



TLM Daily Devotions

April 2018





Easter

John 20 : 19-30

The Anglican ecclesiastical calendar, inherited from before the Reformation, enables us to follow an abbreviated life of Jesus on an annual basis. Easter, the Resurrection, and Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit go well in the springtime because they celebrate new life. The events took place at Passover - the great festival of the season (Jn 13:1 ff.). John's Gospel goes on to recount the story of Thomas and his reaction to the story of the risen Christ (Jn 20:24-29). There is quite a complicated spiritual lesson. Was Thomas unfaithful, or was he doubtful in this instance ? What should he have done ? We could ask what we would we have done - without expecting an answer. .

At that moment many people would have thought that the disciples were stupid to have spent three years, or so, with a wandering preacher. The resurrection (small r) was, therefore, unlikely. Then, when Jesus does appear, the original Greek text is not quite clear. The doors are locked. Jesus appears in the midst of the disciples, and tells Thomas to put his hand or finger (as appropriate) into his wounds. He also tells Thomas not to be *apistos* (*unfaithful*) Jn 20:27 but to be *pistos* (*faithful*). The English word can mean both faith and belief. In Latin, English and other European languages, faith and belief are different words. Belief is quite intellectual. It is often connected with prudence, or just taking proper care. Running into a close relation of a dead friend on the pavement might surprise us if they looked alike, but we soon sort it out in our minds. The friend is dead and the relative looks like him or her. Thomas had neither seen the risen Jesus, nor had he received his commission about forgiveness. As for Jesus, in the story, does he to be « be faithful » or does he tell him to « believe ? » In either event we are not helped by the lines of the hymn

My piercèd side, O Thomas see,
My hands, my feet, I show to thee,
Not faithless but believing be.

The lines are difficult because they are arbitrary. The choice of different translations of one word entails « reading into » the text what one likes and not really to try to learn from it. We could say that the hymn « rewrites » the Bible to « fit » what the author believes. Jesus tells Thomas that he believes what he has seen and adds « blessed are those who believe without seeing. » The translation could also be correct if it meant « blessed are those who have faith without seeing.

Now the question has nothing to do with the historicity of the Resurrection. It is about faith. The Bible is the chief source and norm of what we believe - in this case that the Disciples and then Thomas saw the risen Christ. Faith and the concomitant trust, concern « being touched by the finger of God » as in Michelangelo's painting. It is about spiritual awareness, about experience, mystery and the courage described by the theologian Karl Rahner when he writes that it is necessary to go beneath theology to encounter the darkness of God and its foundation in experience.

Thomas says (λεγω in Greek) « My Lord and my God. » As for the story, the evangelist says « these things are written so that you (the reader) may believe (or have faith) that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God, » and, of course, have life in his name. In the Christian tradition, faith is a gift of God. When Thomas says, « my Lord and my God, » he finds faith. There is a tradition that went on to India where it is quite likely that Christianity arrived very early. The interpretation of the Gospel would have needed quite a lot of theology to build a bridge across the cultures. So the story of St Thomas is about how faith can be the starting for belief so as to understand, to explain and to share.

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Christ is risen! Hallelujah!

Christ is risen! Hallelujah!
Risen our victorious Head!
Sing His praises! Hallelujah!
Christ is risen from the dead!
Gratefully our hearts adore Him,
As His light once more appears,
Bowing down in joy before Him,
Rising up from grief and tears,
Christ is risen! Hallelujah!
Risen our victorious Head!
Sing His praises! Hallelujah!
Christ is risen from the dead!

Christ is risen! all the sadness
Of His earthly life is o'er,
Through the open gates of gladness
He returns to life once more;
Death and hell before Him bending,
He doth rise, the Victor now,
Angels on His steps attending,
Glory round His wounded brow.
Christ is risen! all the sadness
Of His earthly life is o'er,
Through the open gates of gladness
He returns to life once more.

Christ is risen! henceforth never
Death or hell shall us enthrall;
We are Christ's, in Him forever
We have triumphed over all;
All the doubting and dejection
Of our trembling hearts have ceased,
'Tis His day of resurrection!
Let us rise and keep the feast.
Christ is risen! henceforth never
Death or hell shall us enthrall;
We are Christ's, in Him forever
We have triumphed over all.



Confusion, Conversation, Conviction & Commission

(A reflection on Mary Magdalene, Thomas and Peter)

Mary Magdalene was from village Magdala near the sea of Galilee. Jesus drove out seven demons from her (*Luke 8:2*). She owed her renewed life to Him. Had a deep sense gratitude. She saw her Lord and Saviour crucified and laid in the tomb. She was highly anguished. On the third day after the crucifixion, early in the morning she went to the tomb to anoint Jesus with spices for a proper burial. She reached the empty tomb first expecting to find a dead body. Disappointed, she went and informed the other disciples. After the disciples came, saw the empty tomb and left; she could not leave the place where her Lord was buried. She waited in grief; but not in vain. Mary was the first person Jesus spoke to after His resurrection. She was the apostle to the apostles (*John 20:17 Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them...."*). Jesus chose her as His first witness in a culture where women were not considered as reliable witnesses.

Thomas was always intense in his relationship with Jesus (John 11:16). He had always been an inquisitive disciple. When Jesus said that He would be going to His father, Thomas wanted to know the way to the Father. Where was Jesus going? How could I go where Jesus was going? were Thomas's questions (John 14:5). Jesus replied with the profound statement of His unique divine identity, "I am the way and the truth and the life. None comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). Jesus is the only path for reconciliation with Almighty God. But, now that only Way does not exist. All his hopes were dashed to the ground. So, Thomas was troubled; What about me? Am I left now to fend for myself? Was Jesus really the Way, Truth and Life? Was Jesus really the Christ? To that inquisitive, doubting, desperate Thomas; Jesus had stretched out His hands after His bodily resurrection. Thomas could not doubt who Jesus was anymore. He accepted the Lordship and Divinity of Jesus - "My Lord, My God" (John 20:28).

Peter had experienced the miracle working power of Jesus when he had cast out the net during the day when no fish would be caught. He didn't expect the miracle (Luke 5:8). The miracle made him give up his profession and follow Jesus. He is one with high energy, impetuous and emotional. Among the disciples, Peter was given the privilege to receive the revelation that Jesus is the Son of living God (Matthew 16:16-17) and Jesus would build His church on it. He made the tall promise of laying down his life for Jesus (Luke 22:33). But not much later, he denied knowing Jesus thrice. After the empty tomb, there was nothing left for him in life but to get back to fishing. Life had come the full circle. But through a personal dialogue Jesus had commissioned him to feed (with gospel) His sheep (the believers) (John 21:15-17).

They were all intensely related and completely dependent on Jesus. They had put all they had at stake to follow Him. They demonstrated their dependency in word and deed. They needed reaffirmation of their faith in Him. Was Jesus dependable any more after the empty tomb?

Jesus's response exceeded their needs and expectations. They were looking for a dead body; they met a resurrected Jesus in the flesh. The resurrection was physical and not spiritual. The disciples could never ever deny the person of Jesus. Without the bodily resurrection, Jesus would have been like any other good moral preacher and not the divine Holy God. Words do not answer the question of truth; experience does.

Each of them was confused in the beginning. Jesus conversed with them, convicted them and commissioned them to share the gospel. Jesus through a personal encounter had channelled their intense personal relationship and dependency for the commitment to the Great Commission.

In gratitude, for His glory. **Dr PLN Raju** -Former Director (Resource Mobilization) The Leprosy Mission Trust India New Delhi



What must the Disciple of Jesus Christ concentrate on?

