



TLM Daily Devotions

March 2017





Sighing, the loving heart of God

Then Jesus, looking up to heaven sighed and said, "Ephphatha, that is, be opened". Hearing this passage read some weeks ago, I was left wondering why Jesus sighed. Mark 7 verse 34 Look at the whole story from verse 31-37.

A deaf and dumb man was brought to Jesus for healing. He took him aside from the multitude, touched his ears and tongue, and before speaking, Jesus looked up to heaven and sighed.

We all sigh at times, and a sigh can express sadness or tiredness, we can sigh with relief or longing. Was this sigh an indication of the Lords deep feelings and compassion? An example of His human emotions, before He performed a miracle of healing?

Another example of Jesus sighing is in *Mark 8 verse 12*. The Pharisees came to Jesus looking for a sign from heaven and He sighed deeply in His spirit, and said *"Why does this generation seek a sign"*. Now why did Jesus sigh deeply here? It was as if He was almost despairing of the Pharisees, as if He was tired of them and their unbelief.

In many places in the Old Testament the Lord seems to go to the aid of His people who sigh. *Psalm 12 verse 5 says "for the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, I will arise", says the Lord. "I will set him in the safety for which he yearns."* We see here Gods constancy in mans wickedness.

In *Ezekiel 9 verse 4* there is another example. God says, *"Go through the midst of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of the men who sigh and cry over all the abominations that are done within it."* Later we see that the people who were marked became part of the remnant of the people of Israel.

Further on in Ezekiel we read that God tells the prophet to sigh! *21 verse 6. "Sigh therefore, son of man with a breaking heart, and sigh with bitterness before their eyes"*. It seems to me that those who sigh and break their hearts because of the wickedness and sin that they see around them, the Lord hears and blesses them, for He also grieves over the sin and wickedness in the world. He honours them because of their deep grief. How many of us can truly pray with broken hearts as we see the state of our nation, the state of our world? The suffering, pain, hunger of so many people, it seems relentless in parts of the world.

Jesus gave up everything to suffer and die for us, so He fully understands the extent of everyone's suffering. He has borne it all for us. In *Philippians 3 verse 10*. Paul prays that *"he may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings."* Not an easy prayer to pray, but one to think about during this time of Lent, and leading up to Easter.

To finish all the sighs, let us look at the verse of victory or triumph in Isaiah 35 verse 10. The redeemed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with singing, with everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

The victory is the Lords.



Piercing bubbles: listening, learning and connecting 1.

1 Cor 13: 11, 12 Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

Since recent surprise outcomes of elections (Brexit from EU, US Presidential elections, local referenda) there is a lot of talk about people living in their own bubble. US President Obama even referred to it in his farewell speech: *“For too many of us, it's become safer to retreat into our own bubbles, whether in our neighbourhoods or on college campuses, or places of worship, or especially our social media feeds, surrounded by people who look like us and share the same political outlook and never challenge our assumptions... And increasingly, we become so secure in our bubbles that we start accepting only information, whether it's true or not, that fits our opinions, instead of basing our opinions on the evidence that is out there.”*

A bubble often is the frame through which we interpret reality, how we define truth and how we view people outside. When you are in your bubble you only have a limited or shaded view on reality and like in an echoing well, you only get reflected the limited perception of your own truths. You do not hear and connect well with the experience of people living outside of your bubble.

But these virtual bubbles are not unique to our time full of social media. Bubbles are of all ages. We can find many examples in the Bible. Jesus often said things that were very controversial. His words didn't quite match with the perception of reality and interpretation of the truth by others. Just a few examples:

- Parable of the Lost Son (*Luke 15:11 onwards*). Both sons are stuck in their own perception of reality and truth. The youngest comes to his senses and returns to the Father, while the older son remains in his own righteousness and misses out on the essence, the presence and love of the Father.
- Parable of the good Samaritan (*Luke 10:25 onwards*): The Priest and Levite are stuck in their cultural and ceremonial bubble of reality (holiness, cleanliness, importance of their position). They miss the actual reality and higher truth of being a neighbour to a brother in need. The reader expects the Samaritan to be in his bubble, but he is the one that actually steps out and helps a stranger.
- Tax collectors and sinners (*Mark 2: 13 onwards*). Jesus was eating with tax collectors and 'sinners' and was challenged by teachers of the law. Jesus said to them that it is not the healthy that need a doctor, but the sick. *“I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners.”*

I realised that also people affected by leprosy often live in a bubble, alone or with others, isolated from society; unseen and unheard, living in their own secluded reality.

And aren't many of us often more or less secure in our own Christian bubbles looking out to the sinful world around us. But we are not called to isolate ourselves, but to reach out and be a blessing to the world around us. We need to start thinking more 'out of the box' and step out of our comfort zone.

Question: Can you think of a clear example from the Bible where people were speaking or acting out from their virtual bubble, while missing out on the real meaning or purpose of God?



Piercing bubbles: listening, learning and connecting 2.

Ephesians 3:17b-19

And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, 18 may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, 19 and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

As a start for 2017 our team of TLM Netherlands got together for a full day in the eastern countryside to step out of our own virtual bubble. What can we do to pierce our bubble? We identified four areas in which we want to listen, learn and grow our understanding and connection in 2017.

1. We want to listen more to *God*, learn from Him and remain connected. We had a unique time of individually listening to God while walking in virgin snow in the woods. Afterwards we came together in a warm and cosy home for a special time of sharing on what we heard, learned and what we found difficult.
2. We want to listen more to each other and connect as a *team*. Our team is in transition and we need to build a smaller, but more competent team.
3. We want to listen more to *people affected by leprosy* and our *TLM partners* in the field countries. We need to hear more of them, learn and connect in order
4. We want to listen, learn and connect with our *supporters*.

Why do we want to step out of our bubble? Everybody will understand why we need to connect more to God and form a strong team, which are still quite internal. But why should we step listen, learn and connect more outside?

As the Bible verse above states: we need all other Christians to grasp all the measurements of the love of Christ and to know it. But it is just as true that we need our brothers and sisters close by and far away to better understand and appreciate our life, our work and what is expected of us.

I hope and pray that this will help us today to change the way we think. Then we will know how to do everything that is good and pleasing to him according to his purpose.

Question: Might there be a situation where you, your church or your team are stuck in a virtual bubble, which limits you in reaching your Mission? What is needed for you to pierce that bubble and break out?

Henno Couprie Henno is Country leader of TLM Netherlands since 2003. Before he worked in Christian development work in Indonesia, PNG and Ivory Coast. Henno is married and has a teenage son and two daughters.



Jesus said: "I am the light of the world" John 8,12

"You are the light of the world!" Matthew 5,14

The track meandered through the rolling hills of Southern Africa. The odd thornbush and termite "castle" punctuated the golden grass waving gently in the breeze. Here and there outcrops of rocks stood out like giant mushrooms. The early morning sun bathed the countryside in a delicate light.

My vehicle stirred up a cloud of red dust that coated the sparse vegetation on the sides of the road. The sound of birds and crickets and the occasional gazelle leaping gazely away from the car were reminders that I was not alone in the world.

Suddenly I was almost blinded by a bright light emanating from the grass. My curiosity was greater than the fear of snakes, so I stopped the car and walked in the direction of the light. To my surprise I discovered an empty fruit tin.

There was no means of knowing if it had contained peaches, pears, fruit salad or jam... As it had been stripped of all labels or paper, impossible to tell where or by what firm it had been manufactured. Just an old, discarded, empty tin, but lying in such a way that it captured the sun's rays and transmitted the light with great effect.

Jesus said: "...let your light so shine..." Matthew 5,16. Sometimes our culture, tradition, prejudice, egoism, wealth, lifestyle, denominationalism...can make it difficult for us to shine His light. We need to be emptied of self, stripped of labels and exposed to Him so that His light may shine through us.

Prayer: Jesus, light of the world, shine in me and through me, that I may reflect you in what I am and I do.

