



TLM Daily Devotions

March 2018





Drawing a line in the surf

I live near the town of Muizenberg, where breakers born in the storms the deep Southern ocean, end their 2 000 kilometre journey on its five kilometre-long sandy beach. This feast of waves draws thousands of surfers from around the world. Unfortunately, other less welcome visitors are also attracted to these shores.

On Monday 14th August 2006, Achmat Hassiem and his brother Taariq were practicing surf-rescue at Muizenberg when Achmat noticed a great white shark swimming towards Taariq. To distract the shark, Hassiem immediately began creating a commotion in the water. His tactic worked and moments later, Achmat was being airlifted to hospital where surgeons amputated what remained of his right leg.

Achmat has made an amazing recovery. He swims competitively, has done the Robben Island swim and represents South Africa in the Paralympics.

“Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends”. [John 15:13]

Thankfully, we seldom face choices as stark as that faced by Achmat twelve years ago. But choices we do face. How to allocate our time. How to allocate our attention. Which phone calls to make. Which calls to leave unmade. Many of these decisions will be taken at a subconscious level, driven by our deepest values and beliefs, so deep that even we don't always know what drives us to do certain things and to leave other things undone.

Did Achmat decide on that Monday morning to put Taariq's life above his? I rather think not. That was a decision he had made years before the incident, when at some point he decided that he prized the love of his brother above all other things in this world. When confronted by the shark, he already knew how he would react, even though he knew that by drawing the shark away from Taariq and towards himself, his chances of survival were virtually zero.

The values we inculcate in ourselves today will influence not only the choices we make this day, but in the days ahead. We may not have to make a life changing, lifesaving decision today, but we may have to make one tomorrow. For that reason, it is so important that we lay the right foundation today. What defines a good decision in Biblical terms? That's been the topic of many books, but one of the cornerstones of the Christian faith is “preferring others.” So contrary to human nature and so contrary to the spirit of this Age. Many of our decisions will be flavoured by that “preferring of others”, but it will not always come easy, and sometimes it may not come at all. May the Lord help each one of us this day to be transformed by His word, shaped by it and made anew, so that when we do have to make *that* choice, we prefer others, prefer His kingdom and prefer Him above all else.

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 is your life ?!.....

James 4:14 – “...for you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes...”

Rick Warren sums up each earthly life as follows:- It is a TRUST (an accounting of it will have to be given)
It is a TEMP. ASSIGNMENT ('dash' between 2 dates)

The devil would like it to be one long TRIAL/ many TEMPTATIONS

God plans for us to have many TESTS/ many TRANSFORMATIONS

Daily God has at least FOUR GIFTS for you and me:-

A KEY for every problem....

A LIGHT for every shadow....

A PLAN for every tomorrow....

A JOY for every sorrow.....

And this KEY, LIGHT, PLAN, and JOY is JESUS CHRIST (John 3:3; Matth.6:33)

From EARLY CHILDHOOD we have MANY MENTORS that seek to groom us for GOD:-

Proverbs 27:1-10 and 19: Boasting is wrong – often backfires! Compliments must be encouraging and sincere! Folly is not just frustrating – often also infuriating! Jealousy jars! Rebukes that re-form are most helpful! Faithful friendships cause us to flourish! There are degrees of desire: Beware of indigestion/ indiscretion! Heartlessness and homelessness often go hand-in-hand! Pure relationships are like perfume! Family ties and friendships vs feuds and fractures!....

The heart of man reflects the man: DO YOU REFLECT JESUS FROM THE HEART?