1) He must concentrate on dying to self daily! (Luke 9:43 – 45) Jesus, as our Great Example here, said that He had to face death soon.... The NT teaches us to die daily....to live the Exchanged Life in Christ daily... To die to self, to die to the world, to die to sin and to die to the devil daily..1 Cor.1:18ff – *“For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.....For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God..... And because of Him you are in Christ Jesus, Who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,... ‘Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.’ - Gal. 2:20 – “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Philp. 1:21 – “For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.”*

2) He must humble himself daily! (Luke 9:46 – 48) Jesus lived out a humble Servant-Leadership kind of life (John 13:3ff)... James 4:6 – *“But He gives more grace. Therefore it says, ‘God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’” Micah 6:8 – “He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, and to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God.”*

3) He must strive for unity of the Body daily! (Luke 9:49,50) The Church must always remain the True Body of Jesus Christ... 1 Cor.12:12,13 – *“For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one Body – Jews or Greeks, slaves or free – and all were made to drink of one Spirit.” - John 17:20,21 – “I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word, that they may all be one, just as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You have sent Me.” - Psalm 133 – “Behold, how good and pleasant it is when brothers dwell in unity! It is like the precious oil running down Aaron’s head... It is like the dew of Hermon falling on the mountains of Zion... For there the LORD has commanded the blessing, Life forevermore.”*

4) He must expose evil daily, but always leave judgement to God! (Luke 9:51 – 56) We are to walk in the light, but never to manipulate the Light for our own ends!

Eph.5:8ff – “Walk as children of light...and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.... But when anything is exposed by the light, it becomes visible... Understand what the will of the Lord is. - Rom.12:14ff – “Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse them... Never be wise in your own sight. Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable before all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God... ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay, says the LORD’... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.”

5) He must continue to follow Jesus daily – uncompromisingly! (Luke 9:57-62) Plow daily, plow straight, plow true... 1 Tim. 6:11ff – Read

6) He must be involved in missions daily! (Luke 10:1-3) The reason for the Church's existence is Mission (John4:12; Acts4:12; Eph.4:12)... Here Jesus was training His future church to do the Great Commission (Matth 28:20) 2x2...plentiful harvest...few labourers...earnest prayer...lambs in the midst of wolves...

Conclusion: Luke 1:37,38 – *“For nothing will be impossible with God*

And Mary said, ‘Behold, I am the servant/disciple of the LORD,

Let it be unto me according to Your Word.” Amen

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Take up Your Cross Part 1

Mark 8:31-38

Many, if not most of us will have been on the receiving end of the devastating news that we or a loved one or someone we know well has been diagnosed with a terminal illness.

What is our immediate response?

Shock

Denial

Questioning “why me, why him, why her?????”

Feelings of “It’s not fair! This shouldn’t be happening.”

It was at the height of Jesus’ ministry that he confronted his disciples with this very news about himself. Everything had been going really well; people healed, multitudes fed, awesome teaching being given and they had just begun to realise who Jesus really was. Back in verse 29 Jesus asks the disciples *“who do you say that I am?”* And Peter replied, *“You are the Christ – you are the Messiah we have been waiting for.”*

Now Jesus tells them that he would face terrible rejection, suffering and death and they are so shocked they fail to hear that he also said he wouldn’t stay dead but would rise again on the third day.

Isn’t this how it happens sometimes – we are so shocked by some bad news that we fail to hear the ‘BUT’ or the ‘AND’ which holds good news.

Peter couldn’t handle what Jesus was saying. He drew him aside and began to rebuke him, “How can you say such things when we have just acknowledge you as the Messiah?! This can’t be true!”

‘Turning and seeing his disciples wavering, wondering what to believe, Jesus confronted Peter. “Peter, get out of my way! Satan, get lost! You have no idea how God works.”’ (The Message)

Then Jesus called the crowd to join him and the disciples and used this as an opportunity to teach them about discipleship and suffering. He said, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.”

What do you think of when you hear the phrase “Take up your cross”?

Remember that in Jesus day the cross was an instrument of torturous death. Anyone who was told to take up their cross knew they were about to die a painful death. In ‘The Message’ Eugene Petersen puts verses 34 like this: “Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You’re not in the driver’s seat; I am. Don’t run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I’ll show you how.”

‘Take up your cross’ is about trusting God and embracing suffering rather than running from it.

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Take up Your Cross Part 2

Mark 8:31-38

Suffering is inevitable. Because of the world we live in and the choices we and others make, and have made, none of us can expect to avoid suffering in one form or another. What matters is not whether we suffer or not but how we respond to it. Do we fight it or do we embrace it?

One thing I have learnt is that the 'why' questions are rarely, if not never, answered. Instead of asking 'why?' a better question to ask is, 'what can I learn from this about myself and about God?'

It's very easy to dwell on feelings of "God, it's not fair!" but when we do this we are holding God at arm's length, or even pushing him further away, blaming him for our suffering and saying in effect, "God, I don't believe you're a good God."

It is hard to make sense of suffering. We are not alone in this – just read the book of Job, the Psalms or numerous biographies and autobiographies written over the years!

John Pritchard (Bishop of Oxford) in his book 'How to Explain your Faith' has a chapter on suffering which I have found most helpful. The heart of the matter he says is this: "We take off our shoes when talking about suffering because it's dark, holy ground, but again it all goes back to our picture of God. If he's a Cosmic Plumber who should 'fix' things but usually chooses not to, then we have a problem and God has a lot of questions to answer. But if he's the Divine Lover who ties one arm behind his back, so much does he love us, we have a different relationship to explore. True love can only exist between truly free beings in a 'free' environment. God took that risk, but it meant he couldn't save us from suffering, only enter it himself, share it from the inside, and therefore change it. It's a high-risk strategy. But then love always is."

Jesus said (*John 15:13*), *"No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends" and he did it for us!*

Let us remember that Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose again, breaking the power of sin, of suffering and of death, and we have his promise of eternal life. One day all suffering will come to an end and we will be forever with the Lord so, as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, *"encourage each another with these words".* (*1 Thessalonians 4:18*)

No matter what we are going through God is in the midst of it walking through it with us. We may not understand and we will have lots of questions but as someone has said, "God doesn't give answers. He enters into the questions and transforms them, in the life and terrible death of Jesus."

Put your trust in God and allow him to lead. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow Jesus and he will show you how. (Mark 8:34 The Message)

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Psalm 24

Of David. A psalm.

¹The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it,
the world, and all who live in it;
²for he founded it on the seas
and established it on the waters.

³Who may ascend the mountain of the LORD?
Who may stand in his holy place?

⁴The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,
who does not trust in an idol
or swear by a false god.

⁵They will receive blessing from the LORD
and vindication from God their Savior.

⁶Such is the generation of those who seek him,
who seek your face, God of Jacob.

⁷Lift up your heads, you gates;
be lifted up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

⁸Who is this King of glory?
The LORD strong and mighty,
the LORD mighty in battle.

⁹Lift up your heads, you gates;
lift them up, you ancient doors,
that the King of glory may come in.

¹⁰Who is he, this King of glory?
The LORD Almighty—
he is the King of glory.



Psalm 25

Of David.

