregations. In His ministry, Jesus welcomed disabled people (Matt. 9:1-8; Mark 8:23; Luke 7:21; John 5:1-18); contagious people (Mark 1:40-42); social outcasts (Mark 2:14); foreigners (Matt. 8:5-13); marginalised women (Luke 10:39) and adulterers (John 8:1-11). Hence, it is little wonder that in His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus pronounced blessed all those who were deemed cursed by society. In fact, Jesus was "absolutely revolutionary in whom He welcomed" (Bayes, 2015).

4.5.4 Perspectives from the New Testament

The New Testament seems to carry forward, support and continue the principles regarding the disabled found in the Old Testament. Here the incarnation of God in the person of Jesus signals a holistic solidarity with the broken human state and all men, affected in whatever way by the fall. Jesus' own encounters with the disabled confirm the Old Testament notion that disability is not punishment, but rather a channel through which God can show His covenant love to the less fortunate.

In line with this, the New Testament faith community is to show solidarity with all believers treating them equally and including them. Discrimination and exclusion therefore have no place in the New Testament, as is suggested in the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ where all members are equally important and necessary in the functioning of the church.

It seems then that the New Testament not only continues the theological thinking regarding disability, but explicates its meaning in light of the ministry of Jesus and the coming into being of the New Testament church, where inclusion characterises the very being of the church on its way to the second coming of the Lord.

In the New Testament, the second coming of the Lord, also brings into perspective the Christian hope that the challenges of this world will pass in light of the saving work of Jesus,

who has conquered humanity's worst enemy, namely death, through His resurrection. Christian eschatology hence holds important perspectives for an approach to the disabled when viewed through the lens of Christology. Although there are strong differences of opinion of how disability will be effected in the resurrected body (cf. Mullins 2011, Yong 2012), Christian doctrine holds that the saving work of Christ will prove triumphant over the effects of the brokenness of this world in the fullness of time when the Kingdom of God finds its full expression (Pannenberg 2002, Mullins 2011), hence opening up the perspective of hope in addressing issues of disability in the preaching of the church.

4.6 Homiletic theory and disability

Kommers (2017:4) defines preaching as “a communication of the Word of God but it is more than that: It seeks to persuade men to faith, and that is the higher aim”. In seeking to employ preaching as mediator of inclusivity, it is once more essential to offer another definition of disability, formulated by McClure, which is specifically apt in the context of the present chapter. McClure (2007:22) notes that disability is “a physical, emotional, or cognitive loss of ability in human functioning that either hinders one's access to preaching, hearing, understanding, or seeing sermons, or excludes one from messages preached”.

Given such a definition of disability, it is of the essence that preachers are cognisant of the fact that within their congregations there are members, including children, who present with visible disabilities as well as members who present with invisible or silent disabilities, as indicated in chapter two. Undoubtedly, the latter types of disabilities call for preachers to exercise prophetic discernment as they listen to the Word, expound and depend on it for revelation on how to reach out to all members of their congregations, both young and old, in order to accomplish an inclusive homiletic. Preaching is a crucial mediator of inclusivity, much more so than the usual assumption that ramps are indicative of full inclusivity. Whereas it is easy to notice a member with a white cane, crutches or on a wheelchair, members with hearing, emotional and cognitive impairments go unnoticed. Accordingly, this section seeks to highlight the significance of preaching in fostering inclusivity and going further to ensure that faith communities do not only preach inclusivity, but also take action to realise it.

Kommers (2017:4) points out how in his preaching Luther sought to encourage his listeners to internalise the pearls of truth in his sermons by applying them to their daily lives, thereby addressing all aspects of their lives. Furthermore, he goes on to assert that Luther makes it clear to his hearers that the Word meets us human beings through and in Christ, that is Christ

is the heart of the matter in all preaching or so it should be. Luther's intention is to address the hearer's own heart and to make it possible for the preached events of the salvation history to be applied to the hearer's own life, thereby bringing about the simultaneity of man and Christ.

Kommers (2017:4) further affirms that Luther took the freedom of his hearers into account, hence he can be taken as a "relevant guide for the praxis of preaching and effective communication of the gospel". Richardson and Lovell (2011:12) suggest that preaching is the communication or narration of the truth that is absolute and non-negotiable. Lischer (1987:95) states that "preaching is an event in which one person engages others with the gospel of God...In preaching, the message, its articulation and its reception are fused into a single transaction".

Long (1989:31) echoes the sentiments expressed by Lischer (1987). However, he takes it a little further by stating that "preaching seeks to enable some beneficial change to the hearers, attempts to help them make sense of their lives, and strives to be a catalyst for more responsible living on the part of those who hear".

Some authors are of the view that the word that comes closer to explaining the term preaching is the Greek word *kerygma*. According to Dluhy (2013:70), the term *kerygma* is the shortened form of the verb "to *kerygma*", which in essence means to transmit, proclaim or relay a message by word of mouth. This is in line with the great commission as recorded in the gospel according to Matthew 28:19-20.

In the afore-mentioned text, Jesus Christ commissioned His disciples: "Go ye therefore and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always even to the end of the age" (Bible, 1991, KJV). What is literally meant here is that the disciples of Jesus Christ were ordered to go into the world and spread the absolute and non-negotiable message, as suggested by Richardson and Lovell (2011).

In line with Dluhy's (2013) definition that includes the word proclaim, Muller (2008:58) is of the view that the proclamation has to be public and in being public, it is easily and credibly heard where there is a gospel-formed community to manifest it visibly. Bosch (2011:10) considers proclamation of salvation as directive by Jesus Christ, is inviting others to become living members of Christ's earthly community. The Apostle Paul, in agreement and almost endorses the words of Jesus Christ, takes it further in his letter to the Corinthians when he

states: "Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ as though God were pleading through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

Still on this issue of preaching and proclaiming the gospel and in reference to disability, Taber (1983:239) argues that if the gospel that is being proclaimed is not flexible enough to address each facet of the human condition (including disability), then it is not big and relevant enough to take away the sin of this world. In other words, the church has to be concerned with the totality of human beings. In addition, Heldt (2004:166) believes that proclamation of mission alone (reconciling humanity with God), besides any social apprehension, has the capacity to be perceived as a distortion, a trimmed or diluted version of the gospel, a travesty of the good news, lacking significance for the serious and real problems of real people living in a real world. Thus, preaching is not a lecture on theology or a particular church doctrine, but rather a serious interpretation of a particular section or text of the Bible. Nor is preaching about being aloof and conveying own personal insight, but about embracing others. Hirsh and Hirsh (2010:46) affirm that in socialising and embracing sinners, Jesus Christ was demonstrating that true holiness cannot be reached or attained through separation from the unclean. In this statement, the terms sinners and the unclean can be replaced with disabled people, because indeed salvation is meant to be shared.

What comes to mind is that Heldt (2004) is suggesting that proclamation cannot and should not be only empty words, but that the message is communicated more effectively through action. Perhaps that is why Goheen (2011:191) is adamant that "the church is called to be an agent or instrument of redemption in the midst of the world and for the sake of the world, chosen so that it might invite others into the covenant blessing it experiences". This statement goes right to the heart of the Apostle Peter's message in 1 Peter 3:15: "But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear:"

In other words, those who proudly profess to preach the good news need to understand and actually ensure that what they are preaching is nothing but a pure and unadulterated gospel that embraces all of God's children. Those who carry the mantle of leadership in the body of Christ must boldly and courageously follow in the footsteps of the Apostle Paul who boldly declared in 1 Corinthians 9:16: "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!" Paul goes on to make an appeal in 1 Corinthians 11:1: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

According to Stevenson and Wright (2008:8), preaching is "a servant ministry in which all God's people have a voice" and so it "should not be hierarchical", but clergy should practice prophetic discernment and take into consideration those burning issues with which their

congregations grapple. Stevenson and Wright (2008:10) rightly observe that preaching should not be perceived “as an event divorced from the wider reality of local church life”, but should rather be seen as a “regular focal point on a Christian community’s pilgrimage”.

Creamer (2003:61) essentially points out that disabled persons are not treated the same way and that “some disabilities are more socially acceptable than others”. For the most part, disability is a real human experience and “crosses lines of age, race, gender, class and so on”. In most faith communities, disability is something that is considered too sensitive and/or offensive a subject to be broached. In those faith communities that are daring enough to discuss it,

People with disabilities have historically been portrayed as suffering personified (to be pitied), images of saintliness (to be admired), symbols of sin (to be avoided) or signs of God’s limited power or capriciousness (to be pondered). Very rarely have people with disabilities been first portrayed as people (Creamer, 2003:59).

As indicated in the previous chapter, widespread tendencies in preaching are to either conflate disability with sin or to question the strength of faith possessed by disabled persons. Creamer (2003:60) observes that such mistaken assumptions on the part of clergy and members of congregations “do not intend to harm people with disabilities, but the fact of their ignorance does not make the pain they inflict any less”. For the most part, the theologies and language utilised in preaching have a negative effect on disabled persons. This is not necessarily intentional on the part of clergy (Black, 1996:122).

Whilst faith communities have for a long time “failed to honestly engage with people who have disabilities” (Creamer, 2003:60), we are now in a day and age where disability should be considered part of what constitutes the human experience. Admittedly, some people may experience disability permanently, whilst others experience it temporarily. For this reason, it is of the essence that faith communities start including disabled persons “as key partners in the conversation of faith” (Creamer, 2003:60). Creamer (2003:67) cogently affirms that the benefits of faith communities that reflect theologically on the human experience of disability are far reaching for disabled and nondisabled people alike, “especially those of us interested in the relationship between the human experience and the realm of God”.