Thought: What is there in my life that dulls His light or prevents it from shining through me? Do I love Him enough to deal with?

Silvano Perotti

Secretary for Europe then Deputy International Director and Director for Support and Development TLMI

Born in Italy - retired in Switzerland.

Worked with TLMI until 1990



“Your will be done...”

In December 1884 while preparing to bathe, Damien inadvertently put his foot into scalding water, causing his skin to blister. He felt nothing and realized he had contracted leprosy after 11 years of working in the colony. He wrote a letter home saying that he had no illusion as to what “this” meant. For years he worked with those who had the disease, and had seen how it disfigured them and caused them so much pain and suffering. But he was able to write:

“If this is what God wants for my sanctification, His will be done.”

Damien saw contracting leprosy as a stepping stone to his own holiness.

Father Damien (Jozef de Veuster) 1840 tremelo – 1889 Kalaupapa, Molokai, Hawaii



Town ducks and country ducks

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. Romans 15:7

Someone's discovered that ducks in south-east London quack differently from ducks born and bred in Cornwall. Honestly. Ducks have regional accents! The reason seems to be that London ducks become more strident by having to compete with the sounds of heavy traffic and other noise pollution. Cornish ducks quack more gently. It's quieter in Cornwall, except on Bank holidays. But in the end a duck is a duck right down to the last tail feather, however refined its accent. They all have similar needs - for food and water, especially water, a safe nest, and a sense of belonging.

It sets my imagination going a bit though. What would happen if a well-brought-up Cornish duck took a London drake home to meet her parents? What would they say? "Yes, he's a nice enough bird, but I hope you're not going to marry him."

Maybe that suggests something about us human beings. Whatever our background, our accent, or even what language we speak, God made us human, with similar needs, especially the need to belong, to be accepted. Under the skin, or in the ducks' case under the feathers, we're all the same. The little differences just make life a bit more interesting.

*Lord of diversity, I thank you for the differences that shape our lives.
And for loving me for what I am.*

Eddie Askew (1927-2007) devoted half a century to leprosy and its consequences. In 1950 he and his wife Barbara set sail for India. Eddie's first placement was in Purulia, West Bengal. In 1965 Eddie took up the post of executive secretary at TLM's office in London. His first overseas visit in this new role was to Ethiopia, where he learned of plans to set up a leprosy training centre that would benefit patients and medics throughout Africa. He offered to become a founding member and signed TLM up to support what was to become ALERT (All Africa Leprosy and Rehabilitation Training Centre). The following year, the organisation now known as the International Federation of Anti-Leprosy Associations (ILEP) was set up. In 1974 Eddie became general director of TLM. He was keen to develop TLM's work elsewhere, and took a team into the closed land of Bhutan in response to a request from its government. - Inspired by his travels and his Christian faith, Eddie found an outlet for his creativity in painting and poetry. He retired in 1987. From 1998 until his death he was TLM- vice-president, and in 2000 he was awarded an OBE. (Fiona Spence)



Do we boast?

For what gives you the right to make such a judgment? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if everything you have is from God, why boast as though it were not a gift? 1 Corinthians 4:7

I wonder this can happen to any leader that we try to influence situation and decision using our power, position! Let me share some practical instance..

My wife phoned me after returning from my daughter's school saying the teacher is complaining about my daughter is not sharp enough and not progressing. Note that this is a new school where she is being admitted this year. The message has struck me and my ego as I have thought out of my position that it is disgraceful. I was thinking to counter it back by replying that the system is not good enough.

While I was thinking and at the same time appraising someone's yearly appraisal, something flashed in my mind and a question came, " Am I boasting?"

I am reminded the story of Naaman in *2 Kings 5:1-19*, who boasted and not looking to follow what Elisha wanted him to do. Even it was a situation(Leprosy) that he wanted to get relieve from, Naaman did not want to act. It was not probably because of the action, but more of how Elisha communicated with him. He felt offended because of his position and refused to follow Elisha. He was about to lose the blessing and remain a leprosy affected person and parish later until he heard from one of this disciple. Who could see from a normal perspective and not from the eye of a Leader/Captain, and suggested to go and take the advice of Elisha. Naaman eventually did and experienced the result that I believe changed his life and leadership.

We, in our life need to act as a leader in different circumstances; family, church, society, workplace. Do we often boast of our position and want to use it in a negative manner? I think the challenge is there and it will repeatedly be faced. I think this challenge and temptation can come for any person in different situation in their life. Think we don't humble ourselves enough specially in the church leadership that hinders the extension of His kingdom. It can also affect our relation with the people whom we work for or our colleagues and even in families.

The story of Naaman have certainly influenced me to think again. And the verse in *1 Corinthians 4:7* reminded that our life is a gift and what we are achieving is not because of our strength or power, it is because of His blessings.

Amen!

Salomon S. Halder - Country Leader , The Leprosy Mission Bangladesh



Jesus calls us to follow him

A few weeks ago I was asked to lead a study for some of the young people from our Baptist Church who are considering baptism. Preparing for that session has reminded me of my own experience as a teenager. It was at just such a class that I first realised the need to make a personal life commitment to Jesus Christ. We make many choices throughout life.....employment, life partners, where to live.....but none are as far-reaching as our decision to become a follower of Jesus Christ.

In *Luke 18* we have the story of a young man who came to Jesus asking what he needed to do to inherit eternal life. Like so many young people these days, he was seeking fulfillment and some assurance about the future. Jesus responded by reminding him about the law....keeping the commandments and honoring his father & mother. *"I've done all that from my youth"* was the confident response. Was he expecting that Jesus would commend him for doing that?.....Perhaps, but he certainly wasn't ready for the reply he received.

As so often with Jesus, the next response was far more unexpected and challenging than he wanted to hear. *"Go and sell all you have and give it to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven and come and follow me"*.

We all know the result.....he went away with a very heavy heart.....because he was an exceedingly rich man. I expect Jesus was also sad to see him go away like that.....after all, it was a genuine initiation for this wealthy young man to become a follower and we how much Jesus cared deeply for individuals.

There are many reasons why people decide not to follow Jesus.....money may be one, pride, love of things or people, misplaced self-belief, but whatever the reason....it is sad because knowing Jesus Christ has eternal implications as well as life-changing benefits right now.

All those years ago when I attended that baptism class (60 years in September next year) there was not the embarrassment or hesitation by Christians to openly share their faith as there seems to be now. It seems we been effectively silenced, particularly in the west, by an aggressive and persistent attack on Christians and what we believe. Of course in some countries where TLM works the attacks are not just verbal....they are physical and sometimes deadly.

Jesus still calls us, as he did to this rich, young ruler, to follow him. There will be a cost, as there was for him, but whatever that cost is....it will be well worth it.



Joseph - The Cinderella Man

Genesis 41 In this chapter we reach the climactic ending of a long series of malice and injustice. Joseph had already felt the unsettled nature of a dysfunctional family, the unjust hatred of his brothers, the shock of being torn away from home forever, the humiliation of slavery, and the bite of slander. Now, he faces what looks like a non-ending trip to death in a foreign dungeon.

Each day was nothing more than a monotonous, slow-moving grind, to be repeated tomorrow and the next day. For Joseph it must have looked like nothing was ever going to change. He must have felt like his whole life was stuck in a permanent holding pattern.

It is here, in the place of continued suffering, that our faith is attacked with doubts, anger, confusion, loneliness, and sorrow. Suffering always changes us, but not necessarily for the better. But Joseph's integrity and humility holds steady.

Next stop in Joseph's experience is the golden moment, totally unanticipated, when in one afternoon, Joseph is elevated out of a pit to become one of the most powerful men on earth in the ancient world. It happened on just another dungeon day for Joseph. As far as he knew, nothing was different. But there was a little matter Joseph knew nothing about: the night before Pharaoh had a bad dream!

If you haven't already done so, read this wonderful chapter - Genesis 41.

What can we learn from this chapter in Joseph's life?