- ¹ In you, LORD my God, I put my trust. ² I trust in you;
do not let me be put to shame,
nor let my enemies triumph over me.
- ³ No one who hopes in you
will ever be put to shame,
but shame will come on those
who are treacherous without cause.
- ⁴ Show me your ways, LORD,
teach me your paths.
- ⁵ Guide me in your truth and teach me,
for you are God my Savior,
and my hope is in you all day long.
- ⁶ Remember, LORD, your great mercy and love, for they are from of old.
- ⁷ Do not remember the sins of my youth and my rebellious ways;
according to your love remember me, for you, LORD, are good.
- ⁸ Good and upright is the LORD; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.
- ⁹ He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way.
- ¹⁰ All the ways of the LORD are loving and faithful
toward those who keep the demands of his covenant.
- ¹¹ For the sake of your name, LORD, forgive my iniquity, though it is great.
- ¹² Who, then, are those who fear the LORD?
He will instruct them in the ways they should choose.
- ¹³ They will spend their days in prosperity,
and their descendants will inherit the land.
- ¹⁴ The LORD confides in those who fear him;
he makes his covenant known to them.
- ¹⁵ My eyes are ever on the LORD,
for only he will release my feet from the snare.
- ¹⁶ Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.
- ¹⁷ Relieve the troubles of my heart and free me from my anguish.
- ¹⁸ Look on my affliction and my distress and take away all my sins.
- ¹⁹ See how numerous are my enemies and how fiercely they hate me!
- ²⁰ Guard my life and rescue me; do not let me be put to shame, for I take refuge in you.
- ²¹ May integrity and uprightness protect me, because my hope, LORD, is in you.
- ²² Deliver Israel, O God, from all their troubles!



A heart is broken; A soul is saved

John 20:27-29. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and My God!"

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples and showed his hands and feet. Thomas was not with them at that time. The disciples told him what they saw. Thomas replied, *"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."*

Thomas was a seeker. He wanted hard evidence. Thomas did not trust the witness of other disciples. Evidence given by others was not sufficient for him; there was too much at stake for him as an individual. He gave his life to follow Jesus (*John 11:16 Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."*). His need was different than others'. He wanted a personal encounter with Jesus to believe His resurrection. He needed his doubt to be dealt with by Jesus Himself. He had a rational question. Bodily resurrection is difficult to believe though Jesus demonstrated its possibility in the case of Lazarus.

Jesus met Thomas at the very point of his need; the need for evidence of physical resurrection. Jesus knew the honest quest of Thomas. Jesus could have ignored Thomas and concentrated on the other disciples. But Jesus wanted to save the soul of Thomas. Jesus needed Thomas's personal conviction so that he can be set on course for a larger purpose, saving souls. Jesus convicted Thomas in love and did not condemn him. Jesus removed Thomas' unbelief by making him experience the Lamb of God that was sacrificed on the Cross. Sins of every man and woman were borne by Jesus and nailed to the Cross. The wounds on the body of Jesus testify to the substitutionary atoning death of Jesus. What Jesus had said made Thomas realize his sinful nature ie., unbelief. Jesus dealt the unbelief of Thomas at the mind (rational) and heart (spirit) levels.

The personal encounter with Jesus had transformed Thomas. He received Jesus as his personal saviour (My Lord) and the revelation of Almighty God (My God). Conviction is a heart matter. He anchored his spirit in the person of Jesus. Such conviction laid the foundation for Thomas to serve the Lord.

Thomas's heart must have been broken, when Jesus told him to stop doubting but believe Him. Into that broken heart, the seed of love of God was sown to save the soul of Thomas. It made him transit from doubt to conviction through humility. Jesus gave His grace; Thomas honoured Jesus by being diligent in his work of carrying the Gospel to India.

A broken heart is necessary to understand the love of God. In our brokenness we experience the goodness of God (*Psalms 51:17 "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise."*). The top loose soil must be removed till the hard rock beneath it is exposed upon which the Lord can lay His foundation. Don't be discouraged if The Lord breaks your heart; He is saving your soul.



Trusting God when things go wrong

Following Dr Paul du Plessis recent contributions allow me also to share an experience.

Psalm 121:8 – the Lord will watch over your coming and going, now and forever more

It was July 1992, and the monsoon season in Nepal: I was working for the United Mission to Nepal and based in Kathmandu. My wife had left the country to visit a friend in Australia; our two daughters were staying with friends in Kathmandu, and I was about to travel to the far side of Nepal to visit a project – so the family was very split up. The monsoon rain on this particular Friday lunchtime was so heavy that I did not dare venture outside my office for my usual snack lunch – a walk of only 100 metres to the local tea shop. I thought nothing of it, and continued working.

However later that evening I received a phone call to inform me that a Thai airlines plane had gone missing after abandoning a landing at Kathmandu airport because of the rain. There were 113 people on board – including the son of one of the mission partners working for the United Mission to Nepal. It was a hard time for everyone. Among the expatriate community in Kathmandu there was hardly one family who was not affected through the loss of a friend or family member.

How do we pray in these situations, and how do we pray for our own protection as we travel after such an experience?

Just three months later in October I had to leave my family again and travel to the UK. I remember reading Psalm 121 at the breakfast table on the day I left – committing us all into God's hands. Our children (indeed many children of that age) were now very nervous of plane travel after the Thai airline crash, but we tried to reassure them that God watches over us – and anyway plane crashes don't happen twice in the same place! - Or do they? I was in the UK when the news broke that a PIA plane with 167 people on board had gone down on its approach to Kathmandu airport. Among those on board was a mission family of five returning from furlough. We knew them very well: we shared a house with them, and the children, being of similar ages, were all very close friends!

As you can imagine these were extraordinary times, and it took a lot of faith to trust God. As always people ask "why?" and of course there is no easy answer. Children ask "will it happen to us?" and of course there are no guarantees. But there are the wonderful words of Psalm 121 full of reassurance and hope.

In 1993 I had to leave my family again to fly to the UK to be interviewed for the position of General Director of TLMI – and a month later I had to fly to the UK again with my wife to be commissioned into the job. I thank God that our children did trust God for our safety and that trust was honoured.

But all these events and no doubt any number of others like them, remind us to pray for God's protection when we travel by whatever means. In the end we do just have to trust him for his protection in all our "comings and goings".



Death is not the end

Matthew 5:4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted

One thing is certain: none of us are immortal – but, we live in the promise of eternal life. Unfortunately, in the UK we are almost in denial about death. We generally try to avoid the subject and when a loved one dies, their body is quickly removed from view and kept in the hands of the funeral directors. Maybe it's because all too few of our population live in the hope of eternal life. But for the Christian, death is a just gateway to something much better – a great adventure to be looked forward to.

Even so, the sight of a coffin at a funeral service is always a reminder of our own mortality, and a reminder that our lives are in God's hand and we really don't know what's round the corner.

I've been to rather too many funerals over the last year. But probably the most salutary reminder of our mortality were the mass funerals after the two plane crashes in Kathmandu in 1992 described earlier. I attended the funeral of those lost in the Thai airlines plane first. I joined hundreds of family members, friends and other mourners as we looked into a pit the size of a swimming pool in which the coffins were neatly laid.

Of course the people who had lost their lives were from many different countries and religious backgrounds so the funeral "service" was a multi-faith affair seeking to acknowledge each of these distinctive backgrounds. The Executive Director of the United Mission to Nepal had been asked to lead the service – introducing the leaders from the different faith communities in turn and finding suitable words to bring the whole ceremony to a conclusion.

The funeral for the lives lost in the PIA crash took a bit longer to arrange, and the Director of UMN had other commitments on the date set for this. So they asked me to stand in. The scene is etched in my memory. I was with the various faith community leaders (including the pastor of the International Church) on a raised platform again looking down on a pit the size of a swimming pool – this time with even more coffins assembled in neat rows. It was a cold but bright day on a quiet spot not far from Anandaban Hospital, as hundreds of mourners gathered together to say their farewells and pay their respects.

It is almost intolerably hard when we lose our loved ones, yet Jesus promised blessings to those who are mourning. The common assumption is that Jesus lost his own father well before his public ministry as there is no mention of him in the Bible apart from the accounts of Jesus' birth. So Jesus knew grief. And he still wept outside the tomb of his close friend Lazarus – even though he knew the resurrection miracle he was about to perform.

