



TLM Daily Devotions

December 2017





Who wait for Him

Isaiah 64:4

We read in this verse that God is a God Who works for those who wait for Him. In the Bible there is so much about waiting on God and waiting for Him, and it is not always an easy thing to do.

When I first went to Bhutan, God put these words on my heart, and I felt it was His promise to work in the lives and hearts of people there. It was a matter of waiting and believing He would do what He promised. Over the years we saw this happen with people healed and lives changed, although it sometimes seemed a slow process, but God is always faithful. When you watch God at work in the lives of people, it feels as if you are standing on holy ground.

We do a lot of waiting during our lives. Waiting in queues - something we British are known for! We wait for buses, trains, planes, for workmen to arrive, for appointments at doctors surgeries and hospitals. It makes many people very impatient. Being quite a lazy character, and because I like people watching, I don't mind waiting too much!

A few weeks ago Joyce and I spent many hours over a few days at the doctors surgery and the hospital. She had fallen in the garden and injured her arm which needed some expert care. We certainly had major waits for minor injuries!

Waiting for God is different He works in His own time which is not the same as ours! We sometimes think He is not listening but then become aware that He is at work. Waiting for God and waiting on Him is a discipline. We want to hear what He wants to tell us, or how He wants to guide us, or how He wants to direct our prayers. Then when I have started waiting, I get bombarded by thoughts that are completely irrelevant. The only way I find to overcome this is by meditating on Gods word. Psalm 1: 1-3 tells us the godly person meditates on God's law day and night. Psalm 119:130 says *the entrance of your Word gives light..*

We all need light for the way, and as we follow the Light of the world we need not fear any darkness.

Mollie Clark, worked in India, Bhutan and the International Office.



Privilege...

To be translated onto spirituality!

"I have often said to the orchestra, especially to the younger players,
'Do your best, and love what you are doing, because you are allowed to do this thing.'
By this I mean, they can do what millions of people cannot do.
Many people cannot think of playing music or listening to it until six o'clock in the evening.
To be involved professionally in a thing as creative as this
is a great **privilege**
and we have a duty to make it in such a way
that we can help bring pleasure and a sense of fulfillment
to those who are not so fortunate."

Herbert von Karajan – Austrian, 1908-1989, one of the greatest conductors of the 20th century. Principal of the Berlin Philharmonic for 35 years,



'Born in the City of David'.

Coming from all corners of the global journey
The queue edges forward in a quest for light
In a darkness quelled only by energy-savers
Dangling baubles and chandeliers under scaffolding
That clads a building under the crane's renovation
With a ring-a-ring of roses towards the altar
Adorned by the holy family that is not yet one
In the waiting game of an over-crowded town
Making the most of expectant visitors
Whose existence needs to be registered
In a land occupied by the unwanted
Waiting for someone who'll make life better
Yet rejecting the one bathed in frankincense
Because he wasn't quite who we thought he was.

Paul du Plessis - After a lifetime of service with The Salvation Army, South African born Paul and his wife, Margaret, have retired in the UK. Paul has had a number of honorary roles with TLM dating back to his work at TLM Field Representative for Zambia in the 1970s when based at Chikankata Hospital

Blessed Advent!



Advent

Advent is.... *The arrival of a notable person or object, The dawn of something new.*

In the UK, children are far better at practicing Advent than adults. They have Advent calendars, and from December 1st, open them up eagerly each morning, often finding a chocolate inside! During Advent, many children look forward to the coming of Santa, and the promise of countless wonderful gifts on Christmas day. For these children, December 25th is one of the most highly anticipated days of their year.

I wonder if you can relate to a child's experience of Advent and the countdown to Christmas? Is there something in your life that you are so excited about, and just can't wait for it to happen?

Rate the following things from 1 – 3 on a scale of eager anticipation...with 1 as 'not excited at all', 2 as 'looking forward to it' and 3 as 'can't wait for it to happen!'

How would you feel if tomorrow you were:

- getting a new car
- going on holiday for three weeks
- going out for dinner with friends
- babysitting your nephew/niece
- the parcel you ordered is due to arrive
- going for a jog
- having your hair cut
- going Christmas shopping

How did you do – did you find at least one thing that you would love to do? Did you see some things that you really don't get excited about doing?

For me, many of these things would not be of interest, but the thought of going a jog, getting a book I've ordered in the post, then heading off on a 3 week holiday would make tomorrow a day to eagerly anticipate!

The season of Advent is a time of waiting, and it ends of course with Christmas. Christmas is a shortened form of the original phrase 'Christ's Mass', a day celebrated first in 1038 by marking the coming of Jesus to earth through the breaking of bread and the sharing of wine in the act of Holy Communion.

It's significant that in remembering Christ's birth, the church of 1000 years ago chose to mark it by remembering Christ's death. We, too, look at Christ's coming through the prism of Christ's death and resurrection. We know a few more chapters of the book, which give greater meaning to the story of Jesus' Advent to earth. But we are still waiting, still watching for the final chapter of the story: the return of Jesus, the final judgement, and the full establishment of God's kingdom on earth.

Something else eagerly anticipated and longed for within The Leprosy Mission is the end of leprosy. We have come a long way, many chapters of the story have been told, yet there is still some way to go, and some chapters to be written. Our hope and dream is that one day, not too far from now, within our lifetime, we will see an end to this dreaded disease.

As we work towards this eagerly anticipated goal, many small advents are happening, many people affected by leprosy are finding a new dawn of hope in their lives as they receive cure and care from TLM. Let us anticipate and experience each of these advents with joy and thankfulness to God.

Let us pray too for the coming of the day when we will experience the advent of a new era, in which leprosy is defeated once and for all!

Peter Hilton, Church and School Engagement Officer, TLM Northern Ireland



Have a God Day

May the LORD who created the heavens and the earth give you his blessing. Psalm 115:15 (CEV)

Sometimes I think my phone is smarter than me! It can calculate sums, look up maps, give me a weather report and tell me what time a film is showing at the cinema. And when it comes to texting it can often predict exactly which word I want to use. Clever eh?

The only trouble is that sometimes it predicts entirely the wrong word. Rather like the lady who sent her husband a birthday text...

*Happy birthday to you
Happy birthday to you
Happy Birthday dead husband
Happy birthday to you.*

'Thanks', he replied. 'I really hope you meant dear!'
Ahhhh.

Then there's the mum who texted her daughter 'Exams OK?' only to receive the surprising answer 'Yep - no pancake attacks' Followed a moment later by 'Oops sorry, PANIC attacks. No panic attacks'

I decided to finish a text the other day with the words *Have a good day*. But for some obscure reason my phone sent *Have a God day*. When I stop to think about it, I rather like that greeting.

*'May you have a God day filled with his love and blessings.
May you enjoy the beauty of his creation and feel his presence in your life today.'*

Yes that works for me. Some mistakes are worth embracing. Have a God day.

Lord, thank you for 'God days' when we feel your presence, enjoy your creation and know your love intimately. May we have many, many days just like that.



Image of God

Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness... So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them." Genesis 1:26, 27

In a previous devotion I quoted Lois Tverberg's book, 'Walking in the Dust of Rabbi Jesus'. Here's an extract from the final chapter of that book.

'An amusing story was told about a famous second-century teacher, Rabbi Eleazar. One day, as his donkey ambled down the river path on its leisurely trip home from a study session, the rabbi's thoughts lingered back to the profound truths he had unearthed with his fellow *haverim* ("study partners"). He was still basking in the glow of victory, revelling in how he had pulled together three obscure passages to win a heated debate. Only his donkey heard his soft chuckles of self-congratulation.