1. The cupbearer had forgotten Joseph and let him down. Count on the Lord to handle the cupbearers in your life - the people who take but don't give back, who forget you, who abandon you, who break their promises to you. It's God's job to deal with the cupbearers of your past. It's your job to be faithful to a God who will not forget you.

2. When nothing seems to change, count on God's purposes without panic
Vance Havner, wise in the ways of God, once said, "God uses broken things. Broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to give rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume. It is Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever."

While you're waiting, stay under the hand of the Lord. Remember, joy comes in the morning.

3. When the reward comes, thank God without pride
Only God can bring you through and out of the dungeon. Only God can reward your faithfulness. So when it comes, don't pat yourself on the back. Be grateful, not proud.

Joseph, the Cinderella Man, went through the fire, faithful to God and he came out with a character purer, stronger, ready for the assignment God had in store. His promises are just as real today as they were for Joseph. His grace is still at work. You can trust Him.

Gordon Brown

Scotland - 2008-2011 Vice Chair of TLM Scotland, 2011-2015 Honorary Treasurer of TLM International. Kindly sending his good wishes to the TLM family!



Being Child-like

“Jesus said, “ Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these”. Matt. 19:14

My niece, Sandhya, was diagnosed with Down Syndrome. In many ways, she remained a child through the thirty eight years of her life. She had a vague understanding about the value of money, and knew that money could be exchanged for sweets and toys. However, she much preferred money in the form of coins, and bank notes were usually crumpled or torn.

She had a collection of purses and handbags and usually had a small stash of coins in them. She was quite possessive about her money, but there were two situations when she would happily part with the coins – after attending church she would head for the “poor box” kept at the entrance, and would empty her entire collection of change into the box. Or if she encountered someone begging in the street, once again she would empty her purse into the bowl. Many times well-meaning friends would tell her not to give away all her money, but to hold back a part of it. She never did.

Today as I reflected on Jesus’ words that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are like little children, it struck me that perhaps he was referring to this attitude of spontaneous and complete self-giving. We often believe prudence and wisdom lies in holding back, in maintaining some means of independence and control. Perhaps it requires a complete and child-like trust in God to be able to give up all our defence mechanisms.

May God grant us the blessing of such an experience.

Dr Joyce Ponnaiya - I am a pathologist and worked for many years , till my retirement at the Christian Medical College and Hospital in Vellore, India. Apart from my academic appointment, I have served as the Principal (Dean) of the college and later as the Director (CEO) of the organisation. From 2006 to 2011 after retiring from CMC, I worked as Consultant Pathologist at the Schieffelin Institute of Health Research and Leprosy Centre (SIHR &LC), at Karigiri in India. Thereafter, I continue to work at Karigiri in an honorary part-time position as pathologist. I have served on the Board of Governors of both the TLM India Trust and TLM International.



Psalm 7

A shiggaion of David, which he sang to the LORD concerning Cush, a Benjamite.

¹ LORD my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me,
² or they will tear me apart like a lion and rip me to pieces with no one to rescue me.

³ LORD my God, if I have done this
and there is guilt on my hands—
⁴ if I have repaid my ally with evil
or without cause have robbed my foe—
⁵ then let my enemy pursue and overtake me;
let him trample my life to the ground
and make me sleep in the dust.

⁶ Arise, LORD, in your anger; rise up against the rage of my enemies.
Awake, my God; decree justice.

⁷ Let the assembled peoples gather around you,
while you sit enthroned over them on high.

⁸ Let the LORD judge the peoples.

Vindicate me, LORD, according to my righteousness,
according to my integrity, O Most High.

⁹ Bring to an end the violence of the wicked and make the righteous secure—
you, the righteous God who probes minds and hearts.

¹⁰ My shield is God Most High, who saves the upright in heart.

¹¹ God is a righteous judge, a God who displays his wrath every day.

¹² If he does not relent,
he will sharpen his sword;
he will bend and string his bow.

¹³ He has prepared his deadly weapons;
he makes ready his flaming arrows.

¹⁴ Whoever is pregnant with evil
conceives trouble and gives birth to disillusionment.

¹⁵ Whoever digs a hole and scoops it out
falls into the pit they have made.

¹⁶ The trouble they cause recoils on them;
their violence comes down on their own heads.

¹⁷ I will give thanks to the LORD because of his righteousness;
I will sing the praises of the name of the LORD Most High.



What I want...

I want to walk into a room, be it a hospital for the dying or a hospital for the sick children,
and feel that
I am needed.

I want to do, not just to be.

Diana, Princess of Wales (1961-1997). Former patron of The Leprosy Mission England and Wales.



A Redemption History

Ruth 4:13-22 Boy meets girl, they get married and have a baby, grandmother likes the baby, everyone is happy and the family goes on. In those terms it sounds so mundane, so normal, such a routine happy ending to a minor human interest story. But the story of Ruth the immigrant, of Naomi her mother in law, and of Boaz her prosperous new husband is far from routine.

These last ten verses of the story of Ruth are full of issues of the ethics and laws of a long-ago culture. Can they be relevant for us? In Bible times, as in many places still, the extended family was the foundation on which the whole of society was built. One aspect of the family was the role of the guardian-redeemer (or kinsman redeemer or family redeemer, depending on your translation).

We talk about someone having 'no family'. The guardian-redeemer system meant that everyone did have some relative, however distant, who had responsibility for them, to get them out of trouble, to ransom, to redeem them, to buy them back if they were enslaved. Additional duties got added in over the years, including the responsibility for keeping family land within the family, and another one that sounds odd to our ears – ensuring that a dead relative got an heir to continue their name.

However, the guardian-redeemer reminds us of God's relationship with us, of the redemption that is available to us. The well-known verse from Job, "I know that my redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth" refers to God having this same role, 'standing' in the sense of being in court speaking in Job's favour.

The guardian-redeemer was always a family member. Jesus became human so we could be part of his family. He offers to be our Guardian-Redeemer, to save us, to buy us back from slavery to sin and death.

Boaz was a prosperous farmer, the lord of the harvest in his town. He humbled himself, marrying a foreigner in order to do good to Naomi on behalf of her dead husband. Jesus talks of God as the Lord of the Harvest – and Jesus humbled himself for our sake so that he could do good to us. Ruth was redeemed, and so are we.

The book of Ruth ends with a genealogy, a bit more family history. Have a look at the very last two verses. Obed did indeed become famous, as his family had prayed – not for himself but as the grandfather of the great King David. Ruth the immigrant contributed to the genes of that great king of Israel. How amazing! Would anyone have dreamed such a thing could happen? But then of course, we go on to remember who was the descendent of King David – yes, Jesus Christ himself, born in Bethlehem just like Ruth's baby Obed. Ruth appears in the genealogy of Christ at the beginning of Matthew's gospel: Ruth the redeemed was an ancestor of our Redeemer. These verses mark the end of the book but absolutely not the end of the story.

Paul and Niki Jakeman served as TLM missionaries from 1979-1994, successively in Mongar, Lhuntse and Thimphu (Bhutan) and then in Singapore. They returned to the UK and worked in the east end of London for ten years, moving to Wiltshire where they continued medicine and midwifery for another decade. They have both recently retired.



The gain of the grain

Let's face it, Jesus' parables are just as impacting and unforgettable as His miracles – they are timeless! Let's follow through on this one – 'THE GAIN OF THE GRAIN!' (John 12:20-26).

(v20) "Now there were certain Greeks among those who came up to worship at the feast."

Here we once again bump into the world-wide HARVEST FIELD – this time astute, religious and spiritually-hungry Greeks.....so many people around the world still want their spiritual void filled and assuaged!

(v21) "Then they came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and asked him saying, 'Sir, we wish to see Jesus.'"

Here we have them approach the TYPICAL BELIEVER—Philip, from the fishing village on the Sea of Galilee. Always remain approachable.

Always be ready to give an answer to life's greatest questions (1 Peter 3:15,16).