Maybe Jesus is helping us to understand that God draws close to those who are mourning, and holds them in his heart just as he does with the poor, the downtrodden – and those with leprosy. But most importantly for us who trust in the resurrection ourselves: death is never the end – only the beginning of a wonderful new life free from all the pain of this world.



Be Still

I wonder what verse comes to your mind when you read these words. Perhaps you think of the obvious one in *Psalm 46:10* *“Be still, and know that I am God...I will be exalted in the earth”*. Or perhaps you think of the occasion when Jesus stilled the storm as we find in *Mark 4: 39* *“Jesus got up, rebuked the wind and said to the waves ‘Quiet! Be still!’ then the wind died down and it was completely calm”*.

Recently I was quite ill with ‘flu and was forced for many days to *“be still”* as I had neither the energy nor the inclination to be anything else. I have spent quite a lot of time over the last couple of months being still and thinking about what it means to be still. Even as I write this I have a sense of being still as I am trapped in the house by the snow and the wind and the -8C temperature. Yet as I look out of my window, the sun is shining and glistening on the water, there is blue sky above - yes *“be still”*. When I look at the snow, it looks really beautiful then a gust of wind comes and blows it all around, so not only is the snow falling from the sky but it looks like it is blowing up from the ground. Isn't that just like us when we tell ourselves to *“be still”* before the Lord, sometimes our thoughts just blow all around in our minds and we are not really still.

Going back to my enforced rest and time to *“be still”*, I was reading in Zechariah one morning and read these words: *“Be still before the Lord, all mankind, because He has roused Himself from His holy dwelling”*. These words come at the end of a paragraph which talks of God coming to live among His people and giving many nations the opportunity to be part of God's people. Coming not many weeks after Christmas these words reminded me of the miracle that God brought to us through the birth of His Son – the opportunity for me to be part of God's people.

Being still also gives us opportunity to realise all the gifts God has given to us, all the miracles He has performed in our lives, all the times He has rescued us from our own weaknesses, all the times when He has led us to good things or to quiet waters. When did He do all these things you ask? – just take time to reflect on the years of your life and follow the path to which His hand has led you.

Thank you, God,
for the miracles we have been too blind to see,
for the gifts we have taken for granted,
for the paths we have not realised we have been on,
for the wonderful opportunity you have given me to be part of Your family.

Today develop an abiding sense of gratitude and appreciation for all that your Father has given you.



Jesus Never Fails

'Jesus Never Fails', were the words given to me on a plaque by a lady I call my spiritual mum, when I left India to make my journey to the UK as a young bride, aged 21. I had never left my home before.

These words have been key to my life, I am now 48 and Jesus has never failed me. I have had challenges along the way and battles but Jesus has been faithful. My early life was very dependent upon God, as my dad was embezzled out of his money and life was tough for my parents in India, with three small children. I had to go out to work at an early age and was exposed to many dangers.

Along the way I met many good Christian people who helped me. One was a nun who took me to work in a leprosy organisation, in which the people affected with leprosy came in to service government vehicles, such as buses and cars. I had first hand encounters with people affected with leprosy, I used to eat with them, register them in and use the same pen that they would use. I would have not normally done this as there is quite a stigma attached to these people. I recall feeling a sense of helplessness and compassion for people affected with leprosy, as they would often get beaten by the police if they entered a street that was touristic or upcoming. The scars and images of these people have never left my mind.

I see all the good work that is done here at The Mission and one of my first questions to the reps were, how do you relate to supporters and donors, who have not come across people affected with leprosy. The answer was simple, leprosy is mentioned in the Bible, and what we do for the least of our brothers we do unto thee.

My prayer with The Mission is *(1 Peter 2: 9) 'But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.'*

My prayer for each one is

*Our life is for the glory of God. We have been divinely commissioned to display
the virtues and perfections of divinity.
We manifest the power and excellence of Christ to everyone in our world.
Thank you blessed Lord, for bringing us out of darkness
into the glorious liberty of the sons of God,
where we reign and rule in life,
in Jesus' name,
Amen.*



Psalm 26

Of David.

¹Vindicate me, LORD,
for I have led a blameless life;
I have trusted in the LORD
and have not faltered.

²Test me, LORD, and try me,
examine my heart and my mind;

³for I have always been mindful of your unfailing love
and have lived in reliance on your faithfulness.

⁴I do not sit with the deceitful,
nor do I associate with hypocrites.

⁵I abhor the assembly of evildoers
and refuse to sit with the wicked.

⁶I wash my hands in innocence,
and go about your altar, LORD,

⁷proclaiming aloud your praise
and telling of all your wonderful deeds.

⁸LORD, I love the house where you live,
the place where your glory dwells.

⁹Do not take away my soul along with sinners,
my life with those who are bloodthirsty,

¹⁰in whose hands are wicked schemes,
whose right hands are full of bribes.

¹¹I lead a blameless life;
deliver me and be merciful to me.

¹²My feet stand on level ground;
in the great congregation I will praise the LORD.



Psalm 27

Of David.

¹The LORD is my light and my salvation—
whom shall I fear?
The LORD is the stronghold of my life—
of whom shall I be afraid?

²When the wicked advance against me
to devour me,
it is my enemies and my foes
who will stumble and fall.

³Though an army besiege me,
my heart will not fear;
though war break out against me,
even then I will be confident.

⁴One thing I ask from the LORD,
this only do I seek:
that I may dwell in the house of the LORD
all the days of my life,
to gaze on the beauty of the LORD
and to seek him in his temple.

⁵For in the day of trouble
he will keep me safe in his dwelling;
he will hide me in the shelter of his sacred tent
and set me high upon a rock.

⁶Then my head will be exalted
above the enemies who surround me;
at his sacred tent I will sacrifice with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make music to the LORD.

⁷Hear my voice when I call, LORD;
be merciful to me and answer me.

⁸My heart says of you, "Seek his face!"
Your face, LORD, I will seek.

⁹Do not hide your face from me,
do not turn your servant away in anger;
you have been my helper.
Do not reject me or forsake me,
God my Savior.

¹⁰Though my father and mother forsake me,
the LORD will receive me.

¹¹ Teach me your way, LORD;
lead me in a straight path
because of my oppressors.

¹² Do not turn me over to the desire of my foes,
for false witnesses rise up against me,
spouting malicious accusations.

¹³ I remain confident of this:
I will see the goodness of the LORD
in the land of the living.

¹⁴ Wait for the LORD;
be strong and take heart
and wait for the LORD.



In seeking God's face for the future of TLM many people across the Fellowship have contributed insights on Glasscubes, and some have agreed to have it included in the Bridge for our further reflection over the next days.

Hearing from God – 1.

Changing the world

On the 15th of February 2018 TLM DR Congo team had a full day fasting and prayers. We had time to reflect on 2 Kings 5:1-27.

A good example that TLM may follow:

“An anonymous and fragile girl who changed his world” (2 Kings 5: 1 – 27)

A captive little girl from the land of Israel said to her mistress,

“If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy.”

1. Announcing good news: *“If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy”.*
2. Naaman, Syrian chief of army, robust and brave: *“took seriously and acted toward accomplishing the message of the anonymous girls”*

A challenge: TLM need to deliver Good News, that decision makers and policy influencers can trust.

In the 5 year to come, an inspired TLM need to stand strong in announcing the Good News of Jesus Christ, the saviour of the World. Good News is simple but loud, holistic and bears fruits, as the model by this anonymous girl of Israel.

The Good News (gospel) always produces lasting outcomes, our own wisdom and knowledge cannot!



Hearing from God – 2.

Where are the nine?

“Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.” Luk 17:17-19

We all know the interesting story from the Gospel of Luke telling us the encounter between Jesus and 10 men affected by leprosy and how all these men were healed from their leprosy. Just one returned to Jesus to express his thankfulness, to praise God and to worship Jesus. Something very important happened when Jesus saw his spiritual needs as well and said to him: *“your faith has made you well”*. Ten men were healed from sick bodies but just one of them was healed spiritually.

Where are the other nine? Their bodies were healed but they needed also salvation and forgiveness for their spirits.

Where are the other nine? How far is our spiritual responsibility to persons affected by leprosy, their families and villages?

“Zero transmission, zero disability, zero discrimination” are excellent goals for us when we are looking ahead. Those goals are covering two third of our “trinity” as human beings with body, soul and spirit. It’s so important to give healing and rehabilitation to the body and dignity and rehabilitation to the personality.

Perhaps we should add another “zero point” in our goals, at least in our internal goals? “Zero (no one to) perish”, The God-given task of TLM is to reach out to the world with a message of hope and healing for the body, soul and spirit. Christ came to give healing, human dignity and eternal life.

We have to remind ourselves about the third part, the spirit. In a holistic approach we have to include the entire person in our concern. After all, at the end of the day the salvation of our souls is the very most important thing and will open the gates of Heaven for us!

Peter says: *“The Lordnot wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance” 2 Peter 3:9*

Paul says: *“This is good, and pleases God our Savior, how wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” 1 Tim 2:3-4*

Billy Graham, now recently with the Lord, took initiative to the Lausanne movement 1974 and in the Manilla manifesto 4000 Christian leader said: The whole Gospel to the whole world with the whole church.

What is our role in that objective and how is that reflected in our strategies?



Hearing from God – 3.

Christopher Wright wrote: ‘Fundamentally, our mission means our committed participation as God’s people, at God’s invitation and command, in God’s own mission within the history of God’s world for the redemption of God’s creation.’

It’s a short quote which captures the big vision God has given his people. As the new Global Fellowship Strategy is put into place, how can we be meeting this big vision? It almost seems beyond us.

Perhaps the place to start then, is with the author of the mission as he speaks to us in his word *‘Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean on not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight’ (Prov 3:5f)*. We can only begin to plan our mission as we rely on God. It is God’s work. It is not our own. As we trust God he will provide the wisdom to plan our part.

Where are we seeing God’s plan being worked out in where we work? How can we be celebrating this with our team, and in prayer? Maybe there are areas we haven’t relied on God’s wisdom in our work, and we need to confess those.

As we seek God’s wisdom, to be part of his mission, we are reminded of the words which welcome people to Anandaban hospital “people affected by leprosy are the most important visitors in our premises...We are not doing them favour by serving them. They are giving us opportunity to do so”.

This is the mission we have been called to and which God has graciously given us an opportunity to participate in. And yet it might still feel overwhelming. Again the Lord reminds us *“He brought us out from there to bring us in and give us the land he promised on oath to our ancestors” (Deut 6:23)* and *“He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Phil 1:6)*.

There is still so much to accomplish, but God has not brought The Leprosy Mission so far along the journey for no good reason. We can be confident God will carry on the work of The Leprosy Mission.

Why not finish by saying the Lord’s prayer as it focuses our sight on the Father and His Kingdom, and our desire to trust him to work out his plans.

*Our Father who is in heaven, Holy is Your Name. Your kingdom come,
Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us today our daily bread
Forgive us our sin as we forgive those who sin against us
Lead us not into temptation
And deliver us from the evil one.
For Yours is the glory Amen*



Hearing from God – 4.

Assurance of His presence

“God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved” Psalm 46:5 NKJV In response to the global call for prayer across TLM global fellowship, the team of TLM Niger spent a day to pray and to seek God’s direction towards the preparation and development of TLM global strategy; we prayed and listened to God and He led us to study Psalm 46. We acknowledged the faithfulness of God as the Psalmist began with assuring us the God is our refuge and strength that is ever present. This assurance gives us confidence and courage not to fear even though defeating Leprosy and transforming life by targeting zero transmission; with limited funding by what we can see physically, limited resources and limited coverage is daunting/huge (v 2-3)

We are shown the picture of a **river** whose stream makes glad the city of God (vs 4); this river will believe represent the power and presence of the Holy Spirit and this picture was made clear in vs 5-6 that with God in our midst we shall not be moved; because God will help us. He will give us a voice that we will use to melt the earth (Leprosy).

There is a reassurance of the presence of ‘the LORD of host’ in vs 7, that is the Lord Himself has come and will lead the battle just as he did when Joshua and the army of Israel were set to defeat Jericho (Joshua 5:13-15). Surely we will see the result as He promised in vs 8-9, God will make Leprosy cease to the end of the earth, He break the chain of Leprosy and bring about life transformation for the victims.

But there is a caution giving to us in vs 10; we need to ‘be still’ and ‘know’. To be still is to trust God and not lean on our own ability; just as the Lord commanded Joshua to remove his sandals because he is standing on Holy ground and Joshua did so (Joshua 5:15) God is also telling us to be still; to be at peace with Him, to let Him fight the battle; we should not allow human efforts to disrupt what God want to do; God is sufficient for us and He is capable of bringing about the victory we want. It was a stone cut without hand (without human effort) that knock down the great image (statue) Nebuchadnezzar saw in his dream (Daniel 2:34-35). We know Christ is that cornerstone and we need to by faith trust Him to work in and through us for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13). Let us therefore resist pressure from the world system and every human idea and self-glory that may hinder God from doing His work.

God want to be exalted in our midst He also want to be exalted among the nations; this is how the world we know that indeed TLM serve a living God and our God is great. To Him belongs power and glory. Let’s therefore prayerfully **be still** and trust Him to:

- Provide all the resources; funds, human and material requires to fight the battle
- Provide direction, wisdom and strategy on how to fight the battle
- Unite us and make us strong in Him so that we can experience His presence in our midst
- Be ever present with us in all the countries where we work and in all our meetings; especially the committee set up to guide and develop the strategy
- Provide leadership at our secretariat level that will flow also to all members of the fellowship
- Remove every barrier, obstacle and difficulty that may slow us down or bring discouragement.
- Prepare us, cleans us, increase our faith and trust in Him and draw us to Himself through the power of His Spirit and help us to know Him better and be at peace with Him.
- Defeat leprosy, destroy the bacteria and bring about zero transmission, break the chain and liberate the captive of the disease.
- Work through us and in us to bring glory to His name and bring many lost soul to saving knowledge of Christ.

- Faithfully guide us through the process of developing the Strategy and help us accomplish all the outcomes that will be set and grant us grace to finish the task that we collectively agree to implement.

Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church (TLM global fellowship) by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever Amen! (Eph 3:20) 'I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth! The Lord of host is with us (TLM Global Fellowship) The God of Jacob is our refuge.(Psalm 46:10) Think about it and let's pray together.

Bunmi Oluloto - Servant of Christ in the Niger Republic - Team TLM Country Leader Niger and Chad



Hearing from God – 5.

The Cost and the Joy

2 Cor 9:6-15

Looking around the TLM Fellowship I see so many incredibly committed servants; committed to the cause of leprosy defeated and lives transformed, committed to serving those affected by leprosy, committed to loving their colleagues and others around them, committed to being the best that they can be, committed to following the example that Jesus gave us in his life. Praise God indeed for these shining lights.

I have been challenged recently to reflect on the nature of this commitment to show God's love to the vulnerable of this world. I am left wondering if the real nature of this commitment is a deep cost. Am I prepared to really pay the cost? I think to answer this question we have to dig deep inside ourselves.