Or so he thought. As he came around the bend, he almost collided with a bedraggled peasant, an exceedingly ugly man. The homely man's tattered rags seemed almost too elegant for his malformed face, with bulbous eyes and nose to match.

Recognising the highly esteemed sage, the poor farmer bowed low with the traditional greeting, "Peace be upon you, rabbi!" But Eleazar's disgust burst out before he could stop himself. "*Raca!* How ugly you are! Is everyone in your village as ugly as you?"

"I don't know," the peasant replied. "But go and tell the craftsman who made me, 'How ugly is the vessel that you have made.'" Remorse overwhelmed the rabbi. From his donkey he fell to the ground and prostrated himself before the man. "I submit myself to you, forgive me!"

In this classic tale, called "The Rabbi and the Exceedingly Ugly Man," a great scholar is humbled by a simple man's reply to his insult. The rabbi had forgotten that God himself was the misshapen man's creator. To call the man ugly was to suggest that God lacked artistic talent. The peasant had made a profound point – that humans are God's creative work, that we are designed by him. Every human being should be treated as a special creation of God, because all are precious to him.

Human beings are not just clay blobs thrown randomly on the pottery wheel to look like whatever they will. They are fashioned "in God's image." Each person is the Master's own self-portrait in physical form.

The New Testament writers said similar things. James tells us, "*With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness" – his very image (James 3:9)*. How impossibly ironic it is to proclaim God's greatness in one breath, and then to turn around and insult one of his own precious creations, his self-portraits.'

May we be people who actively choose to see the image of God in all people – those we love **and** those we find it hard to love.

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 Bible tells us when to be silent

So often 'we put our foot into it'.....

Eph.4:29-32 *"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear. And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by Whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamour and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you."*

1) Be silent – IN THE HEAT OF ANGER! *Prov.14:7 – "Leave the presence of a fool, for there you do not meet words of knowledge."*

2) Be silent – WHEN YOU DON'T HAVE ALL THE FACTS!

Prov.18:13 – "If one gives an answer before one hears, it is his folly and shame."

3) Be silent – WHEN YOU HAVN'T VERIFIED THE STORY!

Deut.17:6 – "On the evidence of two witnesses or three witnesses"

4) Be silent – WHEN YOUR WORDS WILL OFFEND A WEAKER PERSON!

1 Cor.8:11 – "And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother from whom Christ died."

5) Be silent – WHEN IT'S TIME TO LISTEN!

Prov.13:1 – "A wise son hears his father's instruction, but a scoffer does not listen to rebuke."

6) Be silent – WHEN YOU'RE TEMPTED TO MAKE LIGHT OF HOLY THINGS!

Eccles.5:2 – "Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be hasty. To utter a word before God, for God is in Heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few."

7) Be silent – WHEN YOU'RE TEMPTED TO JOKE ABOUT SIN!

Prov.14:9 – "Fools mock at the guilt offering, but the upright glory in righteousness."

8) Be silent – IF YOU WOULD BE ASHAMED OF YOUR WORDS LATER!

Prov.8:8 – "All the words of my mouth are righteous; there is nothing crooked or twisted in them."

9) Be silent – IF YOUR WORDS WOULD CONVEY THE WRONG IMPRESSION!

Prov.17:27 – "Whoever restrains his words has knowledge, and he who has a cool spirit is a man of understanding."

10) Be silent – IF THE ISSUE IS NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS!

Prov.14:10 – "The heart knows its own bitterness, and no stranger shares its joy."

11) Be silent – WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED TO TELL AN OUTRIGHT LIE!

Prov.4:24 – "Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you."

12) Be silent – IF YOUR WORDS WILL DAMAGE SOMEONE'S REPUTATION!

Prov.16:27 – "A worthless man plots evil; his speech is like a scorching fire."

13) Be silent – IF YOUR WORDS WILL DAMAGE A FRIENDSHIP!

Prov.16:28 – “A dishonest man spreads strife, and a whisperer separates close friends.”

14) Be silent – WHEN YOU ARE FEELING CRITICAL/CYNICAL!

James 3:9 – “With the tongue we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in His image.”

15) Be silent – IF YOU CANNOT SAY IT WITHOUT ‘LOOSING IT’!

Prov.25:28 – “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.”

16) Be silent – IF YOUR WORDS WILL BE A POOR REFLECTION OF YOUR LORD, YOUR CHURCH, YOUR FAMILY, etc.

1Pet.2:21-23-“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in His steps. He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in His mouth. When He was reviled, He did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but continued entrusting Himself to Him Who judges justly.”

17) Be silent – IF YOU HAVE TO EAT YOUR WORDS LATER!

Prov.18:21 – “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”

18) Be silent – IF YOU HAVE ALREADY SAID IT ONCE!

Prov.19:13 – “...a wife’s quarrelling is a continual dripping of rain.”

19) Be silent – WHEN YOU ARE TEMPTED TO FLATTER A WICKED PERSON!

Prov.24:24-“Whoever says to the wicked, ‘You’re right,’ will be cursed by many.”

20) Be silent – WHEN YOU’RE SUPPOSED TO BE WORKING!!!.....

Prov.14:23 – “In toil there is profit, but mere talk tends to poverty.”

CONCLUSION: “Whoever guards his mouth and tongue, keeps his soul from many troubles.” (Prov.21:23) – Amen.

Otto Kingsley is the Cape Regional Director of TLM(SA), operating from Cape Town, RSA.



This is our story... 15. Part 1

...And your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it". Isaiah 30: 21

A quote to begin with, possibly from Abraham Lincoln. "I am satisfied that when the Almighty wants me to do or not to do any particular thing, He finds a way of letting me know".

The following is our story. Really, it should be called 'This is God's Story', because it's all about Him, not us. This is His story about how He introduced Peter and me to The Leprosy Mission, which in those days was The Mission to Lepers. It began in 1962, a few weeks after our second baby was born. God spoke to me, and in a short, simple statement He said, "There's a job there for Peter to do". How did I know it was God's voice? Because 3 years previously He had spoken to us in the same way. This will need some explanation and a bit of background...

Peter and I both became Christians when we were 14 years old. We didn't know each other at that time, but later I joined the church he belonged to. We were baptized together when we were 19 and got engaged around that time. Peter had been deferred from the national call-up as he was an apprentice until the age of 21, studying orthopaedic appliances, and was due to be called for national service after that, so marriage was not really a subject we discussed. Just before he was 21 he had a medical examination, necessary before national service, but was considered unfit because of a knee injury caused when playing football. This meant he could now go straight into the work of an orthotist. During the years of Peter's apprenticeship he had to work in various departments learning different skills, and he was unexpectedly kept a long time learning about feet and shoes, mostly for deformed or diabetic feet. Even then God was preparing him for the specific work he would be called to.