(v22) "Philip came and told Andrew, and in turn Andrew and Philip told Jesus."

Operating two-by-two, in submission to the Lord Jesus Christ, should always be our immediate 'MODUS OPERANDI'.

(v23) "But Jesus answered them, saying, 'The hour has come that the Son of Man should be glorified.'"

Jesus knew that the pinnacle of His earthly ministry (His sacrificial death and amazing resurrection) was only weeks away. He is the KAIROS KING – He is always dead on time to give each generation of seekers His living hope!

(v24) "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone, but if it dies, it produces much grain."

Grain farmers everywhere, depend upon this wonderful natural phenomena: One grain accurately planted in the ground, produces thousands of others! Isaiah became such a PRODUCTIVE GRAIN, when he prayed: *'Here am I Lord, send me!'* (Is.6:8). Have you earnestly prayed this prayer yet??.....

(v25) "He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."

The EXCHANGED LIFE (Galatians 2:20), must now become the pattern for the rest of my life here on earth! 2 Corinthians 7:9-11 will help us in this life-long commitment – a life of purity, graciousness, humility, submission, obedience, fruitfulness, joy, etc.

(v26) "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will also be. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour."

Although we may often feel like unprofitable servants in this thankless world, we have actually been drawn by God, to live the ultimate GOD-HONOURING LIFE!

The 'gain of bearing more lasting grain' for God, is what it's all about (John 15:3,16)!

CONCLUSION:

Read 1 Corinthians 15:31b, 50-58

- Amen.



“This is my story...” 9.

All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. How precious to me are your thoughts, God! Psalm 139, 16-17

My story with TLM as starting at my age of 7, when TLM not existed in Hungary yet at all. But my parents decided in 1961 to send me twice a week 60 minutes to private lessons in English! Their decision rooted in the prophetic view that “English will one day serve for something good!” in a Soviet-colonised country, where in schools just Russian was taught, and in a politically stigmatised family as resistant: this was more than utopian. How did they manage the payment? I have no idea. They did. - The lady who taught me and many other kids with the same background, was an aristocrat, deprived after Second World War of all their properties and any chance for being employed anywhere. Teaching English meant daily bread for her, her husband and her aged mother. For us, her pupils, their behaviour, deeply fine personalities, dignity and straight Christian backbone meant a lifelong instinct, model, a reminiscence of a passed-away world what we hoped to come back: freedom. - For long years I learned and learned English, seemingly for nothing...

Already in the Faculty of Theology, in 1976, a handwritten note appeared on the board: next Sunday in X church in Budapest presentation on the work of the Leprosy Mission in Nepal with slides! I attended. I still hear the voice of the founder of TLM Hungary, Rev Dr Dobos Károly, who was 74 by then! and had started the activity 2 years earlier, in 1974. I still see the first pictures with the Nepalese flag and the Himalayas, and all the rest: miserable patients of leprosy, their treatment and the possible ways to help. At the end Rev Dobos invited everyone who had felt a touch to help him as volunteer. Especially those with English knowledge were most welcome, for translating the newsletters of overseas missionaries! – he said.

The “Great Moment” arrived to fulfil the vision of my parents: “English will once serve for something good!”

I signed up, and from that afternoon on I definitely got infected by TLM. Translating the stories of missionaries was a huge delight. A new world opened for me. My roommates joked about my not having sense for living: they nursed elderly people, cleansed homes, etc. for some pocket money... Later as minister, besides my work and family it became established that I would help in the mission in whatever way I could. – It was amazing when TLMers visited us. Ken Martin, Silvano and Marie-Hannah Perotti, Gottfried and Helle Riedel several times, John and Elsie Harris, Cornelius Walter, Archimede Bertolino, Mollie Clark, Evelyne Staerck, Geeske Zijp, Pierre Deriaz, Helen Roberts, Gandi Marinova, Premal Das... and meeting them, translating their presentations meant a stronger and stronger link all the time.

The second “touch” was in 1991: Rev Dobos asked me to attend the International Assembly. I had much to do to prepare myself for that, knowing that single me will be identified with “Hungary”. I so much wanted to do it well and suitably! Meeting in person all those whose name I had respected formerly, the extremely warm, loving welcome, involvement, the wonderful, dedicated people, and the impact this mission had on transforming lives: became so meaningful, that no time or energy for volunteering for this cause could have been enough. Also the fact that all along I can never use the “visionary English” for anything else, just exclusively for TLM, is a sign that God had had a plan through my parents in advance for me and TLM Hungary. Serving Him as TLMer is my greatest privilege and joy.

“This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Saviour as TLMer lifelong...”



“This is (part of) my story...” 10.

I want to be a missionary!

This is the sentence I said after listening to a missionary report, when I was around 12 years old.

Understand, I wanted to be the one *ready to leave my family to fly to a distant land. The one caring for the sick and cleaning their wounds** (I knew already I wanted to become a nurse).

What I realised years later is that the Lord put this desire in my heart. He heard the wish of the child I was: “You are my child and I will help you to keep your commitment.”

Life continued...

I was engaged in a youth group; about to finish my studies when in a few days period a friend and my pastor asked me: “Have you ever thought of mission, being a missionary?”

Oops, this idea was well hidden in a corner of my head. No, I wasn't ready anymore to leave my comfort, my security, my friends.

But God worked my heart and called me during “Mission 90” (European missionary congress). I was ready to answer: “Yes Lord!”

The path was not straight. And it was around 10 years after my call that I was in a plane to Madagascar (my husband's land, but this is another part of my story!) with my husband and my eldest daughter.

God is the loving Father who gives us all we need *to do good works, which he prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2.10)*

We stayed 6 years, until God called us to go back to Switzerland. During this time, *we trained disciples, we multiplied the crops**.

You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. (John 15.16)

The message we shared during our missionary reports in churches was that to be a missionary is not only for “famous” people. We, as ordinary people were called by God to go to Madagascar. But the privilege to be called is for every disciple.

God says:

“I need someone honest and brave, full of grace, mercy and compassion, free from fear and passivity, someone burning with love, someone who radiantly reflects my glory. Someone ready to go to distant island or to next door neighbours to reach the unreached.”*

Will you answer: *“Here am I. Send me!” (Isaiah 6. 8)?*

*The words in italic are part of the video: God created missionary narrated by Loren Cunningham (founder of Youth With A Mission) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=93wZ1WPMqek>



Transforming solitude: Finding friendship with God

John 15:15 New International Version (NIV) I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

I continue my journey of allowing more time in my life for retreating to quietness and solitude – as I shared in previous editions of The Bridge.

Apart from weekend or week-long retreats, here in Pretoria we regularly have a Quiet Day on a Saturday. What a great excitement on such days to give oneself the permission to leave all chores behind and go to a beautiful little church on the outskirts of the city to focus on fellowship with God.

Last month the retreat leader guided us through the rich experience of friendship with God.

We are made for friendship with God but first I must understand my 'loneliness'.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 (Amplified Bible) He has also planted eternity [a sense of divine purpose] in the human heart [a mysterious longing which nothing under the sun can satisfy, except God].

It sounds as if God says to us, 'Deep within you there is a friendship-hole that only my living presence can fill'.

On this retreat, I could not ignore the opportunity to go the deep places of my soul, which I often fear to enter into. There indeed, once more, I found this mysterious longing for something or Someone, The One?

I noticed my resistance because the hole may reveal my vulnerability, my weaknesses, me being needy.

However, the longing for satisfaction was so strong, I just had to sit with God, allowing Him to fill the friendship-hole. As I continue the journey, I experience more and more that He is present in the quiet, 'in the soft breeze of the evening'. And He fills me with His presence – God and I are friends!

Erna Möller is a social worker with TLM South Africa since 1987.



The Branch of the LORD

Isaiah 4, 2 In that day the Branch of the LORD will be beautiful and glorious,
and the fruit of the land will be the pride and glory of the survivors in Israel.

³ Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem,
will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem.