Craddock (2001:86) is of the view that “preaching brings the Scriptures forward as a living voice in the congregation”. Clergy have a divine obligation to ensure this “living voice” welcomes, includes and nurtures all those who hear it. In agreement with Craddock, Black (1996:180) emphasises the critical role of preaching in forming inclusive congregations and

remarks that preachers “can contribute to an attitude of welcoming acceptance of persons with disabilities both in our churches and in society”.

4.7 Contextual preaching and disability

In this study, it is also important to make a few remarks on preaching in the African context where a particular worldview prevails. Pieterse and Theron (1994:152) hold that in theologising (preaching) it is both very important and necessary to take into consideration the current situation of the people being preached to. Taking a closer look at Jesus’ preaching, it is evident that He always sought to be practical and preached His sermons in relation to the things familiar to people. In line with this, Stevenson (2010:9) affirms that preaching is bound to be affected by context. Hence, it is critical that clergy should stay abreast of the culture in which they serve. He posits that “there is no pure, culture-free gospel”. This is particularly true in the African culture and context, as African worldviews and culture most often permeate all spheres of life. Brunsdon (2019:4) observes that in the African context nothing occurs by chance and that Africans are always “adamant to establish” who has caused the “ill fate”, be it illness or disability.

It is quite difficult to agree with the opposing view expressed by Starkloff (2000:422-425). In opposing contextualisation, he says the church risks being trapped and seduced into enjoying the benefits of belonging or associating with a specific cultural system and in so doing relinquishes its vocation as a prophetic community.

On the issue of worldview, Hesselgrave (1989:205) is of the opinion that some scholars and anthropologists like Franz Boas agree that different people and different nationalities have their own way of perceiving things. He continues to point out that some acquire knowledge through learning, while others know things “through the concrete relational in which life and reality are seen pictorially in terms of the active emotional relationship present in a concrete situation”.

It is equally important to note that preaching is important to Africans, because they are communally based and orientated people who like to verbalise many things. Kellerman (1997:1) rightly observes that since African culture is communal in nature and since the oral tradition is a significant part of African culture, preaching would continue to be significant amongst Africans. He goes on to point out how inconceivable it would be for preaching to become an insignificant activity in faith communities, especially in the West and to a degree in the East.

Almost in agreement with Kellerman (1997), Craddock (1991:19) asserts that for preaching to be effective it has to speak to five core elements, which he lists as: culture, the Word of God, the preacher's life, the listeners' needs, situation and circumstances. Given these, he adds that a "preaching moment occurs at the intersection of tradition, scripture, the experience of the preacher, the needs of a particular group of listeners and the condition of the world as it bears upon that time and place".

If the argument put forth by Craddock (1991) is correct, then African culture and traditions and how they perceive certain things are equally important in any sermon or preaching directed to African listeners. Preaching to Africans in the African context on issues of life, including disability, is of critical importance. Pope Pius XII, upon realising that missionaries had a negative attitude towards Africans, in fact issued an allocution against it. Van Thiel (1990:167) records the warning of Pope Pius XII as follows:

The missionary, the apostle of Jesus Christ, has not been sent to transplant European civilization into mission countries. Therefore, we must Christianise the art of the indigenous people. We must aim to utilise their music and their melodies as well. We must do whatever we can to incorporate African art and music into the Christian liturgical cult.

However, Van der Walt (1994:14) has a different view on the matter of missionaries. According to him, missionaries together with Africans were not really cognisant of the intertwined nature of the gospel message and culture. Hence, missionaries considered "the cultural form in which they presented the gospel as a real part of the gospel". It led to Africans believing that in order to become authentic Christians, they had to be receptive of Western culture and embrace it, forsaking African culture.

Mashau (2013:1) holds the strong opinion that "African Christianity" is intricate "in history, structure, doctrines and practices". He goes on to state that "denominations on the continent range from mission churches, Pentecostals to African Independent or Initiated Churches (AICs) which are either more traditional or Pentecostal in outlook or both". Of the aforementioned, the Pentecostals and African Independent Churches are more popular.

Mashau (2013:4-5) continues to argue that the popularity of the Pentecostals is fanned by its ability to transform and easily adapt to the cultural context of the indigenous people, mainly due to the freedom in spirit.

In the African context, church buildings continue to present an architectural barrier, whilst church members keep a social and physical distance from disabled people (Fast, 2011:420-421). Black (1996:179) emphasises the significance of clergy acquiring a thorough

knowledge of various disabilities and ailments of their church members. Such knowledge would empower clergy to preach the Word with confidence, thereby winning souls for God and ensuring inclusive and enjoyable worship services for all. Undoubtedly, preaching is pneumatological in nature and therefore all clergy should depend on the Holy Spirit for guidance and illumination of the Word of God as they prepare and deliver sermons to their congregations. Given the guidance of the Holy Spirit, clergy would be well equipped to preach edifying sermons that do not conflate disability with sin or a curse and make disabled persons uncomfortable in church.

Stevenson and Wright (2008:vii), in pointing out that preaching is an enterprise undertaken by humans for fellow humans, emphasise preaching in ways that are realistic – that is, ways that keep in mind “the potential for all the glory, misuse, joy and sorrow, seriousness and silliness that goes with being human”. Furthermore, they say that since preaching is carried out by humans, they should make efforts to acquaint themselves with the context and culture of the hearers of the Word. With such endeavours, Stevenson and Wright (2008:viii) assert that clergy would indeed be “reflective practitioners” and this would make a greater impact on their listeners. For instance, clergy should reflect on the daily issues that affect their listeners and seek to address them in their preaching. Such issues in the African context and worldviews are issues relating to perception of disability and how disabled persons are treated in society and churches; whether they are included or left out in evangelism plans.

RampUp (2011) encourages churches to “think disability”. This enables church communities to concentrate on the capabilities and talents of disabled persons, instead of their disabilities. One of the hurdles to inclusivity in African churches is preaching that perpetuates myths, instead of breaking down walls by enunciating ways of learning more about disabilities and challenging and encouraging the entire church to organise services and programmes that give disabled persons a chance to share their experiences. Of course, most people will acquire disabilities at some point in their lives. In line with this fact, Bayes (2015) points out that the majority of people are “in their temporary, nondisabled phase!” With this in mind, church buildings would be designed in ways that cater for all, irrespective of ability and age. “Even the warmest welcome quickly grows cold where ramps are missing, toilets are inaccessible and sermons inaudible” (RampUp, 2011).

Many disabled persons in Africa are yet to find a religious home. Admittedly, Arrais (2007:96) cogently affirms that “the mission to establish a positive church in a negative world belongs to each one of us”.

4.7.1. Perspectives from homiletic theory and contextual preaching

In search of a framework for the ideal situation in which an inclusive disability in the African context can thrive, a number of important principles arose from the above two sections. Working towards an inclusive homiletic we are reminded that in essence preaching remains a form of communication, but with the higher aim of persuading the hearers to faith. The purpose of preaching however becomes even more challenging when it becomes sensitive to the possibility that disabled people may be present in the pews, as disability can limit access to sermons in many ways, depending on the type of impairment. Preaching with this in mind presents preachers with at least the following challenges: The preacher should be sensitive to the need of all listeners, be flexible in terms of presentation, avoid all forms of hierarchical preaching and nurture a spirit of embracing all who are present. While each of these aspects have very practical implications for the way a sermon is constructed and the message conveyed, it seems that an inclusive homiletic will first and foremost require the preacher to have an accommodating attitude that creates room for the disabled in the sermon.

The above becomes even more important in light of the role that context and culture plays in preaching, as inclusive preaching both resembles sensitivity towards the disabled and also sensitivity towards the context. What disability means in the African context is paramount for inclusive homiletics, since it differs in other contexts steered by other worldviews or cultures. The African context furthermore seems prone to be open to a great many different denominations, which poses yet another challenge for inclusive homiletics in that it will have to be cognisant of the Biblical essence of preaching and embrace its fundamental ability as a changing agent through the work of the Holy Spirit. It will also seek avenues that is purposefully accommodating of the limited abilities of the disabled, while at the same time bearing in mind cultural and denominational background. It is a varied challenge indeed.

4.8 Preliminary synthesis

This chapter sought to highlight disability theology as well as Scriptural perspectives on disability and homiletic theory, both in general and the African context. This was done in order to uncover some of the principles that will be important in articulating an appropriate response to the current practices regarding a disability homiletic in the African context.

In the next chapter, the issues of such an appropriate response are addressed.

Chapter five: Markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter sought to study the phenomenon of disability within the framework of disability theology, selections from Scripture and homiletic theory that included contextual preaching. In so doing, it sought to execute the third task of Osmer's four tasks of practical theological interpretation that poses the question: "What ought to be going on?" In seeking to execute the fourth of Osmer's practical theological interpretation tasks, the pragmatic task, the present chapter builds on clues provided by the previous chapter and thus poses the question: "How might we respond?" (Osmer, 2008:4)

As indicated in chapter one, the pragmatic task calls for establishing plans "of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable" (Osmer, 2008:4). Essentially, this fourth movement propels change – change from discrimination and stigmatisation of disabled Christians to full inclusion and participation in faith communities of their choice. Osmer (2008:176) asserts that "practical theology often provides help by offering models of practice and rules of art". Whilst "models of practice" provide leaders with an overall idea about the discipline within which they operate and techniques they may employ to "shape" the discipline to preferred objectives, "rules of art" on the other hand are precise strategies about how to execute exact "actions or practices" (Osmer, 2008:176). Osmer (2008:4) proposes that the pragmatic task requires practical theologians to come up with "strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into a reflective conversation with the 'talk back' emerging when they are enacted".

Given the difference between "models of practice" and "rules of art", it can be said that this chapter seeks to utilise "models of practice" to come up with "rules of art" or markers for an inclusive homiletic for the African context with disabled persons in mind. In so doing, this chapter will see the realisation of the main aim of this study – to move towards inclusive disability homiletics in the African context.