Some days after this we attended an evangelistic meeting at church. The evangelist insisted that boys and girls, and men and women, sat on opposite sides in the church, saying it was very easy for young people to get distracted; so that particular evening we did not sit together. Just before the meeting started I sensed someone walking towards me from the back of the room, and then stop behind me. A voice said "It's time you got married". I was stunned. I felt immediately that it was God's voice, but my next thought was that it must be 'wishful thinking'. How could I be sure? In an instant I had a simple answer. I said to the Lord "If this is really You, would you put the same words into Peter's mouth and let him say them to me without me saying anything to him?" The meeting started, then afterwards Peter walked me back to my house. Halfway home he stopped suddenly, turned to face me and said "I think it's time we got married". The words he spoke were amazing, but so was the fact that my memory of the incident in the church had been completely erased from the time the Lord spoke until that moment. I told him what had happened and we were both thrilled that the Lord could speak to us like that. But as we talked about it we really didn't know how we should go about it. Peter had been an apprentice since school and earned virtually nothing. We told no-one, but kept on listening for anything else the Lord might tell us.

Peter and Barbara Hill, living in retirement in the West Midlands, UK. Joined the Leprosy Mission (Mission to Lepers) 1964 till 1976, at Oji River, Nigeria and then ALERT, Ethiopia. Later, 1999-2003 in Minna, Nigeria.



This is our story... 15. Part 2

...And your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it". Isaiah 30: 21

That happened in the April, and weeks went by. At the end of July we were at a Youth for Christ meeting in the city of Birmingham. Just before it began I was again aware of someone walking up and standing behind me. This time He said "I want you to get married as soon as possible". I didn't need the Lord to prove who He was this time, but I did say that I didn't feel it was my place to say those words to Peter, and that he needed to say them to me. Again, all memory of that conversation disappeared. We sat through the meeting and then got on the bus heading for home. We sat upstairs and talked about all sorts of things, but suddenly Peter stopped, turned to face me and said "I think we should get married as soon as possible". Wow, we were so excited. We got to my home and told my parents what the Lord had said, and then he went home and told his parents the same. The next day was Sunday, and we talked with an elder at church, stressing the "as soon as possible" bit. His advice was that a wedding could be arranged any time, but as it was now mid-summer and was what he called the 'wedding season', it would be difficult to find a place to hold the reception as everywhere would have been booked long ago. Monday morning I phoned many venues only to be told there was nothing available in the foreseeable future. But there was one. A hotel in town said if we didn't mind it being early they could do a wedding reception at 10.30 am - and the date was a bit less than 6 weeks away. This was booked immediately, and the wedding arranged for 9 am. In the middle of that time we had already arranged to go on holiday with Peter's parents which cut down considerably on preparation time. Having no idea where we would live, and announcing to get married in less than 6 weeks' time when we had been engaged for 18 months probably raised a few eyebrows. Nothing turned up regarding accommodation so we returned from honeymoon and stayed with Peter's parents and then lived with my parents until we finally got a small house to rent.

Now... three years later, and I was at a church meeting one evening, taken by a Mission to Lepers representative. He showed slides of the work being done in a leprosy settlement somewhere, and it was while a picture of a man making shoes for patients was on the screen that the 'Presence' suddenly walked up the aisle and stopped behind me. This time He said "There's a job there for Peter to do". When I got home and told him what the Lord had said, he was as speechless as I was. He was progressing really well in his job and we now had 2 small children, one 18 months and a new baby a few weeks old. We knew very little about missionary societies, except occasionally someone from the Mission to Lepers would come and show slides, and the church had L-shaped collecting boxes in the Sunday school. We talked to an elder at church about our experience and he suggested we tried fasting as well as prayer. We did this, but we already knew that God had spoken. We wrote to the Mission to Lepers explaining the situation and giving details of Peter's qualifications and skills and how the Lord was leading us. It was, therefore, quite a surprise when we received a reply to the effect that there were no openings for his type of work at that time, but thanking us for our interest, and in the meantime why not send for an Emmaus Bible Course to do some studying...

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This is our story... 15. Part 3

...And your ears will hear a word behind you, "This is the way, walk in it". Isaiah 30: 21

However, not too long after that we received another letter from them saying they had received a letter from Dr Stanley Browne who was working in Nigeria, in which he said he was looking for someone who could help with the problem of ulcerated feet, because it was becoming evident that keeping the feet ulcer-free could prevent eventual amputation. We were then asked to meet him in London, and it was his suggestion we should go to work in a leprosy hospital at Oji River, Eastern Nigeria. Peter was still working at this time, and during one of his clinics in Aberystwyth a patient who had a problem with his feet was sent in to see him, needing some special insoles. He was African, and when Peter asked him about the problem he replied that he didn't normally tell anyone, but said that he had had leprosy. When asked where he came from he said Nigeria, and when asked where he had been treated he said Oji River in the East.

We then spent some time at a missionary Bible College, and our family increased. In 1964 we set off by boat from Liverpool to Lagos with 3 small children, aged 3, 2, and 3 months. The Lord totally protected us there as we lived in a house with no screening on the windows or doors, no air conditioning, no fans. After 2 years we came home on leave but were not able to return as the Biafran war, which started around the time we left, was still raging. We were then asked to go to Ethiopia, to ALERT, which was just being set up in Addis Ababa and stayed there until 1976, when there was trouble there too, and we returned back to the UK. By this time our family had doubled, and we came back with 6 children. The Lord continued to bless us, enabling us to get a home and furnish it with all that was needed, in a miraculous way. For some years after this Peter worked for the orthopaedic company where he trained originally. Much later, in January 1999, when all our children had grown up, we had the privilege of working again in Nigeria, but this time in Minna, Niger State, where we worked for about 4 years. This time we enjoyed screening, fans and air conditioning, electricity permitting!

And what about me? The Lord also had his hand upon my life regarding what I would do in Africa. When I was 14 my friend and I thought we would like to do something different from all the academic subjects we were doing at school. We decided to learn shorthand and typing, just for fun, and we did this for 2 years each Saturday morning at the home of a lady who taught these subjects. After leaving school we both got jobs using the skills we had acquired. Arriving in Africa in 1964 I was kept very busy as many people needed someone to help with secretarial work. However, during the time we were living back in the UK, technology took a leap and the computer suddenly replaced the typewriter. Out of curiosity I enrolled at the local technical college to find out what computers actually did, and spent 2 very enjoyable years there. This was before we had any idea we would be going back to work in Nigeria for 4 years, where I was again able to be of help, using a computer instead of a typewriter!

We have wonderful memories of the times spent in Africa, and the many friends we still have there; and so many wonderful memories of how the Lord worked in our lives, and continues to do even to this day.

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Divinity of Jesus – Affirm or Deny

John 8:58-59 "Very truly I tell you," Jesus answered, "before Abraham was born, I am!" At this, they picked up stones to stone him, but Jesus hid himself, slipping away from the temple grounds.

This is a unique and singular statement by Jesus about His divinity and identity as Almighty God. It is a claim of the Creator and Sustainer. It is a statement of eternal existence. It is a claim to the deity of Jesus. It is a statement of self-revelation. It is the basis for all other "I am" statements of Jesus in John's Gospel. He is the same God who brought the Jews out of Egypt, now revealing himself in Jesus who is the Christ. Why did such a claim become offensive for the Pharisees?

John records a few significant actions of Jesus in the earlier chapters. At the wedding in Cana, though reluctant, Jesus heeded to Mary's faith in Him and turned water into the best wine. One can presume, there were many guests at that occasion. Word must have spread around of the miracle performer. To the Samaritan woman, Jesus promised the "living water". She declared Him as her Messiah, who the Jews were awaiting. The whole village came to worship Jesus. On a Sabbath day, Jesus healed a crippled by forgiving his sins. Only Yahweh can forgive sins and Sabbath was set apart to worship God, and not to work. According the Jewish leaders, Jesus went against the Mosaic Law.