⁴ The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion;
he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire.

⁵ Then the LORD will create over all of Mount Zion
and over those who assemble there a cloud of smoke by day
and a glow of flaming fire by night; over everything the glory will be a canopy.

⁶ It will be a shelter and shade from the heat of the day,
and a refuge and hiding place from the storm and rain.



Here am I, send me!

Isaiah 6, 8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?”

And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”

⁹ He said, “Go and tell this people:

“Be ever hearing, but never understanding;
be ever seeing, but never perceiving.’

¹⁰ Make the heart of this people calloused;
make their ears dull
and close their eyes.^[a]

Otherwise they might see with their eyes,
hear with their ears,
understand with their hearts,
and turn and be healed.”

¹¹ Then I said, “For how long, Lord?”

And he answered:

“Until the cities lie ruined
and without inhabitant,
until the houses are left deserted
and the fields ruined and ravaged,
¹² until the LORD has sent everyone far away
and the land is utterly forsaken.
¹³ And though a tenth remains in the land,
it will again be laid waste.
But as the terebinth and oak
leave stumps when they are cut down,
so the holy seed will be the stump in the land.”



Christ, our Wisdom and our justification

1 Cor 1: 28-31 Paul, in this first letter to the Corinthians, recalls that the wisdom of men does not make it possible to understand the functioning of God. Its demand for total loyalty means that no human being can satisfy it. Yet His love is such that by grace He wants to open the door to a peaceful relationship which can rest only on faith in Jesus Christ who has become, through the will of God, our wisdom, our righteousness, the source of our Sanctity and our deliverer. (1 Cor 1:30)

From this text, which is in fact a masterly summary of the whole Gospel, I would like to offer you 2 Meditations.

The problem of the Corinthians, as we read in the first chapter, is that they are proud of themselves. They believe that they have understood better than others the stakes of the Christian life. They want to compete with each other. The remainder of the letter shows us the gaps and errors of their reasoning. Even when referring to one or another of their teachers, it is they who are at the centre of their preoccupations and pretensions.

Paul, in this letter, wants to refocus their gaze - and ours - on the one God has chosen to bring us to true life, to progress and to persevere until the day of the completion of His work in us.

Christ became our wisdom

The whole experience of the people of God under the old covenant highlights the inability of humans to satisfy the requirements of the perfect Law of God. Some people thought of being able to do this, for example, this rich man who went to meet Jesus to ask him what he should do to inherit eternal life. When Jesus reminds him of what the law says, he proudly affirms that he has observed these things since his youth! But when the Lord tells him to go and sell everything he owns and to distribute the money to the poor, it is more than the price he is willing to pay. In fact, he is too attached to his property. He does not really love God with all his heart, with all his thoughts ... His God, these are his goods!

According to the letter to the Romans, the pagans also have in nature all the elements necessary to know God and his expectations. They too are inexcusable, just like the Jews who have the law and the prophets. Neither among the Jews nor among the Gentiles, was this "knowledge" - wisdom, enough to enable them to be "up to the task". There is no right, not even one! That is the terrible conclusion.

There is only one way left: "To trust in Him who has become our wisdom - Jesus Christ". Accepting to enter into this logic - knowledge - of the wisdom of God reverses all human logic. It leads us to renounce any religious approach. No effort from us will ever permit us to be pleasing to God or to compensate for the sin that separates us radically from God.

Christ, our righteousness. Because he is perfectly God and perfectly man, coming into the world, Jesus is the only one who is not subject to the human condition inherited from our fathers.

He is in all respects like men, except in regard to sin. He the only righteous man was made sin for us, in our stead.

He was crucified as the "bearer of our sin" and died on the cross. It was not God who rejected it. It is we who, without realizing it, have rejected sin; We crucified Him. The terrible night that falls on all men on this Friday, when Christ expires on the cross, highlights all the horror of this death. God Himself dies at this moment.

We who live in the 21st century, we know - with all believers for 20 centuries, that Christ did not remain in death. He is risen and He lives, He sits at the right hand of the Father. Resurrection is the proof of God's victory over sin. Jesus is truly our righteousness. There is nothing more to add. Do we believe that?



Christ, our sanctification and our redemption

1 Corinthians 1:30 It is through him that you are in Christ Jesus, who by God's will has become our wisdom and righteousness, the source of our holiness and our redeemer; It is written, that he who wishes to feel pride should put his pride in the Lord.

From the moment when, by faith, we have received the free forgiveness of God - God, in Christ, having taken our sin upon Himself, paid the wages of sin - we are born again, according to the explanation of Jesus to Nicodemus. A new life began. We are children of God. The Holy Spirit bears witness to our spirit. From that moment, the grace of God, acting through the Holy Spirit, helps us to gradually adopt a new behaviour. To begin with, God who adopted us as his sons and daughters, introduces us into his Family, the Church. Through the teaching of those whom God gave to the Church, the reading of the Word of God, prayer and the action of the Holy Spirit, we have entered into a process of spiritual growth. We no longer belong to ourselves. We are engaged in the path of sanctification / consecration. Sanctify = set aside, consecrated to God = our response to this sanctification, we offer Him our life. These notions are present under the old covenant through all the rituals of the offerings, the first fruits of the harvest, and so on.

In the course of our journey as a Christian, regarded as righteous by God, not because of our own righteousness, we all depart from the right path, revealed by the Word and the Holy Spirit. The latter alerts us by leaning on our conscience, on what the teaching has made known to us and also on the warnings of our brothers and sisters in the faith. This is part of our sanctification. It is realized when we accept these warnings and return to God. If we confess our sins to him, he is faithful and just to forgive us (always relying on the righteousness obtained by Christ). Sometimes we try to "improve" ourselves by purely human efforts, but this is quite useless. This is what Paul describes in particular in Romans 7, where he describes the struggle between good and evil that wage war on us. This is what snatches the cry: "Wretch that I am, who will deliver me from this body of death? "

The only way out is to rely on Christ as well as justification. It is our sanctification! This is what Paul says at the beginning of chapter 8: "So there is no condemnation now for those who are in Christ Jesus." Writing to the Philippians, probably a few years later, he acknowledged that he had not yet attained perfection, but he ran, trying to reach it! (3:12)

Christ, our redemption

This last of the four elements summarizes all the work of Jesus Christ for our salvation. It connects the whole and emphasizes the goal pursued by the Lord: To realize what was impossible to the human being, separated from God, spiritually dead, while still preserving nostalgia, the thought of eternity (Ecc 3: 11).

In his letter to the Galatians (5: 19-26), we have yet another description of what our redemption is. Verses 19-21 describe the nature of our human works and the following verses summarize the fruits of the Spirit admirably. Let us understand the difference between the works of the flesh and the fruits of the Spirit. In these we have a beautiful translation of what Paul still writes in Galatians 2 v 20: It is no longer I who lives, it is Christ who lives in me.



An Obstacle-free Pathway is needed

1. Lev 19.14 2. Matt 18.6 3. Romans 14.21, 1 Corinth 8.9 4. Malachi 2.8 5. Luke 3.4-6 (Isaiah 40.3-4)

Last year Pat Morgan, an old friend of mine, visited. Having worked as a nurse for many years amongst leprosy-affected people in Africa, and since retirement learnt to cope with the after-effects of a major stroke, she is something of an expert in Living with Disability. She soon found all the hazards & obstructions to free movement in my bungalow, some of which I had not previously noticed, and Pat kindly made many useful suggestions as to how the place could be rendered more disabled-friendly. I am working on it....

Recently I went to a conference in Delhi. Having had surgery to a foot less than 1 month before the trip, I was not walking well and soon discovered all the trip-hazards around the hotel. The unevenness of their floors was disguised by the colour pattern used. The room where we met to discuss a leprosy research project had toilets accessed via a steep staircase without any handrail. In India there are laws about disabled-access to public buildings, but perhaps they do not apply to older hotels. Even in ancient Israel there were laws on such *matters*¹ !