In pursuit of inclusive disability homiletics in the African context, the pragmatic task calls for clergy and faith communities to embrace the mind-set of servant leadership (Osmer, 2008:176). Osmer (2008:192) defines servant leadership as "*leadership that influences the congregation to change in ways that more fully embody the servanthood of Christ*" (emphasis in original).

As indicated in chapter three, Niehbuhr (1956) utilises five models to conceptualise the relationship between Christ and culture. Niehbuhr is of the opinion that even Christ did not look down on culture during His ministry, for He respected the different cultures of the people He encountered. Niehbuhr further affirms that although Christ does not negate culture, when an individual finds Christ his or her culture is bound to be transformed, as Christ is the transformer of culture.

In African cosmology, culture, traditions and customs are viewed as the glue that sustains social cohesion. Anagwo (2014:280) argues in this regard that culture is a complex total that comprises knowledge, art, beliefs, law, customs, morals and any other capabilities and habits that are acquired by a human being as a member of any particular society. Interestingly, Mbiti (1977:28) is of the view that “cultural imperialism” must first end to permit local culture to assimilate and internalise the gospel “on its own terms and without pressure from outside”. Furthermore, Mbiti (1977:28) urges Africans to humbly and gratefully “borrow and learn from other cultures but let us not become their cultural slaves”.

What makes Mbiti’s assertion interesting is the fact that although he is a theologian, he seems to be elevating culture above the gospel in that he seems to argue that the gospel can and must only be related to in ways dictated by culture. Be that as it may, the Apostle Paul cautions in Colossians 2:8: “Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world and not according to Christ.”

In line with the warning from the Apostle Paul, Danfulani (2016:61) makes an appeal to all and especially Africans to realise that cultures are continuously shifting in their patterns, values and commitments. In other words, culture is not static but it is constantly transforming. Perhaps Danfulani’s (2016) observation is informed by the argument presented by Kraft (2006:391). He states that God’s interaction with different cultures wrought change in them. Kraft (2006:391) also notes that God works with people first to bring about transformation in them, and then, through those people, cultural structures are changed. Kraft further observes that it is the people themselves who ought to make changes in cultural structures “on the basis of their understanding scriptures and God’s workings in their lives”.

Kraft’s argument is supported by Scripture. Matthew 13:33 states categorically that “the Kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough”. In other words, embracing the gospel and being committed to the teachings of Jesus Christ are bound to transform individuals and by extension culture and customs.

Parker (1999:204) introduces the premise he calls bi-cultural. He asserts that “to be bicultural means to be able to successfully manage the beliefs, values, standards and expectations of both the dominant culture and one’s culture even though one’s culture is devalued by the dominant culture”.

This researcher is of the view that in instances where one’s culture is in conflict with Christianity, the dominant element has to be Christianity. Here, it is best to adhere to the following advice of Van der Walt (2008:480):

Traditionalism or conservatism is the attitude or tendency of adhering rigidly to the past old ideas or practices and to resist change. It implies closed, with no appreciation for the good to be found in the new and the present. Our standpoint must be that the past was not always necessarily correct because our elders and forefathers were not perfect beings and we have to explore new avenues and have courage to do away with ways which cannot stand the test of time. We should be open-minded enough to realise and to accept the good things or virtues of the present age. Neither the past nor the present is absolutely good or absolutely bad. Both should be judged by the infallible yardstick – that is the word of God.

5.2 Inclusive homiletics and a missional church

It is crucial that both African preachers and their churches are missional in their approach to the issue of disability and disabled persons. Being missional in approach is to be supportive to disabled persons in terms of their spiritual, social and emotional needs. In line with this, White (2017:121) is of the view that disabled persons fall under the category of the “marginalised in society, and it is therefore imperative that their rights be respected, promoted and preserved”.

He goes on to propose that as part of the missional call of the church, the church must strive to consider all issues pertaining to the rights of persons with disabilities and must promote their inclusion and full participation in the church. In other words, White (2017) is suggesting that instead of bombarding disabled persons with messages of healing and prosperity, preachers and churches should rather strive to embrace and support them unreservedly.

Sande (2019:4) believes that the failure of faith leaders to embrace disabled persons strengthens the view that they are objects in need of deliverance by nondisabled members of the congregation. Still on this subject, Wolfensberger (1988:15-16) postulates that the

marginalisation of persons with disabilities is perpetuated when people see them as objects of charity in need of healing. He goes on to say that Christians devalue persons with disabilities by viewing them as aliens in churches.

Wilke (1980:40) acknowledges that persons with disabilities form a critical part of the church and society, they too are essential to the wholeness of the church. Taking the matter further, Amanze (2014:264) argues that Christian theology of disability should articulate that God is on the side of persons with disabilities because they too bear the image of God. Simply put and in agreement with Amanze, clergy as faith leaders should take a leaf from the Apostle Paul's body metaphor (1 Cor. 12) and that in itself should provide a theological motivation for the inclusion of persons with disabilities in church activities.

In an endeavour to address the inclusion of disabled persons in their congregations, the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God released a document in 2000 entitled "Ministry to people with disabilities: A Biblical Perspective". This document basically states that disabled persons are an integral part of the "wholeness of the Christian community". It goes on to highlight that the society of the day has no regard for "human life", subscribes to "physical perfection" and quick fixes and that is why the church should be vigilant in embracing and protecting "the helpless, vulnerable, disenfranchised, including people with disabilities. They are people created in God's image" (General Council of the Assemblies of God, 2000:4).

In line with this resolution, Dyches (2006:91-102) notes that the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints has also adopted the same stance of encouraging integration and inclusion of disabled persons in their congregations. The importance of this inclusion cannot be over-emphasised. Jacober (2010:170) is resolute that "despite a shared Christian perspective people with a disability should be included unconditionally in faith communities and the various ministries they offer".

In most African Initiated Churches (AICs) Jesus is depicted as "the powerful Conqueror over sickness and affliction, for which potent answers are always sought in Africa" (Anderson, 2001:233). Anderson (2001:233-234) observes that the solutions that AICs offer for life's challenges are ostensibly more potent than "those offered either by traditional means or by western Christianity, and they claim in the name of Christ deliverance from this adversity".

Yancey (2008:208) asserts that a critical contributor to successfully inclusive faith communities is when faith leaders first recognise and acknowledge their "own endless need for grace", preach about this need of grace weekly in their sermons and extend it to all those surrounding them in "starkly practical ways". This way disabled persons would never be shut

out of any faith community, for faith leaders would be constantly cognisant that they are themselves saved by grace and nothing else. Furthermore, Yancey (2008:208) also urges faith leaders to be “biblical without being fundamentalist, spiritual without being withdrawn from the world, and actively involved with the world but not conformed to it”. In other words, faith leaders should not only preach the good news, but their lives should also reflect what they preach.

5.3 Utilising disability theology

Disability theology, as mentioned in the previous chapter, seeks to “give voice to the rich and diverse theological meanings of the human experience of disability” (Swinton, 2011:274). Disability theology corresponds to liberation theology in this regard in that it condemns injustice, whilst advocating for the afflicted and by extension, the marginalised, helping to ensure that their voice is heard (Fast, 2012:428).

If the plea for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context is heeded, disability theology will become an indispensable partner in the quest for the authentic inclusion of disabled people in African churches. From the above, it should be clear that disability theology can play a pivotal role in sensitising church leadership and faith communities for this vulnerable group that has always been on the periphery. Apart from the purpose of sensitising the church, it presents itself as a responsible approach to this sensitive issue in that it seeks to provide theological perspectives that can penetrate long-standing beliefs that are wholly rooted in culture and popular beliefs. This is especially important in the African context, where this study has so far uncovered the powerful influence of culture on the way in which Africans perceive disability and express themselves towards the disabled in public and church life. It can put African churches on the path of a deeper understanding of this phenomenon, seeking new ways of understanding the phenomenon of disability based on the Bible. If disability theology can accomplish this, it will mean that Christ will prevail over culture and renew the limiting thinking imposed on Africans when it comes to this matter.

Disability theology also brings the importance of an interdisciplinary approach to theology to the fore, as it reminds of the importance of meta-theory in the quest for a theological understanding of disability. The way in which the African church informs its practices and

preaching should take into account the findings of disciplines like psychology, social work and such that can be conversation partners when doing theology.

Lastly, the insights from disability theologians referred to in the foregoing sections can inform a disability homiletic that embraces the body metaphor for the African church anew. It poses the all-important question of how the African church can be re-imagined through preaching that invokes an understanding for the disabled – and above all convinces the faith community to include all members with disability unconditionally, so that their particular gifts can also be employed to the benefit of the whole congregation or body.

5.4 Old and New Testament perspectives for preaching

5.4.1 Old Testament

Disability is part of the human experience of life. As indicated in chapter three, the fact that there is no guarantee in life means that people who are not disabled are “temporarily nondisabled” (Yong, 2015:25). Disability, contrary to what is popularly believed, is not the result of sin or wrong doing on the part of disabled people. It is merely part of the broken reality of the fall. This perspective is very important within the African context, as it was shown that cultural beliefs and preconceived ideas based on worldviews usually govern the attitude many Africans harbour towards people with disabilities. The Old Testament seems to contravene such pre-suppositions.

Faith communities should assume the same protective stance towards people with any form of disability found in the Old Testament as point of departure, seeking ways in which to promote the interests of those who present in any way with a disability. Understanding that the covenant of God was served in the lives of those who suffered adversities and challenges should also help the church to seek God’s purpose in the lives of disabled persons to whom the church ministers. The church should endeavour in its ministry to disabled persons to refrain from doing anything that contravenes God’s covenant love for disabled persons and instead support and reinforce it.

The Old Testament provides positive perspectives on disability, laying a positive theological foundation for the church’s thinking and practices regarding disabled people in the church. More so in light of the fact that disability, along with other manifestations of the broken reality, are subjected to the coming of the Messiah, where brokenness will have to make way for the restorative glory and eternal healing of the Lord.