Jesus has declared His 3-fold divinity. He gave a *divine promise* - eternal life. No more separation from the fellowship with God (John 3:16). He declared His *divine relationship* - I know God. He has personal relationship with God (John 8:55). He stated His *divine origin* - Eternal Spirit, "*I am*" (John 8:58). He is the reference point for the universe.

The practice of The Law became a hindrance for people to come to God in faith. The letter of The Law superseded spirit of The Law. The Law was meant to show the need for a savior (Romans 3:20). Law needed faith to fulfill it, which the Jews did not have (Romans 9:30-32). It had become ritualistic. The Law was made into legalism. As custodians of The Law, the Jewish leaders had controlling power over people. Jesus challenged their understanding of The Law, which was the source of their authority. Their relevance, position and power were challenged. Jealousy and insecurity entered their hearts and not humility. Their pride as descendants of Abraham was hurt by the claim that He who is now was there before Abraham. Self-righteousness blinded the eyes of the Jews. Their response was violent, to stone Jesus as he is a blasphemer.

What is my stand vis-à-vis Jesus? Do I accept His revelation as the Great "I am"? Do I reach out in faith and obedience for a relationship with Him or seek comfort in self-righteousness and religious legalism?

Knowing Jesus identity determines my own identity; I am a child of God in Christ Jesus. Jesus' identity is like the beacon that guides a ship into safety in the harbor. Accepting the divinity of Jesus makes me secure in who I am putting my faith in. Through legalistic religion Satan separates us from this identity. Law is a burden; but grace is a joy. Religion does not lead me to God; Relationship does.

For His glory



Advent Candles

I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.
John 8:12b (NIV)

The morning service had just begun. It was the third Sunday in Advent, and two of the children went forward and lit the Advent candles. From the pew behind me a little boy was keeping up a barrage of questions to granny. Finally, as the children went back to their seats, he asked loudly, “Who’s going to blow the candles out?”

I suppose his only experience of candles was on his birthday cake, when he’d been encouraged to blow them out in one big breath. That, he thought, was the only thing to do with candles.

The words in John’s gospel came to me: “The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not overcome it.”

Not for want of trying. It seems at times as though all the powers of the world are trying to put out the light Jesus brought, and that they’d think it was a birthday celebration if they succeeded. But weak though it seems, the candle flame of love flickers on, dispelling the darkness around it, ready to ignite new lights wherever there is faith and commitment.

Why should it be like that? Why is there such opposition? An alternative translation says “... but the darkness has not understood it.” The light looks like a threat. It frightens, shows up the things we’d rather have hidden. Disturbs us.

We don’t understand that the truth is different. That light promises life, freedom, and an end to fear. The irony is that we have to find the courage to affirm it before the fear can be dealt with. The courage to make a leap of faith through the darkness towards that candle flame of love. But is it really such a risk? It burns with all the power of God, and it’s been burning for a long time, in spite of all the huffing and puffing of the world.

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)

Taken from *Facing the Storm* by Eddie Askew



**Life is not so much about attaining perfection,
but rather about keeping direction!**

- 1) GOING THE WRONG DIRECTION! Gal.4:8 – “Formerly, when you did not know God, You were enslaved to those that by nature are NOT gods.”
- 2) CONSIDERING THE BEST DIRECTION! 1 Tim.4:8 – “While bodily training is of some value, Godliness is of value in every way, As it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”
- 3) CHOOSING THE RIGHT DIRECTION! (faith and repentance) James4:8 – “Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded.”
- 4) DAILY WALKING ALONG THE BEST DIRECTION! 1 Pet.4:8 – “Above all, keep loving one another earnestly, Since love covers a multitude of sins.”
- 5) DAILY KEEPING IN STEP ALONG THE BEST DIRECTION! 1 John4:8-“Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love.”
- 6) DAILY FEARING GOD ALONG THE BEST DIRECTION! Rev. 4:8 – “And the four living creatures, each of them with 6 wings, Are full of eyes all around and within, and day and night they never cease to say, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come!’ ”
- 7) DAILY RENEWING THE MIND ALONG THE BEST DIRECTION! Philip.4:8 – “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, Whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, If there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.”
- 8) DAILY KEEPING SHORT ACCOUNTS WITH GOD ALONG THE BEST DIRECTION!
Rom.4:8 - “Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”(Psalm 32)

CONCLUSION: Read Hymn : “LORD, speak to me, that I may speak....” - Amen.



The Kingdom of God as family – 1.

“Do you begrudge my generosity?” Matthew 20:1-16

Growing up in the large, traditional, farming family has its advantages. When the crop is ready for harvest, the whole family is out in the field working together. They do not work at the same pace. Dad and big brother would be in the field very early while little sister is still asleep. Mom and little sister would join them in the farm latter. You see, dad and big brother go to work without breakfast but little sister would not go anywhere without breakfast. When she finally arrives in the farm she is more interested in asking silly questions and distracting the workers than in the work itself. At the end of the day all go home happy together. Supper is prepared and served. Does anyone suggest that you eat as you have worked? Not at all! Often the same little sister who did the least work is pampered with the best food. Yet no one complains, no one is jealous, and everyone is happy.

In today's message we hear of a harvest in which some workers put in more work than others. When pay time comes, they are all treated equally and the early birds among them begin to complain and grumble. Why do the workers in the vineyard complain and grumble whereas the workers in the family farm do not? The answer is simple. One group of workers is made up of family members and the other of unrelated individuals drawn from the wider society. The norms of behavior, of contribution and reward, in a family are different from those in the wider society. The big question that the parable poses to us today is “Do we see ourselves as family with a common purpose or do we see ourselves as a bunch of individuals, each with their own agenda? We call ourselves brothers and sisters. Why then do we often see and treat one another as rivals and competitors?

For the early bird workers who ended up being reprimanded by the landowner it was all a business affair. Their working in the vineyard was preceded by a well spelt-out contract regarding their wages: a full day's work for a full day's pay. They latecomers were less legalistic in their approach. They took the job trusting in the landowner's word of honour. *“He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too, and whatever is right I will give you.’ So they went” (Matt 20:4)*. In fact, those employed in the sixth, ninth and eleventh hours were told nothing whatsoever about payment. *“He said to them, ‘Why do you stand here idle all day?’ They said to him, ‘Because no one has hired us.’ He said to them, ‘You go into the vineyard too’” (Matt 20: 6-7)*.

There is no employer-employee contract here. Everything is based on trust. The Johnny-come-lately workers approached the work with a family spirit. Who makes contracts before they can work in a family business?

Moses Onoh is the Country leader of TLM Nigeria.



The Kingdom of God as family – 2.

“Do you begrudge my generosity?” Matthew 20:1-16

Matthew probably addressed this parable to his fellow Jewish Christians. God called them a long time ago to build the kingdom of God. Now at an apparently late hour, God is calling the Gentiles to work with them in building up the same divine Kingdom. It would be wrong for the early-birds Jewish people to see the Johnny-come-lately Gentiles of deserving of a lower status than themselves *“who have borne the burden of the day and the scorching heat” (Matt 20:12)*. Probably the problem of Matthew’s Jewish audience was their difficulty in seeing that God was intent on building, in Christ, a kingdom where all peoples – Jewish and Gentiles – would be family.

The notion of the kingdom of God as family is central to understanding this parable. The kingdom of God is a family more than a society. A society is characterized by we-and-them, by rivalry and survival of the fittest. A family, on the other hand, is all we and no them. It is characterized by a spirit of co-operation rather than competition. If the latecomers were family members of the early birds, the early birds would have rejoiced with them at their good fortune rather than grumbling.