TEN WAYS TO LOVE/ TO BE LIKE JESUS:-

**Listen without interrupting (Prov. 18)*

**Speak without accusing (James 1:19)*

**Give without sparing (Prov. 21:26)*

**Answer without arguing (Prov. 17:1)*

**Share without pretending (Eph. 4:15)*

**Enjoy without complaining (Philip 2:14)*

**Trust without wavering (1 Cor. 13:7)*

**Forgive without punishing (Col. 3:13; Eph.4:32)*

**Promise without forgetting (Prov.13:12)*

**Pray without ceasing (Col.1:9; 1 Thes.5:17)*

“We must begin to believe that God in the mystery of prayer, has entrusted us with a force that can move the Heavenly world, and can bring its power down on earth.” – Andrew Murray

“Prayer does not fit us for the greater work – prayer is the greater work!” Oswald Chambers

“Prayer is not learned in the classroom, but only in the closet.” – E.M. Bounds

“He who runs from God in the morning will scarcely find Him in the rest of the day!” – John Bunyan

“I have so much to do, that I will spend the first 3 hours of the day in prayer.” Martin Luther

“I would rather teach one man to pray, than 10 men to preach!” – C.H. Spurgeon

“He who kneels the most, stands the best!” – D.L. Moody

Notice the apostle Paul’s sense of destiny, calling and pursuit of time in Philp.3:4ff

God is commanding us today, to believe in Him, to repent, to trust, to obey, to do His will...

Don’t argue about your challenges, circumstances, limitations, etc....

REMEMBER, the bear came to prepare David for the lion!

The lion came to prepare David for the giant! The giant Goliath came to prepare David for King Saul!

King Saul came to prepare David for the throne! God allows difficult situations to prepare us for greater situations....

When we reach our limitations, God’s PROVIDENCES are already working!!

CONCLUSION:-

John 3:36 – “Whoever believes in the Son has Eternal Life; Whoever does NOT obey the Son shall NOT see Life, But the wrath of God remains on Him.”

Eph. 5:8 – “For at one time we were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of Light!”

Psalms 57:2 – “I cry to God Most High, to God Who fulfils His purpose for me.”

Read 2 Cor. 4:7-12,16-18.

Amen

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



Psalm 17

A prayer of David.

¹ Hear me, LORD, my plea is just; listen to my cry.
Hear my prayer— it does not rise from deceitful lips.

² Let my vindication come from you;
may your eyes see what is right.

³ Though you probe my heart,
though you examine me at night and test me,
you will find that I have planned no evil;
my mouth has not transgressed.

⁴ Though people tried to bribe me,
I have kept myself from the ways of the violent
through what your lips have commanded.

⁵ My steps have held to your paths;
my feet have not stumbled.

⁶ I call on you, my God, for you will answer me;
turn your ear to me and hear my prayer.

⁷ Show me the wonders of your great love,
you who save by your right hand
those who take refuge in you from their foes.

⁸ Keep me as the apple of your eye;
hide me in the shadow of your wings

⁹ from the wicked who are out to destroy me,
from my mortal enemies who surround me.

¹⁰ They close up their callous hearts,
and their mouths speak with arrogance.

¹¹ They have tracked me down, they now surround me,
with eyes alert, to throw me to the ground.

¹² They are like a lion hungry for prey,
like a fierce lion crouching in cover.

¹³ Rise up, LORD, confront them, bring them down;
with your sword rescue me from the wicked.

¹⁴ By your hand save me from such people, LORD,
from those of this world whose reward is in this life.

May what you have stored up for the wicked fill their bellies;
may their children gorge themselves on it,
and may there be leftovers for their little ones.

¹⁵ As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face;
when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.



Psalm 18

For the director of music. Of David the servant of the LORD. He sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. He said:

¹ I love you, LORD, my strength.

² The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge,
my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

³ I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and I have been saved from my enemies.

⁴ The cords of death entangled me;
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

⁵ The cords of the grave coiled around me;
the snares of death confronted me.

⁶ In my distress I called to the LORD;
I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears.

⁷ The earth trembled and quaked,
and the foundations of the mountains shook;
they trembled because he was angry.

⁸ Smoke rose from his nostrils;
consuming fire came from his mouth,
burning coals blazed out of it.