In line with this, preachers can utilise the Old Testament texts that have been selected for the present study to advocate for an inclusive disability homiletic for the African context.

Genesis 1:26-28 speaks of the creation of man in the image of God. Preachers can preach on this text, emphasising that the image of God is inclusive of all people, regardless of culture, context and disability.

Leviticus 19:14 can be used by preachers to indicate God's protectiveness of disabled persons. This text sets the theme for churches in that it guides them on how to treat disabled persons. Although two disabilities (hearing and sight) are mentioned in this text, it can be used for other disabilities as well. As indicated in this text, no one should put a "stumbling block" before disabled people. This has implications on how church buildings are constructed – whether they are easily accessible, or they indeed have a "stumbling block" that impedes access of disabled persons. Additionally, negative attitudes also serve as a "stumbling block" that impedes inclusion and full participation of disabled persons.

Genesis 32:24-32 and Numbers 23 and 24 can be used to emphasise God's grace – although people make mistakes and falter, God still extends His hand of grace in that He redeems them from their mistakes and by extension, their sins. This text can also be used to indicate that God forgives sins and blesses people, undeserving as they may be. God's blessings for people do not only end with them, but extend to future generations.

Exodus 4:10-14 and Numbers 12:8-10 can be used to emphasise that when God wants to use people, He does not look at disability. Even though people may feel inadequate, as Moses did, God still resolutely uses people and provides help and grace, letting them know that He understands and knows what disability entails. Once God has chosen to use people, no one dares question why. God will not only use people, but will also protect and vindicate them when people speak against them.

2 Samuel 9 can be used to emphasise that although people may be down and out and disparaging themselves, God reaches out to them and looks beyond their fallen state. He does not treat them as charity cases, but extends His hand of grace to restore them to a place of dignity – this is not only restorative "justice, it is grace" (Temple & Ball, 2012:38). It also highlights that indeed, "man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7b). Another point that this text emphasises is that whilst David reached out to Mephibosheth to restore to him what belonged to his family, and he did not anticipate him being 'healed' from his disability, nor did he keep him at a distance – he invited him into his home to dine at the king's table continually, "as one of the king's sons" (2 Samuel 9:11b). Mephibosheth received favour from the king, and not patronising favour, but one that

put him in a prominent position of dignity and status, enabling him to run his own affairs, for “all that dwelt in the house of Ziba were servants unto Mephibosheth” (2 Samuel 9:12b, emphasis in original). This emphasises the fact that disabled persons are capable of making their own decisions and leading successful lives.

1 Kings 19:4-6 can be used to emphasise that all people need proper rest. This text serves to remind us that when we do not rest as we should, it will affect our mental vigour and by extension our mental health. This text applies to all church office bearers, especially pastors, because they tend to put themselves under tremendous pressure taking care of God’s flock. Consequently, their health is adversely affected and this in turn hampers their potential to excel in shepherding God’s flock.

Deuteronomy 27:18 can once more be used to emphasise the curse that would be the consequence of causing blind persons to “wander out of the way”. It can also be used to highlight God’s protective stance towards disabled persons. God expects the church to follow His example in protecting and valuing disabled persons, and failure to do so elicits a curse.

Isaiah 35:5-6 can be used to highlight the promise and coming of the Messiah, which will restore and heal this broken and sinful world. This brings good news to those who eagerly await the Messiah.

In addition to the aforementioned texts, Isaiah 56:7b can be used to emphasise that ideally, churches must be accessible to all and the benefits of such access must be enjoyed by all, “for mine house shall be called an house of prayer for all people” (Bible, 1991, KJV). This serves to confirm that all are welcome.

5.4.2 New Testament

The New Testament seems to take the baton from the Old Testament to carry forward, support and continue the perspectives regarding disabled people. Jesus reached out to disabled people, thereby demonstrating His love for and acceptance of them. This unconditional love and acceptance of all marginalised groups confirms the Old Testament concept that disability is no punishment, but rather a channel through which God can show His covenant love to the marginalised and bring glory to His name.

In line with this, the New Testament faith community is to show solidarity with all believers, treat them equally and include them. Discrimination, stigmatisation and exclusion therefore

have no place in the New Testament, as is suggested in the metaphor of the church as the body of Christ, where all members are equally important and necessary in the functioning of the church.

Preachers can also utilise the texts selected in the present study to foster an inclusive disability homiletic for the African context.

1 Corinthians 1:25-29 can be used by preachers to indicate that God does not look on the outward appearance, as man does, to judge and dismiss people considered of no significance. God is capable of using such people to bring glory and honour to Himself. The wisdom of this world is foolishness to Him. Hence, He values all people, and does not look down on anyone – no one is better or favourite – everyone is equal, for all are created in His image.

1 Corinthians 12 can be used to emphasise that each member has a significant role to play in the success of the faith community. Just as the members of a human body function interdependently, the church cannot be considered complete without the inclusion of disabled persons. They also bring unique talents to the church.

Luke 19:1-10 can be used to demonstrate God's persistence in pursuing sinners, giving them ample opportunity to improve and turn away from their sins. It also shows how Jesus is not ashamed to associate with sinners, but pursues them even against public approval.

Luke 14:16-24 can be used to emphasise that all are welcome to God's banquet table. The banquet table symbolises the church, which must welcome and include disabled people. It also highlights the fact that contrary to the expectations of the world, people who are bidden to share in the banquet are the lowly, showing that God prefers them above people who consider themselves perfect and of high social standing. "In God's encompassing banquet, no one can claim special entitlement: rich and poor, righteous and sinful, women and men, sick and healthy alike are welcome" (Reynolds, 2006:200).

5.5 Homiletics and homiletic theory

As alluded to in chapter one, the word homiletics stems from the Greek word *homiletikos* and means the art of preaching or preparing a sermon. In reference to McClure's (2007:22) definition of disability provided cited in chapter four as "a physical, emotional, or cognitive loss of ability in human functioning that either hinders one's access to preaching, hearing,

understanding, or seeing sermons, or excludes one from messages preached”, preachers should always be cognisant of challenges or impairments that their audiences may have.

One of the theologians who has done groundbreaking work in homiletics is Craddock. Wilson (2004:11) affirms that Craddock should be credited for his work in inductive and narrative preaching, which has in turn “helped preachers move into new ways of engaging listeners.”

Craddock (2001:56) calls for sermons to be revitalised from a sheer transmission of “facts and information”. Indeed, about such sermons, Craddock (2002:62) asserts that “nothing could be more unbiblical, not to mention uninteresting and ineffective”. Furthermore, Craddock (2002:53) rightly observes that preaching, similar to the Bible, has to speak to audiences and apply to their real-life experiences so that it can be understood and internalised to be beneficial in any way. However, it must be highlighted that when disability is involved, the purpose of preaching can become even more challenging when access to sermons is limited.

Furthermore, Craddock (2002:53) also asserts that preaching is “not a collection of theological and ethical arguments to persuade atheists or adherents of other religions”. In this regard, Craddock (2002:103) affirms that listeners are very important in preaching and proposes that “with the listener is the place to begin”. In other words, Craddock (2002) counsels preachers to take special care of their listeners, even more so when preaching is aimed at inclusivity.

Craddock (2002:173) indicates that in actual communication between human beings the “sender has to be not only in the sender position” and that the sender should also be “in the receiver position before he or she can send anything”...Human communication is never one way”. This means that preachers should be open to dialogue and not monologue, when it comes to the Word of God. In this regard, Craddock (1991:167) believes in the kind of communication “that respects and cares for listeners as thinking, feeling, deciding, believing human beings”. In agreement with Ong and Craddock, in order to formulate a framework for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context, it is critical to note that preaching is essentially a form of communication, albeit with a higher aim, namely to persuade the hearers to faith.

Craddock (2001:36) also recommends that a preacher “see himself first of all as a listener to the Word of God. Granted the extreme difficulty of this posture for the pulpit, its importance cannot be overstressed”. Craddock (2001:24) emphasises that preaching is a “cool” medium, that is “not all is given by the speaker; much has to be contributed by the listener. Active participation by both is required”.

Craddock (2001:25) furthermore affirms that sermons would not exist if there were no listeners, hence listeners are key to preaching and for this reason “the one preaching does not put down, insult, violate, or ignore those whose investment in the message is no less than that of the speaker”. He goes on to counsel that preachers need to “interpret the listeners” (Craddock, 2001:84-98). Craddock (2001:84-98) expresses his dismay at the method preachers utilised in preaching in previous years, calling it “authoritarian and often condescending in attitude toward listeners” and admonished preachers to “resist the temptation to tyranny of ideas rather than democratic sharing” (Craddock, 2001:54). Preaching in a way that is “democratic sharing” is not hierarchical, but is mindful of all that are present and flexible enough to embrace and accommodate them, by allowing them to be active participants in sermon preparation. This kind of preaching is inclusive in nature and not only inclusive of culture and context, but also of disabilities or any barriers to preached sermons.

As indicated in chapter three, widespread tendencies in preaching are to either conflate disability with sin or to question the strength disabled persons’ faith. Creamer (2003:60) notes that although these erroneous assumptions on the part of clergy and church members may seem harmless to them, they inflict a great deal of pain on disabled congregants. For the most part, as indicated above, the theologies and language utilised in preaching have a negative effect on disabled persons. In agreement with Creamer, Black (1996:122) says that ministers do not necessarily mean to use hurtful theologies and language in preaching. This then shows that there is a dire need for training and sensitisation of clergy and members of faith communities, in order to be well versed in welcoming and including disabled persons in faith communities.