Today we are called upon to review our all too legalistic notion of the Kingdom of God and see it more as a family where we are happy to expect from everyone according to their means and give to each according to their need – as God our Father does.

Moses Onoh is the Country leader of TLM Nigeria.



Isaiah 40, 12-31

Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God.

² Speak tenderly to Jerusalem,
and proclaim to her
that her hard service has been completed,
that her sin has been paid for,
that she has received from the LORD's hand
double for all her sins.

³ A voice of one calling:
"In the wilderness prepare
the way for the LORD'
make straight in the desert
a highway for our God.

⁴ Every valley shall be raised up,
every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level,
the rugged places a plain.

⁵ And the glory of the LORD will be revealed,
and all people will see it together.
For the mouth of the LORD has spoken."

⁶ A voice says, "Cry out."
And I said, "What shall I cry?"

"All people are like grass,
and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field.

⁷ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
because the breath of the LORD blows on them.
Surely the people are grass.

⁸ The grass withers and the flowers fall,
but the word of our God endures forever."

⁹ You who bring good news to Zion,
go up on a high mountain.
You who bring good news to Jerusalem,
lift up your voice with a shout,
lift it up, do not be afraid;
say to the towns of Judah,
"Here is your God!"

¹⁰ See, the Sovereign LORD comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.

See, his reward is with him,
and his recompense accompanies him.

¹¹ He tends his flock like a shepherd:

He gathers the lambs in his arms
and carries them close to his heart;
he gently leads those that have young.

**Isaiah 40, 12-31**

Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens?

Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,
or weighed the mountains on the scales
and the hills in a balance?

¹³ Who can fathom the Spirit^[d] of the LORD,
or instruct the LORD as his counselor?

¹⁴ Whom did the LORD consult to enlighten him,
and who taught him the right way?
Who was it that taught him knowledge,
or showed him the path of understanding?

¹⁵ Surely the nations are like a drop in a bucket;
they are regarded as dust on the scales;
he weighs the islands as though they were fine dust.

¹⁶ Lebanon is not sufficient for altar fires,
nor its animals enough for burnt offerings.

¹⁷ Before him all the nations are as nothing;
they are regarded by him as worthless
and less than nothing.

¹⁸ With whom, then, will you compare God?
To what image will you liken him?

¹⁹ As for an idol, a metalworker casts it,
and a goldsmith overlays it with gold
and fashions silver chains for it.

²⁰ A person too poor to present such an offering
selects wood that will not rot;
they look for a skilled worker
to set up an idol that will not topple.

²¹ Do you not know?

Have you not heard?

Has it not been told you from the beginning?

Have you not understood since the earth was founded?

²² He sits enthroned above the circle of the earth,
and its people are like grasshoppers.

He stretches out the heavens like a canopy,
and spreads them out like a tent to live in.

²³ He brings princes to naught
and reduces the rulers of this world to nothing.

²⁴ No sooner are they planted,
no sooner are they sown,
no sooner do they take root in the ground,
than he blows on them and they wither,
and a whirlwind sweeps them away like chaff.

²⁵ “To whom will you compare me?
Or who is my equal?” says the Holy One.
²⁶ Lift up your eyes and look to the heavens:
Who created all these?
He who brings out the starry host one by one
and calls forth each of them by name.
Because of his great power and mighty strength,
not one of them is missing.

²⁷ Why do you complain, Jacob?
Why do you say, Israel,
“My way is hidden from the LORD;
my cause is disregarded by my God”?
²⁸ Do you not know?
Have you not heard?
The LORD is the everlasting God,
the Creator of the ends of the earth.
He will not grow tired or weary,
and his understanding no one can fathom.
²⁹ He gives strength to the weary
and increases the power of the weak.
³⁰ Even youths grow tired and weary,
and young men stumble and fall;
³¹ but those who hope in the LORD
will renew their strength.
They will soar on wings like eagles;
they will run and not grow weary,
they will walk and not be faint.



The King's search is much deeper within

"For indeed, the Kingdom of God is within you." Luke 17:21 (NKJV)

How we view things, what we believe to be the true picture, can often be based on a misconception – here are a couple of examples.

Bats are blind – WRONG – 70% of bat species use echolocation to navigate, but ALL bats have eyes & are capable of sight.

Lightning never strikes twice – WRONG – The Empire State Building in New York City is struck on average around 100 times a year.

We can sometimes judge a book by its cover or a person by what we see on the outside.

Every individual has an outward persona, that can be taken as telling the whole story about them. God cares about our natural bodies, but as the Matt Redman classic "The Heart of Worship" states:

"You search much deeper within, through the way things appear, you're looking into my heart"

Let's believe increasingly that as we seek to bring help & relief to people with tragically broken lives we will see:

Not only

BODIES being healed,

LIVES being mended,

HOPE being restored,

but that we also see more & more, the *deeper* need for the

KING to come into every heart.



The Heavens proclaim

Maybe you're back here for my report on the meteors? (14th Nov 2017)

The bad news is that the Karoo was bitterly cold, so much so that we ended up putting on all the clothes we had to keep out the cold, but it made little difference. We sat there, shaking with the cold, staring at the sky, with the water fowl in the pond laughing at us. The expected meteors arrived, but woefully pale and in dismally poor numbers – but, meteors we weren't expecting put on a reasonable show, although I as one of the few people to see them ... it's a long story. I think there is a lesson there somewhere, but what it is, I don't know!

But the crazy thing is, that weekend, in a town not far from where we were, a shop was struck by a meteorite just as the proprietor was locking up for the night. He recovered the fragments of the meteorite inside his shop. I can't begin to tell you how extraordinarily rare such an event is.

This is a time of the year when we think very much about stars and heavenly signs, kings and shepherds, wise men and some very foolish men.

It's a story that has fascinated me since childhood, when I was always disappointed that astronomers failed to do justice to the Text and preachers failed to grapple with the bolts and nuts. I was thrilled to be introduced to a book called "The Great Christ comet" by Colin Nichol, published by Crossway in 2015 [ISBN 1-4335-4213-7]. It does both, and does so extraordinarily well, although I treat many of his conclusions with reservation.

Advent doubtless triggers many memories for you too. Carols accompanied by the Salvation Army Band, the fragrance of a freshly cut Christmas tree, the Nativity play [didn't you just hate it when you were assigned the role of the donkey?] In South Africa, the academic year ends in November, which means that Christmas coincides with the release of exam results, regrettably leading invariably to muted celebrations in the Laubscher household. Dad was always positive – "Maybe you'll do better next year." Did I detect a lack of conviction in his tone?

That's what I like so much about this season. It is a time of the year when we do look forward, when there is a sense of hope and when no matter how hard things have been, we have a sense that tomorrow will be better, not because thinking or wishing will make it so, but because the Lord has placed a huge sense of purpose in our hearts [Acts 20:24] – a purpose which He desires to accomplish through us.

Let me finish by going back to the Star of Bethlehem: - for all our research, there is so much we don't know about it. It's probably true to say that things we disagree about outweigh this issues on which we do agree when trying to understand it. But on one thing, everyone is agreed: It stirred the wise men to action.

Dear friend, let the glimpse of the Manger stir us to action today. Let it encourage us to stir each other, and may our hearts be united with exceedingly great joy [Matt 2: 10]

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.



What's your fashion style?