⁹ He parted the heavens and came down;
dark clouds were under his feet.

¹⁰ He mounted the cherubim and flew;
he soared on the wings of the wind.

¹¹ He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him—
the dark rain clouds of the sky.

¹² Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced,
with hailstones and bolts of lightning.

¹³ The LORD thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High resounded.

¹⁴ He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy,
with great bolts of lightning he routed them.

¹⁵ The valleys of the sea were exposed
and the foundations of the earth laid bare
at your rebuke, LORD,
at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

¹⁶ He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters.

¹⁷ He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
from my foes, who were too strong for me.

¹⁸ They confronted me in the day of my disaster,
but the LORD was my support.

¹⁹ He brought me out into a spacious place;
he rescued me because he delighted in me.

²⁰ The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.

²¹ For I have kept the ways of the LORD;
I am not guilty of turning from my God.

²² All his laws are before me;
I have not turned away from his decrees.

²³ I have been blameless before him
and have kept myself from sin.

²⁴ The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

²⁵ To the faithful you show yourself faithful,
to the blameless you show yourself blameless,

²⁶ to the pure you show yourself pure,
but to the devious you show yourself shrewd.

²⁷ You save the humble
but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.

²⁸ You, LORD, keep my lamp burning;
my God turns my darkness into light.

²⁹ With your help I can advance against a troop
with my God I can scale a wall.

³⁰ As for God, his way is perfect:
The LORD's word is flawless;
he shields all who take refuge in him.

³¹ For who is God besides the LORD?
And who is the Rock except our God?

³² It is God who arms me with strength
and keeps my way secure.

³³ He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;
he causes me to stand on the heights.

³⁴ He trains my hands for battle;
my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

³⁵ You make your saving help my shield,
and your right hand sustains me;
your help has made me great.

³⁶ You provide a broad path for my feet,
so that my ankles do not give way.

³⁷ I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
I did not turn back till they were destroyed.

³⁸ I crushed them so that they could not rise;
they fell beneath my feet.

³⁹ You armed me with strength for battle;
you humbled my adversaries before me.
⁴⁰ You made my enemies turn their backs in flight,
and I destroyed my foes.
⁴¹ They cried for help, but there was no one to save them—
to the LORD, but he did not answer.
⁴² I beat them as fine as windblown dust;
I trampled them like mud in the streets.
⁴³ You have delivered me from the attacks of the people;
you have made me the head of nations.
People I did not know now serve me,
⁴⁴ foreigners cower before me;
as soon as they hear of me, they obey me.
⁴⁵ They all lose heart;
they come trembling from their strongholds.

⁴⁶ The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!
Exalted be God my Savior!
⁴⁷ He is the God who avenges me,
who subdues nations under me,
⁴⁸ who saves me from my enemies.
You exalted me above my foes;
from a violent man you rescued me.
⁴⁹ Therefore I will praise you, LORD, among the nations;
I will sing the praises of your name.

⁵⁰ He gives his king great victories;
he shows unfailing love to his anointed,
to David and to his descendants forever.



“What do you want me to do for you?”

Mark 10: 46-52 Jesus was leaving Jericho together with his disciples and a large crowd. Bartimaeus, a blind man, was sitting there by the roadside. He was begging. Probably the only way to get an income was to sit there day after day asking people for some money. This particular day Bartimaeus heard that this Jesus from Nazareth, Son of David, was coming. Maybe he thought to himself: He who made deaf people hear again, and made paralyzed walk again, I must get his attention! He will make me see again!

So Bartimaeus shouted: “Have mercy on me!” The people around him did not like his shouting, but Bartimaeus shouted even louder “Son of David have mercy on me!” Jesus heard his cry, and he stopped and asked people to call Bartimaeus.

“What do you want me to do for you?” “was the question that Jesus asked Bartimaeus when he came forward. Why did Jesus ask such a question? Wasn’t it obvious that Bartimaeus wanted to see again? Did not Jesus know that?