Craddock (2001:86) is of the view that “preaching brings the Scriptures forward as a living voice in the congregation”. To this end, clergy have a divine obligation to ensure this “living voice” welcomes, includes and nurtures all those who hear it. In agreement with Craddock, Black (1996:180) emphasises the critical role of preaching in forming inclusive congregations, remarking that preachers “can contribute to an attitude of welcoming acceptance of persons with disabilities both in our churches and in society”. In other words, preachers have an immense influence on faith communities and society as a whole, which they should use well in constructive ways that edify and uplift all.

Indeed, Craddock’s ground breaking work and method in preaching is exemplary and encourages preachers to expand preaching so that it includes liturgy. Expanding preaching to include liturgy is made possible by taking the listeners seriously and the creation of dialogue. As alluded to in the previous chapter, preaching is ideally all about “a servant

ministry in which all God's people have a voice" (Stevenson & Wright, 2008:8). In this regard, when faith communities "have a voice", liturgy would achieve its goal, as it would be planned and executed in practical ways that address church life both realistically and authentically. One practical way is for liturgy to involve disabled persons, encouraging them to share their lived experiences. Also, forming small groups – which are inclusive of disabled persons – that are mainly responsible for raising awareness in the church, with a critical element of ensuring that the voice of disabled persons is heard. When faith communities listen to disabled persons on issues of how best to include them, instead of just assuming that they know what disabled persons need, they will go a long way. Jesus Himself set a good example when He enquired of Bartemaeus: "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" (Mark 10:51) By asking Bartemaeus what he wanted done for him, "Jesus, who probably knew the man's thoughts, does him the dignity of asking first" (Temple & Ball, 2012:39). Involving disabled persons in awareness raising initiatives includes them and emphasises the fact that human beings by nature were not meant to be alone or reclusive (Gen. 2:18-22), as is the case with some disabled people who live alone (Temple & Ball, 2012:47-49). Faith leaders and fellow believers should also treat disabled people as they would like to be treated (cf. Matt. 7:12), by addressing them by their names and not merely pejoratively identifying them according to their disabilities, such as "the blind woman" or "that man in the wheelchair" (Temple & Ball, 2012:38). Disabled persons can truly benefit from interdependence with fellow believers. According to Acts 6, the church looked after widows. Given the fact that disabled persons are among the marginalised groups protected by God, this care also extends to them and not in a patronising manner, but an inclusive manner, recognising that they too have valuable contributions to make to the church.

5.6 Disabled congregants as people first

Contrary to what most people believe, disabled people have a great deal to contribute to the success of faith communities. This stems from the fact that not all disabilities are congenital. For instance, as pointed out by Griffin, Summer, McMillan, Day, & Hodapp (2012), there are highly qualified war veterans with acquired disabilities who need to be viewed as "ministering agents in their own right so that the church's mission is carried out not just *to* people with disabilities but *with* them" (emphasis in original). Griffin *et al.* (2012) further affirm that "veterans with disabilities are an untapped resource for congregations. If churches can come to see such people with their various giftings as capable of contributing to the body of Christ, such assets may be released in the wider community for the benefit and edification of all".

There are no guarantees in life and disability can strike at any time. The Malawian proverb in the Chewa language captures this reality profoundly: *Lunga-lunga pobadwa chilema chichita kudza* (Disabilities come later in life. Even if you are born perfect there is no assurance that you will not be disabled in life) (Devlieger, 1999). Apart from war veterans, clergy and other professionals can also be affected by disability. It would be very unwise on the part of faith communities to ignore and discard the wealth of talents such people have, which can lead to the edification and enormous success of the church. Griffin *et al.* (2012) also postulate that the recognition of disabled people's talents and their contribution in the church can result in the church becoming an inclusive community "when it not only undertakes mission *to* people with disabilities (treated here merely as objects of charity) but also engages *with* people with disabilities as subjects and agents of ministry" (emphasis in original).

African culture is communal in nature, there is no solitary, isolated human being. African culture emphasises the interdependence of all human beings; it promotes the concept of *Ubuntu*, which indicates that "motho ke motho ka batho ba bang", "umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu" – "a person is a person through other persons". This simply means that no person can survive on their own without the active role of other people in their life. According to Tutu (2011:26), "the quality of ubuntu gives people resilience, enabling them to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanise them". This depicts the strength that can only be achieved through unity.

Just as every African is part of a community, Tutu (2011:20) is emphatic that every human being is a part of God's family and that no one is excluded. He further asserts that since all are "insiders" in God's family, then there is no doubt that all are equal, for "equality is essential to human life and well-being (Tutu, 2011:21).

Tutu (2011:41) makes the following profound statement about faith communities participating in God's mission to save humanity: "But if you are to be true partners with God in the transfiguration of this world and help bring this triumph of love over hatred, of good over evil, you must begin by understanding that as much as God loves you, God equally loves your enemies." Indeed, the knowledge that God loves us all equally and has no favourites or step children (Tutu, 2011:40) ought to be a unifying force for humanity. All God's children can carry out the great commission (Matt. 28:18-20), knowing that each one is "the indispensable agent of change" in faith communities (Tutu, 2011:61).

The Bible is an excellent example of a manual that guides faith communities to know and do what is right. In this case, what is right is to promote the full inclusion and participation of disabled persons in faith communities. When faith communities segregate disabled persons, Tutu (2011:39) asserts that it is tantamount to Nazism that “despised the ‘weak’ and admired the ‘strong’”. Since all have come short of the glory of God, due to sin, “when we realise that God loves us *with* our weakness, vulnerability, failures, we can begin to accept them as an inevitable part of our human life” (Tutu, 2011:39).

It is not always easy for disabled persons to have good self-esteem. “Being at the receiving end of unwitting excluding behaviour on the part of so many people frequently leads to low self-esteem, lack of assertiveness and a minimal sense of value and significance among those with learning disabilities” (Temple & Ball, 2012:40). To this end, faith leaders have to work assiduously to nurture self-love and a healthy self-worth in disabled persons. Tutu (2011:29) affirms that “to first love yourself, you must know that God loves you now and loves you always” irrespective of disability. Furthermore, God does not love us because of anything we can do to impress Him, instead, He loves us just as we are and unreservedly so (cf. Rom. 5:8). The parable Jesus told about the prodigal son serves as a good example of God’s unconditional love (cf. Luke 15:11-32).

5.6.1 Children as part of faith communities

As indicated in chapter three, the African adage “it takes a village to raise a child” denotes the communality of African culture. Faith communities have an obligation to provide for the spiritual nurturing of children with disabilities. Just as African communities rally around new parents to support them, similarly, faith communities should provide a welcoming and inclusive environment for families of children with disabilities. Clarke (2016:16) indicates that families with disabled children should not be shunned but embraced as they “need the church’s spiritual help, but they also desperately need the church to offer practical support”. When children are baptised, those present pledge to “nurture and guide the child by word and deed, with love and prayer...” (Webb-Mitchell, 2008:16). When church members utter these words, they acknowledge that they are responsible for the child, not only to one another but to God as well. Given the reality in faith communities that reject families of children with disabilities, this pledge seems to be but lip service.

Bailey (2010:59) notes that the essential adjustment that faith communities can make is when they offer “the sacred gift of friendship”. Furthermore, he notes that this “sacred friendship”

commences when a couple in the congregation welcomes a disabled child into their family, and the church “rallies around the family” (Bailey, 2010:59). The act of uniting with the family to welcome the disabled child says ““We will journey with you and this beloved child. We will not abandon you”” (Bailey, 2010:59). Ideally, this is what ought to happen in faith communities, regrettably, it is not always the case.

Referring to the Holy Communion as *Christ’s table*, Webb-Mitchell (2008:24) says that “At the table, seeing children with disabling conditions, we come face-to-face with our dependence, which is not exactly an easy thing to do in a society that celebrates the autonomous individual”. Indeed, church members should be entirely dependent on Christ and as the body of Christ, interdependent for optimal functionality (Eph. 4:15-16).

Webb-Mitchell (2008:24) goes on to point out that “Children with disabilities (and all of us) need to learn not only *how* to share, but *why* to share, absorbing from experiences around them the very ways we share” (emphasis in original). This holistic learning is hampered in settings where disabled children are segregated to special schools, and it has excused why they have been left out of “mainstream settings” (Ballard, 2004:315).

For Brown (2001:67) there is a strong connection between children’s ministry and adult education. He goes on to point out that a “strong, healthy and vibrant” children’s ministry has great influence on the strength, health and vibrancy of the adult ministry. In fact, when faith communities have their children’s ministries right – inclusive – then the inclusion of disabled adults would not be anything out of the ordinary.

Brown (2001:69) goes on to point out that children need to be engaged in meaningful ways as they live in a “rapidly changing world” where technological advancement has resulted in Christian educators and clergy being challenged to offer resources that are appealing, interactive and holistically nurturing.

Jesus always included children in His ministry – He was never too busy to give them quality time. He loved and cared for them so much, rebuked those who attempted to keep them away from Him, bade them come to Him and even blessed them (Matt. 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16). Given this prime example, Brown (2001:70) poses critical questions on how inclusive faith communities are of children – how children are welcomed to “worship and other activities”, are they kept apart from adult congregants in a bid to avoid being “bothered by their questions, their restlessness, and the curiosity?” (Brown, 2001:70). In addition to Brown’s questions, are faith communities nurturing a spirit of segregation or inclusion in their

children? Children learn from adults and they hold on to what they are taught, whether it is to love, hate, include, segregate, welcome, snub, embrace or reject. With this sobering thought in mind, faith communities would do well to nurture healthy attitudes in children within their ministries.

5.7 Faith leaders as drivers of change

Faith leaders play a pivotal role in the lives of their followers. Eales-White (2003:204) defines a leader as a person who rules or guides others. Fischer (2018:226) is of the opinion that “leadership in the faith community has a direct influence on what the faith community does and what it contributes with regard to people and families”. In other words, clergy have a great influence on the attitudes of faith communities and especially on issues that relate to persons with disabilities. The more innovative and welcoming clergy are, the more inclusive their churches will be, because their congregations will take cues from them.