“Therefore, as God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity” Colossians 3:12-17 (NIV)

Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

Yesterday I went for a weekend run. It’s not an unusual thing for me – it’s my way of keeping fit. Normally I have a smart pair of running shoes and clothes that are specifically designed for running. When I wear these I look like a runner and I feel like a runner. I had not thought too much about this. However, yesterday I had been at a match with my son’s football team and couldn’t be bothered to change out of the cloths I had on - a pair of old trainers, tracksuit bottoms, and a football jacket. I didn’t look like a runner and I certainly did not feel like a runner. My run was hard work! I seemed to go slower and slower. I time myself and this was my worst time for months and months. It seems to me that what we choose to wear has an influence over how we feel, and in my case how quick I run!

Each day when we get up we make fashion choices. Over what clothes we put on, how we arrange our hair, use makeup (though I tend not to use much makeup!). Even if only implicitly, these things reflect something that we want others to see in us. Of course, within these fashion choices are many issues of our identity, personality, self-esteem, and feelings of belonging.

Paul in his writings in Colossians uses this picture of clothing to convey what happens when we put on a new set of clothes based on Jesus’ values. We are urged to clothe ourselves in these virtues of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. And the jacket to put on over all of these and help hold everything else in place? Love.

It seems to me we need to consciously make a choice each day on what we are going to put on. The same old things or a new set of clothes that will help us to feel Christ-like and to reflect Him to those around us. Let’s ask God to help us put on a new fashion look.



Thank me frequently as you journey through today

This practice makes it possible to pray without ceasing, as the apostle Paul taught. If you are serious about learning to pray continually, the best approach is to thank Me in every situation. These thankful prayers provide a solid foundation on which you can build all your other prayers. Moreover, a grateful attitude makes it easier for you to communicate with Me.

When your mind is occupied with thanking Me, you have no time for worrying or complaining. If you practice thankfulness consistently, negative thought patterns will gradually grow weaker and weaker. Draw near to Me with a grateful heart, and My Presence will fill you with Joy and Peace.

Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. 1 Thessalonians 5:16–18 (KJV)

Come near to God and he will come near to you. Wash your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. James 4:8

May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. Romans 15:13

Taken from daily devotional, Jesus Calling

Helen Walton, Community Development Manager, TLMEW since September 2015



We are waiting

Psalm 27,14

We are waiting, all of us, sitting in darkness, waiting for the light of dawn to break. We tell ourselves 'Christmas is for the children', but there is a little child in each of us that is waiting for more than the contents of the brightly-wrapped boxes and the feast of chocolate.

The little child is waiting:

For the moment of wonder...joy...love...

For the moment the world holds its breath and then breaks into a smile.

For the moment when a lifetime of hurts and disappointments is forgotten in a hug.

For the moment when the poor and the hungry are lifted up and the rich are sent empty away.

For the moment when the hopes and fears of all the years meet in the dark streets and whisper to each other:

'Don't be afraid.'

The little child is waiting. Waiting to be born.

May Jesus, the Light of the World guide us.

May He inspire and bless our preparations with His generosity and love.

May we each have time to give and share with others. May the cards we write and the gifts we choose bring joy to those who receive them.

May our shopping trips not weary us and may we have a ready smile for those who serve us. Help us to return filled with everything we need.

May we take joy in preparing our homes and let the decorations and much loved ornaments bring rejoicing in the memories they hold.

Fill our days with peace and gentleness and show us new treasures in the familiar Scriptures we read and the carols we sing,

Lord, may the Christmas time strengthen our hope and let Christmas morning find us ready to worship our Saviour and rejoice in His coming. Amen



Love came down at Christmas – 1.

These are the opening words to a lovely Christmas Carol and this year they have made me think about love at Christmas. We all give gifts at Christmas, gifts given in love. I was asked recently by a young child if I had completed my Christmas Shopping and what I had bought for the baby Jesus. What do I want to give Jesus as a gift this Christmas? Thinking of that first Christmas many people gave the new born King gifts:

Bethlehem...A little town, a nowhere-in-particular. A place of hope, over the years, but also, often, of fear. My streets are dark; my people are longing for freedom from the fear of violence, for a healing of divided communities, for peace here, peace for all the earth.

Look in the most unlikely of places for the birth of hope.

Listen in the silence for the most extraordinary of messages.

Tonight, in my dark streets, God says: *'Do not be afraid' (Luke 2,10)*

'I bring the love gift of a stable, a humble but safe place for Jesus to be born'.

I am Mary...

A teenage girl, no one in particular. Of course I'm excited about bringing a tiny new life into the world. You'd be scared too if you were me: my first baby here now; we're in a strange town far from home; there were no beds free, and no hospital, come to that.

In my body – mine! – God's love is taking shape.

In my ears – yes, mine! – God whispered the promise:

'Do not be afraid'

'I bring the love gift of a mother's love for her first born son – a love that knows no bounds; a love that will nurture my baby, a love that will grieve at my son's crucifixion and rejoice at his resurrection'.

I am Joseph...Step-dad, before the word was even thought of.

Good with my hands – not so clever with words. I'm with Mary because I love her, baby or no baby.

How many of you have brought up a child, knowing from the beginning it wasn't yours, but doing your best – your very best, I mean – to teach him all you know about love, and faithfulness, and courage, and being a man, a real man, a good man?

I fear I might not have a big-enough heart to do that.

But then there's God, chipping away, gently but firmly, with those words again:

'Don't be afraid.'

'I bring the love gift of a step father who will love and cherish this child bringing him up in the faith and teach him my skills until God reveals His future'.



Love came down at Christmas – 2.

I'm a shepherd... Paid barely enough to make ends meet, put food on the table, keep the babbies in clothes.

Working conditions not great either: outdoors, whatever the weather; long days; long nights.

And hardly secure employment: hired and fired from month to month; dispensable.

Leaving your flock is not a good career move, whether an angel's told you to or not.

I'm scared this winter's going to bite hard. But maybe God knows all about cold and poverty and insecurity.

Maybe I've got nothing to lose.

'Don't be afraid.' (Luke 2,10) That's what the angel said.

'I bring the love gift of a lamb, a lamb for the special Shepherd born in a stable.'

I'm an innkeeper.

Which means I run a hostelry, and this, for people in my trade, is the busiest, most stressful, time of year.

No room, no time, no joy. Too many people around, too many jobs to do, too many places to be at the same time. I'm anxious, just to keep my head above water. I'll be better when it's all over.

But if, for ten minutes even, I could leave the customers, the complaints, the constant demands, and get round the back to the cattle shed, to see that new-born baby I can hear crying, and hold him in my arms...

If, even for five minutes, I could just stop and do nothing, except be there, and look and listen...

Then, perhaps, in the space, and the silence, I might just hear God saying:

'Don't be afraid.'

'I bring the love gift of a stable, a shelter to lay your weary head, a shelter for the Son of God to be born in and a mouse. Why a mouse? Well there were mice in my stable, listen:

SONG OF THE MOUSE

Hush now! Still now! Whatever's going on? There are people in the stable. We must pry.

There's a donkey, there are cattle; did I hear a baby's rattle? And I'm almost sure I heard a baby cry!

Careful! Watch it! There's something going on! It's that feeding trough that seems to hold their eye.

I can't believe it, I just saw a new-born baby in the straw! What's a baby doing there, oh my, oh my!

Slowly! Silently! Now see what's going on! Listen carefully as we creep on softly by.

Did you hear just what they say? There's a Christ-child born this day. Come to heal the world, so man need never die.