In Bangladesh last year I was at a meeting to which many people with disability due to leprosy had been invited as participants. I watched some of them struggle on the stairs. One guest speaker (suffering from another neuromuscular disorder) who normally moves around independently by wheelchair had to be carried by a friend up to the first floor hall, while another a person carried his wheelchair. He accepted this indignity with admirable self-composure. If they knew the lifts were out of order, either the organisers of the meeting or the owners of the conference centre could surely have addressed this problem in advance.

A few years ago, on World Disability Day, some of our patients at DBLM hospital drew pictures to illustrate the talk they had just heard: one showed an imposing local government office building approached by a steep flight of steps and, at the foot of the steps, the artist was to be seen with his crutches looking helplessly up at the front door which he could not reach.

We who have full use of our limbs and faculties need to be aware of physical obstacles which hinder movements of our less fortunate neighbours. Wherever we have control (in our own homes or workplaces) let 's work to make the physical environment more disabled-friendly.

One does not have to be able-bodied to go to heaven. Those who are lame or blind or have other physical impairments are welcomed without discrimination.

But the path to heaven is also strewn with "obstacles", and those of us who know the way should beware lest we hinder anyone from making the journey to the celestial city. Is there anything in my life which will make a godly life more difficult for someone else? Something in my behaviour or my attitudes? The way I speak or what I do? Have I caused anyone to trip up as they struggled along the road to Life? *Jesus*² and *Paul*³ and *Malachi*⁴ warned us not to place metaphorical stumbling-blocks in the way of others. *John the Baptist*⁵ called for us to prepare the road for the King a royal progress requires a smooth path, but all who follow Him need to constantly work on keeping it clear for the others who will come behind.

C Ruth Butlin Dr - British (63). My service with TLM is as follows: 1981- 1982: sponsored by TLM for 1 academic year at All Nations Christian College in Hertfordshire, UK. 6 weeks of linguistics course. 1982- 1991: Medical officer at Richardson Leprosy Hospital Miraj, in India, under Dr PD Samson. 1991- 2001: medical superintendent at Anandaban Leprosy hospital in Nepal. March - June 2001: Furlough. June 2001- 2003: Superintendent Purulia leprosy hospital and homes, West Bengal in India. 2003- 2007: Medical advisor at DBLM (hospital and field programme), Nilphamari, Bangladesh (then ended my time as expatriate staff). 2007-now Voluntary speaker for TLMEW. 2013- now, skilled volunteer, sponsored by TLMEW, mainly working for DBLM hospital and rural health programmes in Bangladesh (also some work for TLMNepal)



This is my story... 11.

The human mind plans the way, but the Lord directs the steps. Proverbs 16:9 (NRSV)

As a 10 year old I wrote an essay at school about the question 'What will you do when you grow up?' My answer was, "I will train as a nurse then go to Bible College and go to India as a Missionary." I'm not sure what the teacher thought about that but it seems God took it to heart and guided my steps over the following years.

When our church showed a film depicting the work of The Leprosy Mission in India I was particularly drawn to the physiotherapy aspects of the work and from then on that became my goal – to train as a physiotherapist and go to India with TLM. At my interview for Physio training I was asked what I wanted to do with the training and I said I would work a few years in NZ then go to India and work with people affected by leprosy.

To cut a long story short, I finished training, worked two years in a hospital then went to Bible College. Part of the course was a three month practical. I was blessed to be able to go to Karigiri, South India, and see for myself the work of a leprosy physiotherapist. I still remember the sensation I had on the drive from the airport to the hotel where I spent a night that this was the place God had destined me to be. Sadly, a week after I arrived at Karigiri, my Dad passed away after a long debilitating illness. At that time I was reading Genesis and came to the end of chapter 11 when Abram's father died. The beginning of chapter 12 leaped out at me, "Go forth from your country, and from your relatives, and from your father's house, to the land which I will show you." (NASB) It was time to formally apply to join TLM which I did on my return to NZ. By the beginning of the 1981 I heard that I'd been accepted and by July I was back in India. After a period of training in Salur I moved to Purulia where I ran the Physio-technicians' training course. In 1984, when back in NZ for my first home-leave, Mrs Gandhi, Prime Minister of India, was assassinated. This led to changes in Visa regulations and I was not able to return there to work. My dream had always been to work in India but now the door had closed. However, God is faithful and with the door to India closed he opened the way for me to go to Anandaban Hospital, Nepal.

In 1991 I was planning to return to NZ for a time to up-date my physio training but I was approached by TLM-Bangladesh asking if I could help set up physio-technician training there. It felt like a 'please come over and help us' call like Paul's call to Macedonia (Acts 16:9) to which I agreed thinking it would be a 10 month assignment. However, after running the first course and handing it over to Carolyn Wilson to continue, I offered to stay in Bangladesh to support the newly trained physio-technicians. 10 months became 4 years of passing on to others what I had learned in previous years.

Then, when I felt that the time had come for me to return to NZ I was blessed to meet up again with Bruce, who I'd known as a child, and the circle was complete. We were married in 1996 bringing me back to the very place where my life had started.

Kathleen Gavin (nee Finlay) New Zealand Physiotherapist with TLM in India, Nepal & Bangladesh 1981-1996. Now an ordained Anglican Priest and Spiritual Director living in Raglan, NZ and member of the Leprosy Mission NZ Board.



The stature of waiting

Wait for the Lord, be strong and take heart and wait for the Lord. Psalms 27: 14

God's way is rarely the quickest way. It is seldom the easiest way. But it is always the best way.

“Waiting” can feel like torture when you are afraid. David wrote Psalm 27 at a time when he was terribly afraid, but he didn't panic. Instead, he called upon the Lord and pleaded his case before him. Then he waited patiently for the Lord to rescue him. Any scared person knows that fear can cause people to make hasty, unwise decisions, and cause them to act before they are ready.

It seems a long time for me to wait in Hong Kong for my next assignment, although eight months is short in a whole life. Such waiting can seem endless. I realize the deep things of God do not come quickly. They are revealed in the fullness of time- God's time, not mine.

Recently I read a book about Jesus' life; it was a balanced rhythm of waiting on God and expressing the fruits of waiting. I find Him refusing to rush into ministry but rather waiting for the right moment to act. When important times of transition came for Him, He entered enclosures of waiting - the wilderness, a garden, the tomb.

There are reasons why Jesus was prepared to wait. He recognized that when we are waiting, we are not doing nothing. We are doing the most important something there is..... If we can't be still and wait, we can't become what God created us to be.

If not, waiting may seem irksome, futile, and a waste of time and talent. It may trigger feelings of failure or a lack of self-worth. Jesus not only endured and grew through endless waiting. He also demonstrated the power of powerlessness. We see this peculiar power at work in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Trust in God's timing and make use of my waiting time by discovering what God may be trying to teach me.

The blessings poured on me richly in my time of waiting: I have been reading over 50 Christian books in last eight months, to learn more about Jesus and the truth. To have regular swimming in order to keep my body fit and strengthen my muscle through a good physiotherapy program, and have good spiritual support by fellowship and mentoring, fruitful time with family, relatives and friends, also spent time to have silent retreat in Thailand. Enjoy my time to do discipleship training and Bible study among new believers, support Hong Kong Nepali church to outreach to Nepali community. I really appreciate having such good chance to build up trust and friendship with local Nepali women. Chance to share my life message in different churches had encouraged the congregation to fulfill God's plan for their mission.

Yuek Ming Poon - Hong Kong. Worked with The Leprosy Mission for 22 years. 1993 – 2000 seconded to INF to work in Nepal in leprosy clinic as Clinic Manager. 2002 – 2004 worked with TLM as POID Technical Officer in India, 2005 – 2012 worked with TLM as Country Leader in China and Laos, 2013 -2015 worked with TLM in PNG as TLMPNG Capacity Building Advisor. June 2015 left TLM and then studied in Vancouver Regent Bible College from September 15 to April 2016. Now back to HK and involving in Nepali ministry in HK.