To Luthans, Luthans and Luthans (2004:45) leadership is all about providing hope. They go on to say that hope is a spiritual ability that can be nurtured and is closely related to the effectiveness of leadership. In other words, clergy as leaders are not only entrusted with the responsibility of guiding their congregations, but also to provide hope. Fischer (2018:208) is of the view that there is a general trend that congregational attitudes towards persons with disabilities are to a large extent determined by influential individuals within that particular congregation. This means that the role clergy play is prominent in ensuring that there is positive change amongst congregations in relation to persons with disabilities.

What Fischer (2018) is emphasising is that as leaders and the most influential figures in their churches, clergy should be catalysts of change in the way their congregations treat persons with disabilities. One of the strategies clergy or faith leaders can employ to foster unity and inclusion of persons with disabilities is to introduce skills development programmes, which can enable interaction at all levels in their churches.

This kind of initiative will play a vital role in sensitising faith communities, thereby changing perceptions and easing the rejection and exclusion experienced by disabled persons. Fischer (2018:226) argues that when faith communities are well versed in terms of disability awareness, it would be easy for them to be welcoming and supportive of not only disabled fellow believers, but disabled persons in broader society “and will be less likely to be agitated by them or judgemental about them”.

Faith communities can buy into the notion of inclusivity when faith leaders themselves are genuinely committed to driving the concept of inclusion. As disabled persons are welcomed and recognised for the contributions they can make, instead of as burdens, a diverse and vibrant faith community can ensue. "Churches can be crucial sites for the formation of spaces of belonging, where all ages can learn to exercise the mutuality, reciprocity, and hospitality of inclusion through interaction with people with intellectual disabilities" (Griffin *et al.*, 2012). Christians across the globe, particularly those coming from the reformed tradition, accept the Bible as the true inspired Word of God. Matthew 28:18-20 records how Jesus Christ, after His resurrection, commissioned His disciples to:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen. (KJV)

Jesus' "teaching them to observe all things" speaks not only of educating them, but of transformation as well. Bosch (2011:67) suggests that "it is important to recognise that for Matthew, teaching is by no means a merely intellectual enterprise. Jesus' teaching is an appeal to His listeners' will not primarily to their intellect, it is a call for a concrete decision to follow Him and to submit to God's will".

In other words, the church and by extension church/faith leaders have a pivotal role to play in ensuring that the ultimate goal of Jesus Christ is achieved. In essence, faith leaders or clergy are the custodians of the gospel, which Merriam Webster (2016) defines as "something accepted or promoted as infallible truth or as a guiding principle or doctrine".

It is critical that faith communities endeavour to always yearn for Christ's image. Shantz (2003:62) asserts that "to attain the image of Christ means to...remain with the oppressed and the disadvantaged. It means to make their lot as one's own. It means that we must remain with those who are suffering, and stand in solidarity with the victims by sharing their fate".

The Apostle Paul exhorts believers in Romans 15:7 to "accept one another". Therefore, disabled persons and all other marginalised persons should be brought into the church from the periphery. Accepting one another would be acknowledging the body metaphor that the Apostle Paul describes in 1 Corinthians 12. Farber-Robertson (2000:69) observes that utilising a particular "system, such as the body, to talk about another system, such as the church, is a powerful teaching tool". Utilising such "illustrative metaphors" helps people get a better perspective of things and to understand how they affect them.

As servants of the Lord and custodians of the “infallible truth”, it is thus crucial that they allow themselves to be agents of change and diversity and they can do this by preaching a pure unadulterated gospel and simply by being the embodiment of Jesus Christ’s love and compassion.

Given the way faith communities reject marginalised groups, it is often difficult for those in need of the Saviour’s love and care to believe that God truly cares. When human beings go through pain, it is difficult to understand why such things happen to them when there is a loving God in heaven. Faith communities in Africa are surrounded by similar groups to those in Jesus’ time – disabled persons, the sick (cholera, malaria, HIV/AIDS and so forth), the poor, prostitutes and so forth. However, faith communities are not doing their part in inviting the marginalised in (cf. Luke 14:13). If only the majority of marginalised people who are completely excluded from faith communities could hear the good news of salvation, the way Jesus intended it to be, they would somehow be comforted thereby that they fall within the categories of those Jesus deliberately sought out. Yancey (1995:155-156) observes that in His parables Jesus made the poor and rejected heroes (Luke 16:20-31). On the other hand, Yancey (1995:156-157) marvels why things have taken such a change in faith communities today. He questions how the church today has deviated from the example Jesus set in reaching out to marginalised groups and welcoming them whilst “the rich and powerful stood on the side lines, testing him, spying, trying to entrap him” (Yancey, 1995:157).

As indicated above, Jesus is the prime example for faith communities. He has demonstrated that faith communities can indeed be inclusive and ideally that is how they should be, for that was the crux of His ministry and message. Since Jesus ascended to heaven, faith communities have the task to continue with His mission. As Heitink (1999:4) asserts, “God’s work became the work of human beings”. Yancey (1995:155) affirms that through His revolutionary ministry “Jesus moved the emphasis from God’s holiness (exclusive) to God’s mercy (inclusive)”. Christians in African faith communities “have assurance, because of Jesus, that God knows no undesirables” (Yancey, 1995:155). Grace is not just an abstract concept to them, since they experience adversity and know that Jesus also experienced adversity on earth (Yancey, 1995:157). Indeed, Jesus understands all the pain that disabled persons go through. The riveting thought about Jesus’ death on the cross is that He paid the penalty for the entire world’s sins, even though He never sinned.

Jesus had a special place for children and just as He included disabled persons, women, poor, sick, he included children and even blessed them (Matt.19:14; Mark 10:14; Luke 18:16).

Jesus used little children in His object lessons, in a bid to teach His followers that it is better to be humble (Matt. 18:1-4; Mark 9:33-37; Luke 9:46-48). In other words, He urged them to humble themselves like a little child in order to attain greatness (Howell, 2003:190).

It must be noted however that Jesus was not saying His disciples and audience should be like children in the literal sense. He was not encouraging them to show “naivety or playful foolishness” as children are prone to do (Howell, 2003:191). However, He was using children to highlight the fact that children have not yet “mastered the adult arts of manipulation, self-aggrandizement, and political maneuvering” (Howell, 2003:191). Instead, like little children, He urged them to have complete trust, simplicity and no interest whatsoever in social status. Those are the qualities that Jesus sought to foster in His disciples as well as His audiences.

5.8 The role of faith communities in the African context

Although faith communities in different parts of the world have played a major role in taking care of disabled people, it would seem that not much has been done in the architectural structures of many churches. According to Griffin *et al.* (2012), a survey conducted in 2000 by the National Organisation on Disability found that “84% of people with disabilities and 87% of people without disabilities” considered faith “an important aspect of their lives”. It is easy to see that these figures are almost the same. If faith is then as important to disabled people as it is to those without disabilities, it goes to show that existing disparities in church attendance are not due to a lack of interest from disabled people but rather due to “other barriers such as poor accessibility or negative attitudes towards their participation” (Griffin *et al.*, 2012).

Griffin *et al.* (2012) highlight the three critical pointers in welcoming congregations as: accessibility, hospitality and contributions of disabled congregants. Accessibility is the first of these and is said to be “including both physical accessibility as well as accommodations that promote the full participation of people with disabilities in the community”. Hospitality is said to extend the concept of inclusion beyond simple accessibility. It “encompasses those aspects of a community that actively welcome people with disabilities to become members and to participate in the community”. The third pointer, contributions of disabled congregants, calls for the recognition of contributions by disabled people in congregations “by ensuring that congregants with disabilities have opportunities to contribute”. When faith communities recognise these contributions, they signify that disabled congregants are valued and are an integral part of the congregation.

Disabled people, just like any other, have rights too. White (2017:121) points out that “the idea of human rights is the claim that all people have the same rights to be treated as persons, irrespective of the religion, sex, political persuasions or social or economic status”. Interestingly, even though the Bible is not explicit and detailed on the issue of human rights, it does mention something very crucial. According to the Book of Genesis, man was created in the likeness of God (Gen. 1:26-27), also referred to as the *imago Dei*. The phrase *imago Dei* is a Latin phrase that signifies a symbolic relationship between God and created man. Wilson (2017:263) states that:

In the *imago Dei*, several of the most influential voices in theology have located foundational claims about the nature of humanity and God. Augustine, for instance, understood the divine image as residing in the human soul, while Thomas Aquinas found it in the human ability to reason.

The image of God referred to here does not discriminate on the basis of its form or shape. According to Genesis 1:21, when God created living creatures, He created them “after their kind”. However, when God created human beings, He created them according to one kind, that is in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). To that end, the image of God is borne by every human being alive on planet earth, with no exceptions, including disabled persons. Additionally, Tutu (2011:62) highlights that “we are each created by God, like God, for God”, and that we do not need to impugn the image of God represented in disabled persons since “each human being was created in the same divine image”.

On the issue of the role of faith communities, Poston and Turnbull (2004:96) start first by defining what religion is. They point out that “religion is defined as the institutionalised and organised patterns of beliefs, moral, rituals and social structures that people create to help fulfil their spiritual quest”. They go on to say that disability, like any illness, is intertwined with religious beliefs and as such religion has to provide three basic functions to a disabled person, namely: a framework to make sense of their disability, material resources as well as to give them hope for the future, which in turn can lead to a positive acceptance of the disability.