Hold it! Wait there! D'you hear what's going on? That little babe's to be a King, they cry!

But cow sheds are not meant for kings! They're born in palaces and things, especially when they're sent from God on high!

*Praises! Hosannah! We know what's going on! See those shepherds clamour round to testify.
Angel voices sing in chorus that our God is rooting for us, just rejoice, sing out His name and magnify!*



Christmas

Attentive readers of the Bible sometimes find the Christmas stories difficult. Matthew and Luke contain rather different accounts. In Matthew Mary and Joseph, the parents of Jesus, are engaged. Mary is surprised when she discovers that she is going to have a child. Joseph hides her, evidently for her protection. An angel reveals the truth to Joseph. Jesus is born in Bethlehem. Three people with special insight called *μαγοι*, like magic in English, come to see the one born king of the Jews. As the *magoi* have already visited King Herod, Jesus is taken to Egypt by his parents because his life is in danger as we see from the massacre of the « Holt Innocents. »

Luke account is rather different. Jesus' parents live in Nazareth (can any good think come out of Nazareth). They go to Bethlehem for the Roman census, where they find shelter in a stable because there is no other accommodation. The Angel called Gabriel this time, visits Mary not Joseph. Shepherds, not *magoi*, come to visit the infant Jesus in a stable. Jesus is presented in the temple and Simeon proclaims the Benedictus (*Lord now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace*). Twelve years later the (supposedly lovely) baby is transformed into a disobedient adolescent who abandons his parents at the age of twelve to impress the teachers of religion. The precious and perhaps infuriating child on the verge of adolescence, observes correctly that he has been about his Father's business. It is not, of course, surprising that Jesus should be confident that he knew more than his parents.

Fortunately there are some clues. In Mark's Gospels (*Mk 4:11-12*) Jesus says to the *disciples* « *The secret of the kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding.* » The statement echoes the opening verses of the (apocryphal) Gospel of Thomas which say that it contains *the secret sayings of Jesus*. The Gospel of Thomas (so-called) belongs to a rather confusing kind of literature that has been found since the second world war at Qumran by the shore of the Dead Sea and at Nag Hammadi in the Sinai Desert.

Some people try to use these internal and external contradictions to discredit Christmas as we celebrate it. Mark 4:11-12 gives us a hint, but the real issue is more subtle. In the early days of Christianity there were a number Jewish and (probably) Christian sects. Among the sects were groups called « gnostics. » The term comes from the Greek *γνωσις* which means knowledge. Some of their writings claimed a secret understanding. They wanted to impose Greek philosophical reasoning, although it is not a very good way to understand Jewish thought or the context of Jesus' teaching. The Gospels, which are quite hebraic (related to Judaism), reached their present form some years after the Resurrection. For the writers and in their sources, Jesus was both risen son of God and the fulfilment of prophecy. Gospels are public documents and not a secret tradition. They were important for early spread of Christianity with interpretation, for example by St Paul.

Philosophical reasoning would come later. Meanwhile mainstream Jews emphasised history, prophecy and simple devotion. So interpreting the Gospel texts has to take account of the Jewish beginnings of our faith and religion. They were a public declaration, because spreading the truth about Jesus is a prime role of Christians. The sharing of secret traditions is a contradiction in terms. As the church expanded philosophy, for example neo-platonism, would important, but that quite a lot later than our Christmas stories. People who work in different cultures with the leprosy mission know that Christianity needs to relate to ambient culture so as to share the truth that is another aspect of our work. Meanwhile we can celebrate the Incarnation - the word made flesh - knowing that the Gospel is true for all humanity and that its proclamation is public.

James Barnett is an Anglican priest. He was involved in syllabus development and theological education in secondary schools and in preparing men and women for Christian ministry. He was Archbishop of Canterbury's Representative at the European Institutions and currently represents the Intereuropean Commission on Church and School at the Council of Europe. With his wife Elisabeth, he is secretary of the Mission Lèpre France.



Love came down at Christmas – 3.

I am a wise man, apparently, although they don't say that about everyone who looks for messages in the stars.

I am a traveller, My journey has brought me a long, long way. I have not found much yet: only power-hungry rulers, and too many doors shut in my face.

I am a foreigner, I might look and sound quite different to you.

But just because I struggle to speak your language doesn't mean I don't have a brain, or a heart.

You and I are searching for the same thing, I think.

A new government, perhaps; a different world, definitely; a brighter future, we hope.

But maybe we are looking in the wrong places.

Not in the corridors of power, among the money men and the decision-makers.

But in a back-street stable, among the young mums and the shift-workers.

The starlight I have been following seems to shine down those dark streets, beckoning, calling: *'Do not be afraid.'* (Luke 2,10)

'I bring the love gift not just the gold which will take you to Egypt and back, not just the frankincense, not just the myrrh which speak of events to come in your life, but a gift for someone who has nothing but who is looking to God to help.

I am me...

I am you...

I am your next-door neighbour...

I am the person you go out of your way to avoid...

I am your best friend..."



Task for today and onwards...

“The shepherds returned,
glorifying and
praising God
for all the things
they had heard and seen,
which were just as they had been told.”

Luke 2,20



Responsibly for others - The Parable of the Talents

Matthew 25 v 14-31

Is this meant to be a humorous story? Is the exaggeration by Jesus to help people remember? Think of the quantities of silver how did the slaves get them home let alone invest them.

A talent is about 33 or 34 kilograms of solid silver with a handle on the top. This amount of silver was worth 6,000 denarii that is 6,000 days work. A long time. 16, 18 or more years, depending on days off and holidays.

The master summed his slaves *to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Matt 25 v 15*

Frightening, terrifying, how on earth do you take these blocks of silver home. They are a gift not a loan; for the first enough to live on for more than 80 years. An enormous responsibility to be landed with.

The abundance of the gift is important to the story, as is the selection of the slaves, he gave to *each according to their abilities*. The first two accept the gift, and know how to put it to good use. The third servant is given one talent. The master knew he was different. Even one talent is an incredible responsibility. How to keep it safe? Is it really a gift? Questions, doubts, what can he do? He decides to hide it away, maybe thinking "If I can't see it I can ignore it." Keeping it safe till his master returns. Then he can give it back. How on earth can he hide an entire talent? As we know he buries it. More smiles on the faces of the hearers, how did he bury it secretly.

The master returns and the slaves report. The first says *Look I have made five more talents*. As Jesus told the story did people imagine the slave coming with his 10 talents; about 330 kilos; he must have needed a few people to carry it. The first two slaves are congratulated on their trading skills. Another smile at the phrase *you have been trustworthy in a few things*, I can't imagine many of the hearers thinking that a talent was a little. Remember it is 6000 days wages.

Then the third returns his gift, *Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; 25 so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.*" Even when returning the talent he is still overwhelmed and unable to cope with the enormity of the gift.

Previously I had thought of the parable as encouraging to use ones gifts to the full and not being lazy or wasteful with what we are given. Now I see more than that: it shows a difference in personalities and how people react to responsibility. The contrast between the two slaves who prove to be risk-taking, self-starting entrepreneurial types, doubling their money given to them in what appears to be a very short time and the third slave timid, afraid, maybe inadequate. The 3rd so frightened that he did not even think the money could earn some interest.