The Branch From Jesse

Isaiah 11, 1 A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse;
from his roots a Branch will bear fruit.

²The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—
the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding,
the Spirit of counsel and of might,
the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the LORD—
³and he will delight in the fear of the LORD.

He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes,
or decide by what he hears with his ears;
⁴but with righteousness he will judge the needy,
with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth.
He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth;
with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked.

⁵Righteousness will be his belt
and faithfulness the sash around his waist.

⁶The wolf will live with the lamb,
the leopard will lie down with the goat,
the calf and the lion and the yearling^[a] together;
and a little child will lead them.

⁷The cow will feed with the bear,
their young will lie down together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox.

⁸The infant will play near the cobra's den,
and the young child will put its hand into the viper's nest.

⁹They will neither harm nor destroy
on all my holy mountain,
for the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the LORD
as the waters cover the sea.



In that day...

Isaiah 11, 10 In that day the Root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples; the nations will rally to him, and his resting place will be glorious. ¹¹ In that day the Lord will reach out his hand a second time to reclaim the surviving remnant of his people from Assyria, from Lower Egypt, from Upper Egypt, from Cush, ^[b] from Elam, from Babylonia, ^[c] from Hamath and from the islands of the Mediterranean.

¹² He will raise a banner for the nations
and gather the exiles of Israel;
he will assemble the scattered people of Judah
from the four quarters of the earth.

¹³ Ephraim's jealousy will vanish,
and Judah's enemies ^[d] will be destroyed;
Ephraim will not be jealous of Judah,
nor Judah hostile toward Ephraim.

¹⁴ They will swoop down on the slopes of Philistia to the west;
together they will plunder the people to the east.
They will subdue Edom and Moab,
and the Ammonites will be subject to them.

¹⁵ The LORD will dry up
the gulf of the Egyptian sea;
with a scorching wind he will sweep his hand
over the Euphrates River.
He will break it up into seven streams
so that anyone can cross over in sandals.

¹⁶ There will be a highway for the remnant of his people
that is left from Assyria,
as there was for Israel
when they came up from Egypt.



What is my worth?

12 But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell? 13 No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living. 14 The deep says, "It is not in me"; the sea says, "It is not with me." 15 It cannot be bought with the finest gold, nor can its price be weighed out in silver. Job 28,12-15 (NIV)

7 But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. 8 What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Philippians 3 : 7-8 (NIV)

In planning and managing projects, I find myself often having to evaluate the worth or value of things. Is it worth doing this training or going on this trip or buying that equipment? What value will it add ? Will it make a difference ? Is there good value for money here ? In a world of limited resources and time, it is right that we ask these questions. We find ourselves however sometimes asking these questions of our staff, our partners and ourselves.

What is my worth?

We can quickly jump to an answer, stating our upbringing, our training and experience, our years of service, or even our bank balance and investment portfolio. But from Gods perspective, all this seems to evaporate quickly. Even worse, we can loose all of that and more in a single day, as we know from the story of Job.

We also easily confuse worth and value, attributing value to things that are worth a lot and esteemed in this world, but may be insignificant from Gods´ perspective. Oscar Wilde wrote "Nowadays people know the price of everything and the value of nothing."

In searching the Bible for handy passages explaining the worth or value of man, I came up pretty empty handed. So why on earth does God bother with us? Maybe that is not the right question to ask. Maybe it is not about us at all.

It is clear that God loves us, even though we are fairly worthless. But in treating us this way, His wisdom and attributes become visible in the contrast of the darkness we are in. Actually, the fuller we are of our own worth, the less we see of His. Sometimes He lets us go through the deep waters so that we will not reach out to others, to ourselves or to material things around us to find value, but to Him alone.

What a privileged we have to be working with people affected by Leprosy. Where people are far from the worth and value of this world, but where the wisdom of God can shine so bright.

Dear Lord Jesus Christ, may people affected by Leprosy have the surpassing worth of knowing you.



Truth

John 18:36-38 ³⁶ Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place."³⁷ "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me."³⁸ "What is truth?" retorted Pilate. With this he went out again to the Jews gathered there and said, "I find no basis for a charge against him.

"What is truth?" This particular question seems very relevant today. Perhaps the easier question is to ask, "What is untruth?" I am afraid that truth doesn't seem to be based on hard facts so much as beliefs. Untruths are often those facts that don't agree with my opinions. Perhaps that is why we have not been so discerning in picking out false news items or indeed in being able to distinguish opinion from fact. Here was Pilate, the judge in a court of law, struggling with truth. What a pity he didn't hang around to find out the answer to his question. I suspect it was rhetorical; he already knew the answer and rushed out to confirm that Jesus was innocent.

Still, I would like to have known what Jesus would have answered. Would he have said as he did to the disciples "I am"? Or would he have thrown the question back to Pilate as He so often did with non-believers. I think what Pilate was really saying to Jesus was that life is not black and white, particularly for a ruler or politician. There are a lot of grey areas. That was the dilemma that Pilate found himself in. Actually, his judgement was not about the truth but rather what was the best way forward that would preserve his position and not cause a riot. If you'd asked Pilate he might have said that truth had to be sacrificed for the greater good. Not the first or the last politician to have thought that.

Jesus was much clearer he had come into the world to testify to the truth. "The truth" what is that? Well, it has to be related to the kingdom of God and what they had previously been discussing. The truth for Jesus is not an opinion or a side. It is not about being right and everyone else wrong, it is the deep reality that Jesus is the Son of God (I am), truth incarnate, who came into the world to bring us back to God. Truth as a kingdom concept is rooted in God's ways and values. To learn more about truth we need to listen to Jesus and be filled, as He was, with grace *and* truth.

June Nash

I have worked for the Leprosy Mission for 35 years. At first I was on the mission field in Papua New Guinea and then Ethiopia. In the beginning I did leprosy control but then moved into the training of health workers. It was a privilege to serve overseas with TLM for 20 years. I returned to be part of the team in Brentford, firstly as global training adviser, then HR Director and lastly as Knowledge Management Director. I am now retired but being a part of the Leprosy Mission never really leaves you. I continue to hold the work in my heart through prayer and visits to Brentford.



The Beatitudes

And seeing the multitudes, he went up into a mountain: and when he was set, his disciples came unto him: ² And he opened his mouth, and taught them, saying, ³ Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted. ⁵ Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. ⁶ Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. ⁷ Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. ⁸ Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. ⁹ Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. ¹⁰ Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. ¹¹ Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. ¹² Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you. Matthew 5,1-12

The Beatitudes draw a life-size portrait of Jesus. They talk about what Jesus experienced. Jesus, Son of the Father and poor of heart. He became gentle and humble. He wept with suffering and compassion. He testified with truth and courage. He showed mercy to sinners by making peace through the blood of his cross. He suffered persecution for the righteousness of the Kingdom, even that total gift.

The Beatitudes are far from being a passive and blissful tranquillity; they call for a concrete commitment proposed as a path of happiness. Poverty of heart means the refusal to be fascinated by money, power or pride. It is a choice to live free in the sweetness and rejection of violence. Poverty of heart is to welcome the other without weakness but also without prejudice or jealousy. The tears described by Jesus are not those of sentimentality, but the tears of compassion that bring sympathy to those who suffer. Purity of heart is synonymous with transparency. It is the refusal of what blurs the heart and the gaze that prevents "seeing God" as He is. She flees duplicity. To make peace implies a will to achieve reconciliation in the image of the Son: *"I give you my peace" (John 14:27).*

Persecution for the cause of Christ is always "suffered". Yet the fact that it is the result of a search for the righteousness of the Kingdom shows us the commitment of the disciple who seeks to "adjust" his life to the Gospel despite mockery. To unveil as a Christian never goes without courage and struggle! It is a real happiness but lived against the tide. But at the same time the Beatitudes are addressed to all. When Jesus proclaimed them on the hill of Capernaum, there were not only perfect people in the audience. It is indeed to these Mary Magdalene, Zacchaeus, and Peter that Jesus spoke these sublime words.