The role of faith communities in the African context is of paramount importance, because the African culture is fraught with superstitions and myths, thereby contributing to disabled people still being subjected to prejudice, discrimination and senseless segregation. Thus, the role of faith communities is significant in debunking myths as well as ensuring the full inclusion of disabled people. Scripture states: “Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute” (Prov. 31:8 – Bible, 1982, NKJV). Perhaps it is such Scriptures that have inspired White (2017:121) to acknowledge that given the fact

that disabled people form a great part of people who are marginalised in every society, especially in Africa, it is important that faith communities rise up to ensure that their rights are not only respected but protected, promoted and addressed.

White's acknowledgement and appeal could also emanate from the admission of the All Africa Conference of Churches of 1991 that many of their member churches are lagging behind in processes to fully integrate disabled people into churches. Therefore, the role of faith communities is to recognise and nourish the spiritual needs of disabled people. They should not only be seen as seeking miraculous healing, but as God's children who need spiritual nourishment and can also add value to the congregation through the contributions they can make as they put their talents to good use, thereby proving that they are indeed an integral part of faith communities.

Peterson (2011:22) affirms that when faith communities claim to follow Jesus, they should truly follow in His footsteps, the way (John 14:6), as He has shown through his unrivalled example. "To follow Jesus means that we can't separate what Jesus is saying from what Jesus is doing and the way that he is doing it" (Peterson, 2011:22). In line with this, it is imperative that when faith communities emulate Jesus, it should be in full and not just in part, but in full. For instance, they should make more effort to reach out to marginalised groups and bring them into faith communities. An inclusive disability homiletic has the ultimate objective to transform faith communities to treat and engage disabled persons as bearers of the image of God. With this fact constantly in mind, designing and/or adapting church buildings in a way that makes them accessible, welcoming and accommodating will become the norm instead of an exception.

One of the practical ways in which faith leaders can promote inclusivity and full participation of disabled persons is through the involvement of their congregations in collaborative preaching. McClure (2007:13) points out that the exercise of collaborative preaching necessitates faith leaders to form some kind of committee that comprises members from their congregations as well as people outside their congregations. The purpose of such a committee would be to brainstorm about the subject that the faith leader intends to preach about. The brainstorming session would not only be limited to the discussion of theology or the Bible, but would be a platform that could significantly enrich the faith leader by sharing some first-hand information on the lived experiences of different groups of people – it may be disabled persons, youth, children, women, elderly people as well as experts from various disciplines. After the brainstorming session, the faith leader would then prepare the sermon and incorporate all the valuable information gleaned from the brainstorming session. After

the sermon has been delivered, faith leaders would once more return to the committee to obtain feedback on what they think about the sermon. Ideally, it would be beneficial to let members of such a committee serve a term, after which new members can be elected in order to ensure that all groups within a congregation are well represented.

In agreement, Van der Walt (2010:411) urges Christians to be at home in God's world by not only leading godly lives and being devout church members, but by being actively involved in various "social relationships outside the church". Such relationships with different stakeholders would enrich the experience of faith leaders and by extension, entire faith communities.

There is a tendency to preach to different groups, even if faith leaders are not really conversant with the challenges each group faces. However, when faith leaders deliberately involve different stakeholders in brainstorming exercises, this would put faith communities well on their way to genuine inclusivity in word and deed. This way, all categories represented in the congregation would feel both at home and also valued – that is disabled persons, children, youth, adults as well as the elderly.

For instance, one of the biggest challenges faith leaders face is to make faith communities accessible and hospitable. Yancey (1995:147) observes that during Jesus' ministry "the more unsavoury the characters, the more at ease they seemed to feel around Jesus. People like these found Jesus appealing". On the other hand, Jesus received an indifferent response from people who were considered "more respectable...Pious Pharisees thought him uncouth and worldly" (Yancey, 1995:147). Nowadays, it is the more respectable who are seen in large numbers in faith communities, whilst the marginalised or "unsavoury characters" would rather stay away from cold and judgmental faith communities.

Furthermore, Yancey (1995:148) highlights that instead of making "sinners" feel at ease like Jesus did, faith communities are shutting them out by having "created a community of respectability in church...The down-and-out, who flocked to Jesus when he lived on earth, no longer feel welcome". Yancey (1995:148) also wonders: "How did Jesus, the only perfect person in history, manage to attract the notoriously imperfect? And what keeps us from following in his steps today?" These are quite sobering questions for any faith community that claims to be preaching the good news commissioned by Jesus Christ.

Regrettably, faith communities seem not to realise that they are not accurately representative of Jesus and His mission when they portray a picture of perfection, purity and holiness to those in need of spiritual repose and the assurance of God's grace and forgiveness. Yancey (1995:149) asks yet another sobering question: "What would it take...for church to become

a place where prostitutes, tax collectors, and even guilt-tinged Pharisees would gladly gather?”

Farber-Robertson (2000:61) talks about change being inevitable, therefore, faith leaders would do well to be flexible and open to learn. They do not have to go anywhere special to learn, they can do it right in their faith communities, as long as they are “open to the movement of the spirit that blows where it wills, and speaks through others as well as in our own head and heart...learning, which always includes the risk or opportunity for transformation” (Farber-Robertson, 2000:61). Instead of being set in their ways and exclaiming that they do things the way they have always been done, faith leaders can be innovative by immersing themselves in unfamiliar situations such as the following:

- Learning sign language and Braille
- Spending one day in a wheelchair to establish how accessible the church building and liturgy are
- Wearing a blind fold and using a white cane to navigate the church building
- Wearing ear plugs to experience how those dealing with hearing loss and impairments cope – to check if sermons are audible enough
- Allowing disabled persons to lead – giving them the opportunity to share their experiences as well as guide the congregation on how best to interact with them

It is important to note that learning is a process and not always a pleasant one, because it can cause one to feel unsettled at times, usually such moments are followed by “plateau periods in which the learnings are integrated” (Farber-Robertson, 2000:69). One of the suggestions from Davie and Thornburgh (2010:19) for congregations that want to improve personal interactions with disabled persons is to “try to see the wholeness of spirit underneath and overcome the tendency to turn away or ignore the person with the disability”.

The onus is on faith communities to truly emulate Jesus in unreservedly welcoming all to share in God’s banquet prepared for the most vulnerable – “the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind” (Luke 14:12). In agreement with Bayes (2015), as cited in chapter one, Yancey (1995:153) also highlights the “revolutionary changes Jesus set in motion” during His ministry. For the most part, Jesus broke all the rules that the Pharisees clung to and legalistically enforced – rules of segregation and stigmatisation of the poor, disabled, women, leprous, foreigners. This points to what the Apostle Paul alludes to when he proclaims that “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor

female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). This proclamation by the Apostle Paul was prompted by his knowledge of the loving God and His only-begotten Son, Jesus, who had even declared that He had come to “seek and save the lost” (Luke 19:10).

5. 9 Preliminary synthesis

This chapter sought to articulate markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context by executing the fourth of Osmer’s practical theological interpretation tasks, the pragmatic task. This fourth movement poses the question, “How might we respond?” (Osmer 2008:4), and involves responses that can lead to change. Some of the perspectives critical to the articulation of markers for an inclusive homiletic in the African context were highlighted.

The importance of African preachers and churches being inclusive and missional towards disabled persons, was highlighted. A church that is inclusive and missional supports disabled persons spiritually, socially and emotionally, taking into cognisance the pivotal role of the church to respect, promote and preserve the rights of all marginalised people in society. In seeking the inclusion and full participation of disabled persons in African faith communities, the church should welcome and embrace them unreservedly and not seek to heal and normalise them. That is, positive Scriptural perspectives on disability and disabled persons should be emphasised through preaching and the unique gifts of disabled persons should be utilised and valued within the faith community. As this study was not an empirical investigation into if and when preachers in African churches do preach about disability, it remains a lead for further research to analyse to what extent an inclusive disability homiletic is present in African churches.

The critical role that disability theology plays in the implementation of an inclusive homiletic in the African context has been highlighted, as disability theology champions the cause of disabled persons by playing an advocacy role, condemning injustice. Disability theology informs and sensitises clergy and congregants on issues of disability, and in turn, they lead the way in drawing disabled persons from the peripheries to the centre of faith communities, thereby producing a vibrant ministry. Disability theology was shown in this study to be a diverse and well established field in theology, but it remains an open question to what extent clergy receive training in this regard and how sensitive and knowledgeable they in fact are about this issue.

In the quest for an inclusive disability homiletic for the African context, it was shown that human dignity anchored in the *imago Dei* is a crucial foundational point of departure. In this regard it has been highlighted that God thinks highly of disabled persons, and this is highlighted in the Old and New Testaments through the protective stance towards disabled persons. The church should take cues from God who chose disabled persons to make and fulfil His covenant. This sends a positive message that indeed, God's divine image is the same in all people, irrespective of disability and methods should be sought to achieve this through preaching in African church-life.

It has been noted that the homiletic theory of African churches should shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that it contributes to a positive attitude of welcoming acceptance towards disabled persons in church as well as in broader society. This points to a sensitising of academics about this issue which will call for proper research and writing on this issue in varied African contexts. However, it should be noted that preachers play a pivotal role in influencing faith communities through preaching. Liturgy also plays a critical role in ensuring that disabled persons are drawn into the centre of the church from the margins. Hence, as indicated above, liturgy should not be contrived, but should be planned and executed in practical ways that foster the authentic welcome of disabled persons.

The study also underlined that disabled congregants have a lot to offer in terms of their contribution to inclusive faith communities. Since not all disabilities are congenital, congregants who acquired disabilities whilst serving in leading positions in the church, can still be allowed to enrich the church with their talents. The African culture has been shown to be communal in nature, subscribing to the concept of *Ubuntu*, which reaches out to others in a caring and nurturing way. It is imagined that the African culture has been inspired by the Biblical concept that accentuates that people are their brothers' keepers. This concept of being a brother's keeper should be promoted even more by faith communities.