The talent hidden away did not keep up with inflation. Many are surprised those who have more are given more responsibility. But isn't it so they can have the responsibility of caring and encouraging those who are frozen by fear? Often in our daily life, whether we are in paid work or volunteers or enjoying life we meet people who are vulnerable who are afraid, at other times we, ourselves may be vulnerable. We need to be aware of those who need encouraging.

The theme of this years Protestants en fete in France was *Vivre la Fraternity Living in fraternity*, I noticed in the song that won the prize *Who are you, you my brother ?* (Priss, Françoise et Daniel 2016 © FPF Que es-tu, toi mon frère) the chorus at the beginning is "I perceive all your fears and depressions" in the last verse the chorus is

We will fight against the fears and live life to the full.

Elisabeth Liz Hichens épouse Barnett, Occupational Therapist worked with TLM at the Philadelphia Leprosy Hospital, Salur, AP India and at RSK Sungai Kunda, Palembang Sumatra, Indonesia. 1979-88. Today, she is retired living in South West France; with her husband James, she is joint secretary of la Mission Lèpre, France.



Faith for crumbs – 1.

Matthew 15:21-28

Imagine Jesus saying this about you ... *you have great faith! Your request is granted*

A desire I have is to be able to have *great faith!*

Great faith gets great results ... *her daughter was healed from that very hour*

What does great faith look like?

1. **She knew she could come to Jesus regardless of her gender & race.** She broke tradition. As a Canaanite woman, she had 2 things against her: Her gender & her race – it never worried her she went to Jesus. In the presence of Jesus it's not what you are that counts, it's who you are that counts! Jesus cares for people!!

2. **She worshiped Jesus!** In Marks gospel it says: *She fell at His feet*

She called Him: *Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!*

She recognised His position as Lord – as God

She recognised His earthly position - *Son of David*

She recognised He was full of mercy – *Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!*

James **tells us:** *Mercy triumphs over judgment! The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.*

1 Peter 2:10 *Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.* Things change when you come to Jesus & worship Him!! Mercy flows, mercy flows – your status changes!! *Once you were not - but now you are!!*

There is value in worshiping Jesus! Worship is more than singing songs! Worship is the way you live a separated life for Jesus in this world!

3. **She made her request know to Jesus.** She knew what she wanted....*My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession*

4. **She was prepared to expose herself** – would you do the same? What are you hiding behind? A family situation, A friendship situation, A church situation, A job situation, A social position situation, A financial situation that needs sorting out... What are you hiding behind?

While you're hiding NOTHING gets sorted out

- Come clean – become real – face the facts of your situation
- You're not a hero when you remain silent – you're distancing yourself from Jesus!
- Do something that will change your negative situation!

The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

5. **She endured opposition**

She had a need & that need transcended tradition. *Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.*

Dan Izzett - Zimbabwe. Retired pastor. I was diagnosed with lepromatous leprosy in 1972. Served on TLMI board for eight years and on the Zimbabwe board for 15 years. I now serve on the ALM board and do advocacy for them.



Faith for crumbs – 2.

Matthew 15:21-28

6. Note how Jesus handled the situation: *Jesus did not answer a word.* Why?

- He understood what His Father had sent Him for
- He knew why He was on earth
- He had to check with His Father if he could make a change, no matter how desperate & how urgent the situation was *...I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel*

She had opposition because of her gender, race, the disciples – but not Jesus!

...The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

She knew that anything no matter how small from Jesus can change your life

The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said.

He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to their dogs."

Yes, Lord," she said, "but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters' table."

Just crumbs from the table of Jesus are enough!

- Crumbs set her daughter free
- Crumbs can set you free - & you're of the household of God

Ephesians 2:19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household,

Dear child of God: Crumbs are enough to heal you

- If you don't want to hassle Jesus – at least eat the crumbs!
- They are enough! More than enough!

She gave Jesus the break, the reason to heal & deliver her daughter

...The Lord is full of compassion and mercy. That's our Jesus!

His disciples are another story! Then & now!! So often we hinder the grace of God because we are trapped by our traditions. Give Jesus a reason to do something in your life! ...He is waiting give Him a chance!

...Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." Today Jesus wants to say this to some of us here *...you have great faith! Your request is granted*

Many of us have been sitting outside drooling at what God has done and what He is doing for others – while we don't even eat the crumbs

Child of God – saved by Jesus! The table is ours – COME & EAT!

Dan Izzett - Zimbabwe. Retired pastor. I was diagnosed with lepromatous leprosy in 1972. Served on TLMI board for eight years and on the Zimbabwe board for 15 years. I now serve on the ALM board and do advocacy for them.



On the other side of the lake

Mark 5:1-17

Today I thought about the story of Jesus healing the man with the 'legion' of demons on the other side of the lake. I was also thinking about a group of folks from my church who are working hard with a young man in our local community, in trouble at home, at school, in the community, with police, with alcohol, and with more troubles looming. In both cases the needs are enormous. There is chaos, there is disorder, there is self-harm, there is fear, there are legal problems, there is apparent 'waste' of resources, and there is plenty of heartache and loss.

But there is also hope. For there is also the presence of Jesus to name and to point to and to empower something different. While others want to simply 'chain up' the problem person, Jesus wants to set them free, and cost is not an issue. The chains are broken, the demons are gone, the prison is no more, the carnage has ended. In the end the community has had enough, is too afraid, has lost too much, and asks Jesus to leave. The healed man would leave too, but Jesus tells him to remain – he has to be the one who shows his own transformation, who takes responsibility for previous actions in the community. And shows that there is hope. And points to the love of God.

In our work with people affected by leprosy, we also come across many who live 'on the other side of the lake,' far from the rest of the community. In that place of suspicion and stigma and plenty of chains to keep them away so everyone else can be 'safe,' Jesus comes calling. He wants to meet with the lonely and isolated and tormented and chained, to lead them back into life, into fellowship, into healing, into hope. Their healing is also the healing of a community that too quickly gives up hope, and is afraid, and turns to chains and rules rather than to prayer. For as they – and we – tell our stories of what God has done for us, hope can be born anew on the other side of the lake.

Steve Withington - Steve worked with TLM in Bangladesh from 1997 to 2004, and was on the TLM New Zealand Board until 2012 when he and his wife Juan returned to a mission role in Bangladesh for 3 years. Steve currently works part time as a doctor and has a leadership role in the South West Baptist Church in Christchurch, New Zealand.



Facing 2018:

Blessed New Year,

TLM!



Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Barbara Hill	8, 9, 10 December		Genesis 1,26-27	6 December
Christine Osman	22, 23, 24, 26 December		Psalms 27,14	22 December
Dan Izzett	29, 30 December		Psalms 115,15	5 December
Eddie Askew	12 December		Isaiah 30,21	8,9,10 December
Elisabeth Barnett	28 December		Isaiah 40,1-11	16 December
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James Barnett	25 December		Matthew 15,21-28	29, 30 December
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Luke, evangelist	27 December		Mark 4,11-12	25 December
Mollie Clark	1 December		Mark 5,1-17	31 December
Moses Onoh Dr	14, 15 December		Luke 2,10	23, 24, 26 December
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Paul Moores	18 December		John 8,12/b	12 December
Pete Garratt	20 December		John 8,58-59	11 December
Peter Hill	8, 9, 10 December		Ephesians 4,29-32	7 December
Peter Hilton	4 December		Colossians 3,12-17	20 December
Peter Laubscher	19 December		1 Thess 5,16-18	21 December
Raju PLN Dr	11 December		1 Tim 4,8	13 December
Steve Withington Dr	31 December			

The Bridge - TLM Daily Devotions

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