Sublime because they reveal to those who hear them a treasure buried in them and whose name is sanctity: Jesus does not describe what these people live, he reads what they are in his eyes. It reveals the grain of holiness buried in everyone and that these people did not know - and that we continue to ignore.

He says who we are in the eyes of his Father. It reveals our identity and our vocation within the mediocrity of our lives. It reveals the presence of happiness at the heart of our days. He gives us the key to happiness: *"Blessed are you ..."* Jesus, the Son of God seizes us by our frailty, he wants to put his strength in our weakness. He wants to lay down his joy in our tears. In our poverty, he wants to place his wealth. In our sin, he wants to offer his forgiveness. On our crosses he sets his own. And whatever our poverty and shame. The Beatitudes are entrusted to us today as a treasure.



Our legacy

2 Chronicles 26: 1 – 23, Proverbs 3: 5 – 12 & 2 Timothy 4: 7 – 8

Have you ever given thought to the question of how you will be remembered once your life on earth has come to an end? How often do we watch a game of football, cricket or rugby where one team slightly pulls away from the other, only to finish poorly by giving away a goal, a penalty, a boundary or a try, in the dying moments of the game?

In 2 Chronicles 26 we read about Uzziah, king of Judah whose reign lasted 52 years (792 – 740 B.C.) He ruled longer than either David or Solomon. He started off brilliantly, but finished poorly.

The people of Judah made Uzziah king in place of his father Amaziah when he was only sixteen years old. He is credited with restoring the strategic harbour Elath, in the Gulf of Aqaba, where Solomon used to have ships built. During his rule the combined area of Israel and Judah reached the same proportions as in the days of David and Solomon.

Uzziah did what was right in the eyes of the Lord, with good influences on his life by his mother Jecoliah and Zechariah (a prophet). Zechariah instructed him in the fear of the Lord. While he followed the Lord closely, God gave him success in all he did.

He had military success: he conquered the Philistines and certain Arab groups. He built strategic towns to ensure the safety of his people, he repaired the broken walls of Jerusalem, fortified them and built towers in the city and in the desert. He had economic success: he built many cisterns to collect water to provide for livestock, planted fields and vineyards. He was a man of the soil. He had a well-trained, well-equipped and well-organised, massive army of 307 000 men. They used innovative techniques in warfare, including an early design of catapult.

Verse 15 says: "His fame spread far and wide, for he was greatly helped until he became powerful." Then verse 16 reads: "But after Uzziah became powerful his pride led to his downfall."

The Chronicler writes that Uzziah became unfaithful to the Lord. He took matters in his own hands, entering the Temple to burn incense on the altar of incense. Azariah and 80 other priests confronted him and asked him to leave the sanctuary. He became angry. He had a censer in his hand ready to burn incense. While still raging at the priests, his forehead showed the signs of leprosy. The priests recognised leprosy and hurried him out of the Temple. This was his last time in the Temple. He had leprosy till he died and remained ritually unclean. He had to stay in a separate house, relieved of his responsibilities. His son Jotham took charge of the palace and governed the land until his father died. He was not buried in the tombs of the kings, but in a separate cemetery. His tombstone read: "He had leprosy", at least that is what people said of him!

Uzziah's leprosy raises a tough question: is illness (e.g. leprosy) punishment for sin? When we read John 9 (about Jesus, the Pharisees and the man born blind), the answer is clearly **no**! When we accept God's discipline or rebuke in our lives (Prov. 3:11-12), it brings about the restoration of our relationship with Him. Let us therefore, like Paul, finish the race of life well, holding on to faith (2 Tim 4:6-7).



The eye of the beholder

Last week I was bumping along the roads in the far north of South Africa, near the Kruger Game Park, visiting leprosy patients together with a team from the department of health. We were admiring the lush Bushveld.

“It’s so green”, remarked my host. As I nodded in agreement, she added, “The cow dung will also be very good this year. It will have a nice green colour. The green colour looks good when you smear it on the wall. Much better than the dung you get in a dry year. People will be so happy when they come here to buy dung and find it so green. It’s a lovely colour.”

Cow-dung. Lovely. Not words I usually combine. For once I am lost for words. My host expands on the virtues of the dung in a good year. She points out some fine examples to me along the roadside. I make a note to myself never to complain again when Elizabeth prevails upon me to paint the house. “I could be smearing dung,” is what I’ll tell myself.

[I hope that you waited until after breakfast to read today’s message.]

It’s one of the many things that delight me about my work. Learning from and about other people. I’m no stranger to rural kraals and cow-dung. It’s a great form of recycling and far more friendly to the environment than the paint on my house. I am surprised though that my host, who lives in genteel suburbia, is enthusing about it.

I sensed in her the vigour spoken about in *Proverbs 14:1* “*The wisest of women builds her house.*” The theme of energy and foresight runs through the book of Proverbs, reaching its culmination in the final part of chapter 31. I’ve had the privilege of seeing many women like this in action and recall with great fondness one colleague in particular whose “*lamp never went out at night*”. [*Prov 31:18*]

I think too of some of the seriously disabled people I’ve met in rural areas who have nevertheless maintained beautiful homes and nurtured bountiful gardens. I remember a patient from the Kingdom of Swaziland, who without hands or feet, produced a never-ending supply of excellent cabbages. These are people who are indeed clothed in “strength and dignity.”

So many fine qualities are listed in the closing verses of Proverbs and several of them have to do with hands: “Willing hands”, “Fruits of her hands”, “Hand to the poor.” Many of you will be looking at hands today and those hands will tell their stories of hard work, of lost sensation, of hand care lessons faithfully applied or long forgotten.

And one day we shall see His hands and what a story they will tell.

“Lord, what do You see when they look at my hands? May my palms tell a worthy story.”

Peter Laubscher - Country Leader, Southern Africa. Peter and Elizabeth Laubscher have worked with the Leprosy Mission since 1981. They are blessed with three children. Peter cruises the waters of False Bay when he’s not trying to polish scratches out of telescope mirrors.



Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Anne-Claude Jonah	16 March		Gen 41	9 March
Arie de Kruijff Dr	27 March		2 Chronicles 26,1-23	30 March
David, King of Israel	11 March		Ruth 4,13-22	13 March
Diana, Princess of Wales	12 March		Job 28,12-15	27 March
Eddie Askew	6 March		Psalm 7	11 March
Erna Moeller	17 March		Psalm 27,14	24 March
Father Damien	5 March		Psalm 139,16-17	15 March
Gordon Brown	9 March		Prov 16,9	23 March
Henno Couprie	2 and 3 March		Prov 31,18	31 March
Joyce Ponnaiya Dr	10 March		Isaiah 4,2-6	18 March
June Nash	28 March		Isaiah 6,8-13	19 March
Kathleen Gavin	23 March		Isaiah 11,1-9	25 March
Ken Martin	8 March		Isaiah 11,10-16	26 March
Marta Risko	15 March		Matthew 5,1-12	29 March
Mollie Clark	1 March		Matthew 5,14	4 March
Otto Kingsley	14 March		Matthew 19,14	10 March
Pascal Machefer	29 March		Mark 7,34	1 March
Paul Dr and Niki Jakeman	13 March		Luke 18	8 March
Peter Laubscher	31 March		John 8,12	4 March
Pierre Geiser	20 and 21 March		John 12,20-26	14 March
Ruth Butlin Dr	22 March		John 15,15	17 March
Silvano Perotti	4 March		John 18,36-38	28 March
Sumon Halder	7 March		Romans 15,7	6 March
Theo de Villiers	30 March		1 Cor 1,28-31	20 March
Yuek Ming Poon	24 March		1 Cor 1,30	21 March
			1 Cor 4,7	7 March
			1 Cor 13,11-12	2 March
			Eph 2,10	16 March
			Eph 3,17/b-19	3 March
			Phil 3,7-8	27 March

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