Still on the issue of the communality of African culture, children with disabilities should be embraced and nurtured like their nondisabled counterparts in order to ensure that they remain active congregants in faith communities. Jesus bade His disciples and other members of society to "suffer little children to come unto me" (Matt. 19:14, Mark 10:14, Luke 18:16), hence faith communities are to be a place of welcome and joy to all children, including those with disabilities.

The duty of faith leaders in championing the necessary change in faith communities cannot be overemphasised. Congregants take cues, positive or negative, from their faith leaders, thus faith leaders have an immense influence on their congregations. An inclusive faith

leader thus creates an inclusive congregation. Just as Christ sought out people from marginalised groups, so should faith leaders, through outreach programmes which actively involve disabled persons, clearly showing that the church is in solidarity with disabled persons. This will ensure that sermons preached do not only end on the pulpit, but become a lived experience of the church.

It has been highlighted that African faith leaders have a great challenge because of the prejudice and discrimination disabled persons are subjected to as a result of superstitions and myths. Christ is to be uplifted in African faith communities – it means, His example should be followed in word and deed in all respects, not just where it is convenient. Ultimately, the objective of an inclusive homiletic in the African context is to transform faith communities to be Christ-like in the way they treat disabled persons, acknowledging them as the valuable image bearers they are.

Chapter 6: Summary and conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The aim of this study was to propose an inclusive disability homiletic for the African context. Disability was understood to be a complex phenomenon and when it was studied in the African context, it was found to be complicated even more by African beliefs, worldviews and culture. The focus was on homiletically including disabled persons by addressing disability in preaching, but also creating an understanding of disability by congregation members, thereby ensuring that they are authentically welcomed and included in faith communities and not just ostensibly so. To this end, welcoming and including disabled persons entail fostering their full participation in faith communities, where their voices would be heard and their contributions valued, through articulating markers for an inclusive disability homiletic.

6.2 Findings

6.2.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter served as the introduction to this research. The main research question of this study was:

What are some of the markers for an inclusive disability homiletic through which current perceptions and beliefs about disability in African faith communities can be addressed?

Four main objectives were outlined and each objective was linked to a task of the practical theological interpretation based on Osmer's model.

The four objectives of the study were as follow:

- To engage the phenomenon of disability in the light of the African context and worldview – chapter two – the descriptive empirical task
- To investigate how disability is addressed in the African context through preaching – chapter three – the interpretive task
- To investigate disability theology and Scripture in order to articulate basis-theoretical points of departure for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context – chapter four – the normative task
- To suggest markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context – chapter five – the pragmatic task

6.2.2 Chapter 2: Disability in the light of the African context and worldview

The aim of this chapter was to engage the phenomenon of disability in the light of the African context and worldview in order to indicate how disability is perceived in that particular framework. This chapter highlighted the universal nature of disability and how it is perceived in different cultures. The specific belief and value systems in which the negative stance towards disability is grounded, was demonstrated to emanate from a worldview embedded in a particular context. This chapter thus engaged disability within that framework in order to identify some of the reasons why disability is shrouded in mystery and prejudice in the African mind – and why disabled people are often marginalised even in the church and preaching. This engagement aligned with the descriptive task of practical theological interpretation in attempting to establish what is going on with regards to the phenomenon of disability.

This chapter executed the first of Osmer's (2008:4) four practical theological interpretation tasks – the descriptive-empirical task which requires determining what the status quo is and thus posed the question: "What is going on?" Collecting relevant information and observations are key to this task as they reveal "patterns and dynamics in particular episodes, situation or contexts". To that end, it highlighted the phenomenon of disability as a universal and complex evolving concept, its epidemiology, different typologies and aetiology, its physical, economic and emotional impacts, the unfair burden placed on individuals and families as well as the tectonic focus on disability issues that the past three decades have witnessed. It is worth mentioning that executing the descriptive-empirical task unearthed critical aspects such as the fact that the cost of exclusion outweighs the cost of inclusion. It shed light on how disability is perceived in the African context in the light of African culture, beliefs and worldviews. The African context was denoted as a philosophical and spiritual construct, thereby highlighting it positively as a rich construct instead of highlighting only the underdeveloped and negative about the African continent. The descriptive-empirical task placed a responsibility on preachers to be cognisant of their hearers' diverse situations.

6.2.3 Chapter 3: Disability in the African context, church practice and preaching

This chapter investigated the phenomenon of disability in the framework of the African context, church practice and preaching. This chapter pursued the hermeneutical function of practical theological interpretation, namely to come to an understanding of why disability is treated in church practice and preaching in the way it was described in the previous chapter.

This pursuit aligned with the interpretive task in seeking to understand why church practice and preaching in the African context do not debunk the myths surrounding the phenomenon of disability, but instead seem to perpetuate them. The interpretive task necessitated “sagely wisdom” on the part of the researcher. Thus, the interpretive task provided pointers for an appropriate response in terms of an inclusive homiletic in the African context. The interpretive task required determining why things are what they were - “why is this going on?” Salient issues in this chapter were the impact of context, culture, beliefs, worldviews on church practice and preaching. It highlighted the intricacy and philosophical nature of the African context. African beliefs, worldviews and culture were found to play a pivotal role in the lives of Africans. Hence, in order to truly understand Africans and to have an impactful ministry amongst Africans, their beliefs, worldviews and culture must be studied, respected and embraced. The influence/hold that African beliefs, worldviews and culture have on Africans were highlighted, thereby indicating the intricacy in living the Christian life for Africans. This chapter also sought to understand why Africans still hold their living dead in high esteem and relate ancestral veneration to a meaningful Christian life. The second task of practical theological investigation called for preachers to exhibit an attitude of sagely wisdom that endeavours to assist people to “make sense of the circumstances of their lives and world” (Osmer, 2008:82).

6.2.4 Chapter 4: Perspectives from disability theology, Scripture and homiletics

This chapter sought to study the phenomenon of disability in the framework of disability theology, selections from Scripture and homiletic theory. In so doing, it engaged Osmer’s third task of practical theological interpretation or the normative task, which posed the question: “What ought to be going on?” This task involved “the use of theological concepts to interpret episodes, situations, and contexts (Osmer, 2008:131). As such, it intended to uncover principles that could guide an appropriate response towards an inclusive homiletic for the African context.

This chapter sought to highlight disability theology as well as Scriptural perspectives on disability and homiletic theory, both in general and the African context. This was done in order to uncover some of the principles that would be important in articulating an appropriate response to the current practices regarding a disability homiletic in the African context.

6.2.5 Chapter 5: Markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context

In seeking to execute the fourth of Osmer's practical theological interpretation tasks, the pragmatic task, this chapter built on clues provided by chapter four and thus posed the question: "How might we respond?" (Osmer, 2008:4). Essentially, this fourth movement propels change – change from discrimination and stigmatisation of disabled Christians to full inclusion and participation in faith communities of their choice. Osmer (2008:176) asserts that "practical theology often provides help by offering models of practice and rules of art". Whilst "models of practice" provide leaders with an overall idea about the discipline within which they operate and techniques they may employ to "shape" the discipline to preferred objectives, "rules of art" on the other hand are precise strategies about how to execute exact "actions or practices" (Osmer, 2008:176). Osmer (2008:4) proposes that the pragmatic task requires practical theologians to come up with "strategies of action that will influence situations in ways that are desirable and entering into a reflective conversation with the 'talk back' emerging when they are enacted".

In pursuit of inclusive disability homiletics in the African context, the pragmatic task calls for ministers and faith communities to embrace the mind-set of servant leadership (Osmer, 2008:176). Osmer (2008:192) defines servant leadership as "*leadership that influences the congregation to change in ways that more fully embody the servanthood of Christ*" (emphasis in original).

This chapter sought to articulate markers for an inclusive disability homiletic in the African context. Some of the perspectives critical to articulating these markers were highlighted. One of the important points that came to the fore was that although in the African context, culture, worldviews and context seem to permeate every sphere of life, Christ should always be lifted up to triumph over culture.

This fourth movement proposed "rules of art" in ensuring that faith communities become authentically inclusive. It was shown that once faith leaders acknowledge that disabled persons are bearers of the image of God and thus can make a positive contribution to the success of faith communities, faith communities would be enriched and truly representative of God's unconditional love. To this end, faith leaders are exhorted to take their place in ensuring the inclusivity of faith communities.

6.3 Conclusion

Disability is a universal and complex phenomenon, transcending age, gender, race, social status, culture, worldview and context. Africa is a tapestry of cultures, resulting in a context that is philosophical and spiritual in nature. Some of the issues that came to the fore in the present study are the mystery in which the African culture, worldview and beliefs are shrouded; the veneration of the living dead; and how the African culture, worldview and beliefs permeate all spheres of life, including religion. The epidemiology and aetiology of disability have shown that humanity and disability are inextricably linked, which is all the more reason why the exclusion of disabled persons from homiletics is unconscionable. The negative attitudes that persist towards disability and disabled persons in Africa – despite African proverbs which are protective of disabled people, warning nondisabled people against laughing at or ridiculing disabled people, and even highlighting unpleasant consequences that ensue as a result of non-adherence to such proverbs – still need a lot of work in terms of sensitisation.

The Bible provides positive perspectives on disabled persons which faith communities can learn from in order to welcome, include and stand in solidarity with disabled persons through advocacy programmes. Although the past three decades have witnessed a tectonic shift in issues of disability, putting policies and treaties in place, implementation is yet to be realised, and it seems as if inclusion and full participation of disabled people in mainstream society is just a quixotic venture. The success of disabled persons in life, despite all the barriers to inclusion and full participation that they encounter, is often met with amazement, distaste and even belligerence. Faith communities are exhorted to “feed the flock of God” with diligence and dedication (1 Pet. 5:2-4). An inclusive homiletic in the African context is possible, as long as faith communities focus on Jesus and His ministry and recognise Him as Lord who acknowledges and transforms culture.

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