It's easy to be busy, displaying lots of energy. Verse 6 of today's passage calls us to give generously. Real generosity has a cost, yes in terms of sacrifice, in terms of our time and energy, but also in terms of giving of ourselves emotionally and spiritually. Are we truly driven by a deep desire to connect with the people around us at an emotional and spiritual level, not just at an abstract and theoretical level but day by day with the people we meet each day? What might this look like for you?

There are many different reasons why we might put up barriers that prevent us giving of ourselves in this way. It can be messy, it can leave us vulnerable to being hurt. Perhaps you can think of, or discuss, what barriers (or costs) you might face?

I believe God is longing for us to pay this cost, to give generously of ourselves at a deep emotional and spiritual level. Why? Well it shows thanksgiving to God (v11, 12), it helps others see God at work (v13), it gives us the opportunity to 'abound in every good work' (v8). Scared or nervous about this? Don't be! Verses 10 and 11 show God's promise to us to supply all that we need to give in these ways. As we give out emotionally, spiritually, physically, materially – God is already pouring in more and more, more than we can ever need or even give away again. What a glorious promise.

As I read this passage, and perhaps you'd like to do so again, I come away with a feeling of joy. God loves it when we give deeply and generously of ourselves, he delights in it and us, and blesses us so richly with his joy. Let's hold onto that joy ... and keep on giving as a testimony to the grace God has given us (v14). Thank you Lord for your indescribable gift (v15). Amen.



Psalm 28

Of David.

¹To you, LORD, I call;
you are my Rock,
do not turn a deaf ear to me.
For if you remain silent,
I will be like those who go down to the pit.

²Hear my cry for mercy
as I call to you for help,
as I lift up my hands
toward your Most Holy Place.

³Do not drag me away with the wicked,
with those who do evil,
who speak cordially with their neighbors
but harbor malice in their hearts.

⁴Repay them for their deeds
and for their evil work;
repay them for what their hands have done
and bring back on them what they deserve.

⁵Because they have no regard for the deeds of the LORD
and what his hands have done,
he will tear them down
and never build them up again.

⁶Praise be to the LORD,
for he has heard my cry for mercy.

⁷The LORD is my strength and my shield;
my heart trusts in him, and he helps me.
My heart leaps for joy,
and with my song I praise him.

⁸The LORD is the strength of his people,
a fortress of salvation for his anointed one.

⁹Save your people and bless your inheritance;
be their shepherd and carry them forever.



Psalm 29

A psalm of David.

- ¹ Ascribe to the LORD, you heavenly beings,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength.
- ² Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name;
worship the LORD in the splendor of his holiness.
- ³ The voice of the LORD is over the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the LORD thunders over the mighty waters.
- ⁴ The voice of the LORD is powerful;
the voice of the LORD is majestic.
- ⁵ The voice of the LORD breaks the cedars;
the LORD breaks in pieces the cedars of Lebanon.
- ⁶ He makes Lebanon leap like a calf,
Sirion like a young wild ox.
- ⁷ The voice of the LORD strikes
with flashes of lightning.
- ⁸ The voice of the LORD shakes the desert;
the LORD shakes the Desert of Kadesh.
- ⁹ The voice of the LORD twists the oaks
and strips the forests bare.
And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"
- ¹⁰ The LORD sits enthroned over the flood;
the LORD is enthroned as King forever.
- ¹¹ The LORD gives strength to his people;
the LORD blesses his people with peace.



Hearing from God – 6.

A Lamp Under a Basket

Mark 4:21-25 ²¹ And he said to them, “Is a lamp brought in to be put under a basket, or under a bed, and not on a stand? ²² For nothing is hidden except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret except to come to light. ²³ If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear.” ²⁴ And he said to them, “Pay attention to what you hear: with the measure you use, it will be measured to you, and still more will be added to you. ²⁵ For to the one who has, more will be given, and from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away.” *ESV*

It seems such an obvious choice. Of course we will not put the lamp under the bed. But it often do not come naturally to us as Christians to shine. On a personal level but also on a institutional level we are called to shine. It is in the purpose and design of the lamp to shine as much as possible. And the same with that which the Lord invests in us when we come to Faith in Jesus. It is of course not us shining, but Jesus shining through us. And as with the lamp, we need to keep the oil filled and flowing through our personal walk with Gods Spirit and Word.

So our personal walk with God and our shining seems very intentional purposes for us that we need to promote, or that we need to let God accomplish through us.

What is it that we need to Hear and that we need to give careful attention to ?

Our walk with God and our engagement with the world in darkness is neither static nor automatic. We need a humble and listening heart for usually the engagement starts with us before it shines outside. The lamp wick needs cutting and cleaning... But there seems to be a multiplier effect included related to the degree of engagement we permit on ourselves and from ourselves.

Are we intentional enough about our shining, and are we using the correct tools to measure and apply Gods engagement priorities for us?

Arie de Kruijff - country leader and TLM Mozambique



Hearing from God – 7. Everything we have for your Kingdom's cause

Your Kingdom come. Your will be done. with a focus on the next part "As it is in heaven" The word RUACH was strongly felt. The breath of the Holy Spirit, bringing life wherever we take it. God is calling us to be the wellhead. The source of a well or stream, a principal source, a fountain head.

Jeremiah 29 v 11-13 "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart." Isaiah 43 v 19 " See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up, do you not perceive it. I am making a way in the desert and streams in the wasteland." Ezekiel 47, the Living water flowing from the temple. The Holy Spirit bring life to whoever He touches. Bringing life and healing

A sense that ZERO LEPROSY is God's dream.... As some staff connected in over the internet and the team was quiet they said that they felt that they could sense a distant sound of water bubbling over the stones. Before the river comes the rain and I'm going to rain down on you

You are my church, and God works through his church. The sense here was that the church refers not to any building but people of God

One of our team shared a story of holding a young child in church the previous week and whilst held against her chest the child was singing. Amongst all the surrounding noise only she could here the child singing the song 10,000 reasons, "Bless the Lord all my soul." The key here is that if we stay close to God, nestle into his embrace, we will hear His song

Unity - When the tide goes out pools of water are isolated. When the tide come in again the pools are joined together. The tide is God and we need to invite the tide to come in, and we will be united in him. This followed a previous picture shared with me prior to the meeting shared next.

God gave a member of the team a picture of a sea wall, and the spring tide coming in. The sea is the powerful love of God and is determined and incredibly strong - pounding day after day, night after night against the sea wall. It never gives up. (Your live never fades, it never gives up)

Gradually the sea wall has begun to give way. It is crumbling and cracked. The sea wall is our defence. We fear the damage the huge waves will do to the land. The sea will surge in, flooding the land - BUT this won't destroy the land, it will bring life. The waters will make a beautiful wetland where rare wild flowers and wildlife flourishes - wading birds, butterflies, rare species... It will be bursting with life. But God does not break into places where we keep Him at bay. He will not invade against our will. It is up to us whether we are willing to demolish the sea wall. *Galatians 6 v 9 "So. let's not get tired of doing what is good. At just the right time we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't give up" Hebrews 12 "Therefore, since we are surrounded by a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. LET US FIX OUR EYES ON JESUS, THE AUTHOR AND PERFECTOR OF OUR FAITH, who for the joy set before Him endured the cross, scorning it's shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

We sensed that more than ever Jesus must be the cornerstone, at the centre of all we do. We are the body, but JESUS is the head. He is what makes The Leprosy Mission unique.

“Anyone who is thirsty may come to me! Anyone who believes in me may come and drink! For the scriptures declare, Rivers of Living water will flow from His heart.”

Peter Waddup – country leader. Words received at TLM England and Wales whilst waiting on God during the 5 year strategy prayer and fasting day



TIME TO BEGIN

“Repent. And believe the Good News”-Mark 1: 14-20 Sammy believes he should be a soul winner for Christ. In the parish Bible class he has learnt how to share his faith with people and lead them to Christ. But he has never done it. Sammy prays to God to give him a sign so that he would know exactly when to start. One day he was traveling in the subway to meet his Bible study friends. He has his Bible in his handbag. A young man about his own age enters the train and sits next to him. He wears a T-shirt with the slogan, “WHO HAS THE MOST TOYS WINS.” Sammy bends his head and says a little prayer, “Lord give me a sign when to start.” The young man’s cell phone rings. His friend wants him to come and pick him up. After arguing with his friend awhile, he says, “Alright I will come to the church and pick you up, but I will not enter the church. You will find me at the parking lot,” and hangs up. Sammy bends his head a second time and prays, “Lord, I ‘m still waiting for the sign!” Finally the young man turns to Sammy and says, “You know I got this weird who skips work on Sundays to go to church. I don’t get it.” Sammy smiles, bends down his head once again and says, “Lord, the sign, the sign!” End of story.

This message reflects on Jesus beginning his public work. After living a private life for more than thirty years, how did Jesus know exactly when to end the hidden life and begin his public work? Our first thoughts are to suppose that, of course, God his father spoke to him and communicated to him exactly when to begin. He got a special green light from God. But this reflection suggests that Jesus probably arrived at this decision the way most people do, that is, by inferring from the things happening in their lives what God is trying to say to them. *“When Jesus heard that John has been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea.” (Matt 4: 12-13).* Jesus heard that John has been arrested gave him an insight that the renewal movement that John started would be needing a new leader. He looks around and finds that none is more suited to assume leadership of the movement than he himself. That’ it. That is all the sign he needs. He says farewell to his family and moves on to meet the challenges of his public calling. Unlike Sammy in our story, Jesus does not sit there and wait for a special supernatural sign from above. Rather, Jesus learns to read the “signs of the times,” that is, to infer from the goings-on in the world around him what God might be saying of him.

What needs do we see in the world around us? Do you, for example see the need for more messengers of God’s love and peace in our world today? What can you personally do about it, given the personal circumstances of your life? When are you actually going to start doing something about it, or are you like Sammy, waiting for a special sign from God? Well, that sign may never come. We, like Jesus, must learn to read the “signs of the times” in which we live.

Note that Jesus did not start preaching immediately. If he had started preaching right away from his home town in Nazareth, they would probably have silenced him there and then. The first thing he does was to look for a location and community that would support his vocation. He finds it in Capernaum where he quickly attracts a group of friends and his disciples. Even though he is the son of God, Jesus does not work like a lone ranger. He shares his vision and ministry with people. That is why, even though he was stopped and killed just three years after, they could not stop his work and his vision for a new world of sisters and brothers. In Jesus we see not only what it means to do God’s work but also how to do God’s work. - Let us ask God today to give us the wisdom to read the “signs” of our own times so that we can correctly infer from events in the world around us what Demands God is making of us, as individuals and as a church.

And let us ask for the courage to start doing it, not just praying about it.

Moses Onoh, MD, is a former Country Leader of TLM Nigeria, currently the Regional Team Leader, S-W Nigeria, KNCV Tuberculosis Foundation, with HQ in Netherland. KNCV leads an international consortium in the implementation of USAID funded “Challenge Tuberculosis” Project in over twelve countries including Nigeria.



The courage to board the bus

In 1982, Elizabeth and I were assigned to work in a country which had strict laws forbidding foreign ownership of properties and businesses.

As it goes with human nature, people were ingenious when it came to finding ways to skirt these restrictions. The most popular solution was to get a local citizen to act as a “front” for the business and this was especially true of the transport sector, where most bus companies were owned by non-residents.

This practice resulted in some unusual names being plastered on the buses: two of the names I remember are “Jealous Down” and “Talk yours”, which meant something like “Yes, I know what you’re thinking, ‘Who gave me the money to buy this bus and who is the real owner?’, but don’t be jealous of my success, mind your own business.”

However, it’s the banner on the bus that brought people from the town to the hospital where I worked that left me feeling uneasy.

It rejoiced under the name of “Rest in Peace.”

Just how this bus came to serve the hospital, I never did find out, but it seemed a most unfortunate choice. Even the “Hope does not kill” bus [true story] would have seemed a more palatable option.

Given the suicidal mis-behaviour on the roads, I, as a first language English speaker, found the phrase “Rest in Peace” somewhat ominous. Is that the bus I’d want to ride on my way to have my appendix fixed ... would you buy a return ticket?

Getting around safely is often one of the toughest aspects of our work. Many of us will have flown, ridden and sailed in craft and vehicles which have caused us some disquiet. Perhaps like Paul, you could also say something like: “Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea.”

What kept Paul going when he was faced with boarding the “Rest in Peace” bus service?

There are several possible answers to that question. One that comes to mind is found in *1 Corinthians 9: 26-27*: *“So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.”*

Paul had a deep sense of purpose and a clear goal. Dodgy boats weren’t about to stop him. We’re not all the same. Some of us are very goal driven and are willing to take risks to get there. Others prefer order and the established way of doing things and will find it hard to set foot on the “Rest in Peace” bus. Maybe these personality differences underlie the conflict we read about in Acts 15:39. It is important, though that we understand our purpose. Some people discover their purpose early in life and have no difficulty focusing on it for years to come. For others, a sense of purpose seems elusive.

Wherever you find yourself on this spectrum, may I ask you to pause and consider Proverbs 20:5?

“The purposes of a person’s heart are deep waters, but one who has insight draws them out”

Ask the Lord for that insight and ask him too for the courage that goes with understanding your purpose – after all, someday you too may be asked to board the “Rest in Peace” bus!

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.



'a white stone'

Revelation 2:12-17 *"To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."* (v.17)

In 2005 I was privileged to be at TLM's International Assembly at An Grianán on the shores of the Irish Sea, and to share a devotional time later with Country Leaders in Dublin. At that time the group was asked, on coming into the chapel, to collect a black stone each, and reflect on the burdens and 'blackness' that we bear in our work and personal lives, through our human weakness and spiritual frailty, or through the circumstances and threats around us.

In His letter to the church at Pergamum, the risen Lord expresses His deep understanding of the 'blackness' of the secular and pagan context in which the little church was surviving. Yet they did not renounce their faith in Him, even when threatened with persecution and death. The Lord's awareness is expressed in tender terms, like the empathic friend whose understanding doesn't need many words, it is a heartfelt, *"I know"*.

Yet like that lovingly critical friend, our Lord knows our faults and failures too. In Pergamum there was false teaching and moral temptation, compromise and confusion. This is also our context, to different degrees and in different ways; -you face them in your TLM location, in the society and culture and religious landscape around you. And these are amongst the temptations we face. Our loving Lord understands; He *knows*, -He has been there; He *is* there. *"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to feel sympathy for our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin."* (Hebrews 4:15) So He says to this little fellowship two things which cover our situation too, and bring comfort: *"Repent therefore! Otherwise, I will soon come to you and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth."* The powers of wrong in the God-averse cultures all around are stronger than I am; but He is stronger than they are! I need to repent of my part in any giving-in to their temptation (by failing or fearing); but ultimately He will -He *has*- come to fight for me... and is victorious.

So in our devotions on that occasion in Ireland years ago, we were then invited, when we were ready, to come to the centre of the room and exchange our black stone for a white one, to take away and keep. It was a simple but powerful symbol.

To be victorious (v.17) is to accept the Lord's victory, to know the loving forgiveness of a fully-understanding Divine Friend; to know the sustenance ("*hidden manna*") of spiritual enemies defeated, threats made nothing. And then comes the white stone; the gift of purity in a life made clean by Christ, protected, inviolable... and on it my new name! Well, I hope and pray that the manna can be for now... the stone is to await in confident hope; the new name is to wonder at. One day I'll know!

But it is all ours *-now and not yet-* through the victory found in resting in the Victorious One.
God bless you with encouragement in that hope. David

David Beazley began involvement with The Leprosy Mission in 1992 when he came as Minister to a Church near the International Office in Brentford. He acted as an informal 'chaplain' to the Office, and served on the International General Council for some years. At the same time he became a member of TLM England and Wales Board, serving as Chairman for six years and on various committees. He now pastors a Church in South-West England part time, freeing time for TLM as a volunteer speaker and continuing on the E&W Board. He chaired the Spiritual Ministry MAWG, and is also able to serve TLMI by leading retreat days and other such things as opportunity allows.



Psalm 30

A psalm. A song. For the dedication of the temple. Of David.

¹ I will exalt you, LORD,
for you lifted me out of the depths
and did not let my enemies gloat over me.

² LORD my God, I called to you for help,
and you healed me.

³ You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of the dead;
you spared me from going down to the pit.

⁴ Sing the praises of the LORD, you his faithful people;
praise his holy name.

⁵ For his anger lasts only a moment,
but his favor lasts a lifetime;
weeping may stay for the night,
but rejoicing comes in the morning.

⁶ When I felt secure, I said,
“I will never be shaken.”

⁷ LORD, when you favored me,
you made my royal mountain stand firm;
but when you hid your face,
I was dismayed.

⁸ To you, LORD, I called;
to the Lord I cried for mercy:

⁹ “What is gained if I am silenced,
if I go down to the pit?

Will the dust praise you?

Will it proclaim your faithfulness?

¹⁰ Hear, LORD, and be merciful to me;
LORD, be my help.”

¹¹ You turned my wailing into dancing;
you removed my sackcloth and clothed me with joy,
¹² that my heart may sing your praises and not be silent.
LORD my God, I will praise you forever.



Psalm 31

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

- ¹ In you, LORD, I have taken refuge;
let me never be put to shame;
deliver me in your righteousness.
- ² Turn your ear to me,
come quickly to my rescue;
be my rock of refuge,
a strong fortress to save me.
- ³ Since you are my rock and my fortress,
for the sake of your name lead and guide me.
- ⁴ Keep me free from the trap that is set for me,
for you are my refuge.
- ⁵ Into your hands I commit my spirit;
deliver me, LORD, my faithful God.
- ⁶ I hate those who cling to worthless idols;
as for me, I trust in the LORD.
- ⁷ I will be glad and rejoice in your love,
for you saw my affliction
and knew the anguish of my soul.
- ⁸ You have not given me into the hands of the enemy
but have set my feet in a spacious place.
- ⁹ Be merciful to me, LORD, for I am in distress;
my eyes grow weak with sorrow,
my soul and body with grief.
- ¹⁰ My life is consumed by anguish
and my years by groaning;
my strength fails because of my affliction,
and my bones grow weak.
- ¹¹ Because of all my enemies,
I am the utter contempt of my neighbors
and an object of dread to my closest friends—
those who see me on the street flee from me.
- ¹² I am forgotten as though I were dead;
I have become like broken pottery.
- ¹³ For I hear many whispering,
“Terror on every side!”
They conspire against me
and plot to take my life.
- ¹⁴ But I trust in you, LORD;
I say, “You are my God.”

¹⁵ My times are in your hands;
deliver me from the hands of my enemies,
from those who pursue me.

¹⁶ Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your unfailing love.

¹⁷ Let me not be put to shame, LORD,
for I have cried out to you;
but let the wicked be put to shame
and be silent in the realm of the dead.

¹⁸ Let their lying lips be silenced,
for with pride and contempt
they speak arrogantly against the righteous.

¹⁹ How abundant are the good things
that you have stored up for those who fear you,
that you bestow in the sight of all,
on those who take refuge in you.

²⁰ In the shelter of your presence you hide them
from all human intrigues;
you keep them safe in your dwelling
from accusing tongues.

²¹ Praise be to the LORD,
for he showed me the wonders of his love
when I was in a city under siege.

²² In my alarm I said,
“I am cut off from your sight!”
Yet you heard my cry for mercy
when I called to you for help.

²³ Love the LORD, all his faithful people!
The LORD preserves those who are true to him,
but the proud he pays back in full.

²⁴ Be strong and take heart,
all you who hope in the LORD.



The Bank Note

Before you settle down to devotions, go and find a bank note. Take a look at it. How much is it worth? If you wanted to redeem the value of the note, how would you go about it?

A bank note is a promise. By visiting the country's central bank, you would receive the promised amount of the notes value. For myself, that would involve a trip to the Bank of England.

Now, crumple the note up in your hand. Throw it on to the floor. Stand on it.

How much the note is worth now?

Why has its value not changed?

Often, people with leprosy are treated as though they are of no value at all. Because their bodies bear the marks of leprosy, people reject them, exclude them, and leave them feeling worthless.

In God's eyes, they are worth just as much as anyone else in the world. We know the value God places on each one of us when we read in *John 3:16 that God loved the world so much, he sent his son Jesus to earth so he could rescue us.* This is the immeasurable value that God places on you, on me, on our family, our work colleagues, our friends, and on those disabled and rejected because of leprosy.

Just as the bank note keeps its value in the eyes of the Bank no matter how badly we might treat it, so to do people with leprosy keep their value in the eyes of God, no matter how badly treated they might be.

Our work in The Leprosy Mission is driven by a desire to demonstrate and share the love and compassion of God with leprosy affected people who are left lost, lonely, hurting and isolated as a result of the disease.

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Afterthought

I have used this illustration as I've spoken to groups both young and old to communicate our message with supporters in Northern Ireland. As you share the vision of TLM with others, you might find the bank note to be a useful way to communicate the love, compassion and God given value for those with leprosy which lie at the core of all that we do.



Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

James Barnett	1 April		2 Kings 5,1-27	16 April
Allan Ekstedt	17 April		Psalm 24	7 April
Arie de Kruijff Dr –team Mozambique	23 April		Psalm 25	8 April
Bunmi Oluloto – team Niger	19 April		Psalm 26	14 April
Christine Osman	12 April		Psalm 27	15 April
David Beazley	27 April		Psalm 28	21 April
David, King of Israel	7,8,14,15,21,22,28,29 April		Psalm 29	22 April
Kathleen Gavin-Finlay	5 ,6 April		Psalm 30	28 April
Louis Palluku Sabuni Dr – team DR Congo	16 April		Psalm 31	29 April
Moses Onoh Dr	25 April		Psalm 46,5	19 April
Otto Kingsley	4 April		Psalm 46,10	12 April
Pam Lake - team Australia	18 April		Psalm 121,8	10 April
Pete Garratt	20 April		Proverbs 3,5 f	18 April
Peter Hilton	30 April		Jeremiah 29,11-13	24 April
Peter Laubscher	26 April		Matthew 5,4	11 April
Peter Waddup – team England and Wales	24 April		Mark 1,14-20	25 April
Raju PLN Dr	3, 9 April		Mark 4,21-25	23 April
Trevor Durston	10, 11 April		Mark 8,31-38	5, 6 April
Veronica Hewins	13 April		John 3,16	30 April
			John 20,19-30	1 April
			John 20,27-29	9 April
			1 Cor 9,26-27	26 April
			2 Cor 9,6-15	20 April
			1 Peter 2,9	13 April
			Rev 2,12-17	27 April

The Bridge - TLM Daily Devotions

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