I am convinced that Jesus knew about Bartimaeus’ disability, just as He knows about our situation and our lives. Here again we are reminded that Jesus always gives us the option to choose and to tell Him what we want from Him. We have a free will and He will never force us to do something.

At the same time Paul says in Rom 9: 16 **“It does not, therefore, depend on a man’s desire or effort, but on God’s mercy”**. He, who gave His life for us, loves us so much that we never can fully understand it! It is by His mercy that we can become His children, but we need to respond to His question: what do you want me to do for you?

I think that God always is whispering this question to us when we live in a close relationship to Him. He says this to us because behind that question is His great love and mercy for us! He is willing to help us, to support us, to save us, to heal us and to give us a new direction in our life. Yes, He is ready to help us in all our needs because His mercy and grace will never end!

It is up to you and me to respond to Jesus. Bartimaeus gave his answer: **“Rabbi, I want to see.”** He trusted Jesus, he had faith in Him and He received his sight.

When Jesus asks you and me this question, today, I think it is important to take it seriously and to respond. He knows your life and your needs, but He wants this close relationship where you are honest with Him, where you dare to open your heart and tell Him about your needs and your mistakes in life. He will be there for you with His love and mercy!



Vision 2035: A Long Obedience in the Same Direction

In 2018 we are faced with a great challenge. The challenge of writing the strategy of where we want to be and what we want to achieve by the year 2023. As we write our strategy for 2019-2023, we will work together across 29 countries to come up with priorities, targets, outcomes and indicators that will guide our global programme and take us nearer to our vision of **Leprosy defeated, Lives Transformed**. Nearer to our target of **no new cases by 2035**.

As I reflect on this and look ahead, it also makes me look back to see where we have come from since our Mission started in 1874. How far have we come in the past 144 years? When Wellesley Bailey founded the Mission, he had no hope of a cure - that did not come until the 1950s with Dapsone monotherapy. A chance to make a real dent on leprosy did not come until the mid-1980s when multi-drug therapy was rolled out globally. It took 100 years from the founding of the Mission for us to find a cure that we can rely on!

When I look back I also see names and events that demonstrate the dedication and achievements of those that have gone before us: The International Leprosy Association; ILEP; The spread of our own work from India into China, Myanmar, other parts of Asia and then into Africa and Asia-Pacific region; Paul Brand and his pioneering adventures in reconstructive surgery for eyes, hands and feet with nerve impairments; the world-renowned and globally important research that has taken place (and still does) at our three research centres in Bangladesh, Nepal and India, to name but a few.

I am sure there were times when the TLM folks that went before us thought that the work was too hard, that they would never be able to do it. But they did not. They kept hold of their calling and they waited on the Lord. They were obedient.

*The essential thing in heaven and in earth is...that there should be **long obedience in the same direction**, there thereby results, and has always resulted in the long run, something which has made life worth living* (Friedrich Nietzsche, German Philosopher.)

As I reflect on those that have gone before me, I pray that my obedience to the call of God on my life to serve Him (**because we follow Christ...**) through ministering to those affected by leprosy will be at least as consistent as theirs. It is only by keeping on keeping on that we can even imagine a world without leprosy and its complications.

No new cases by 2035 - are we sure we can achieve it? No, I am not sure. But with God's help and with us working together as Fellowship and with our ILEP, WHO partners I think we can give it a jolly good attempt! There is much to do, but if we all focus on and work towards that same direction, we can do it.

"Let us not grow weary in well-doing, for in due time we will reap a harvest, if we do not give up." Galatians 6:9
for "...they that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint." Isaiah 40:31

As we look ahead to 2023, and beyond that to 2035, we will face many challenges - as individual people, as individual Members and as a Global Fellowship.

But He is faithful and He will never leave us nor forsake us. Amen.



The scroll and the lamb

Don't try to remember, it's not an Aesop's fable! It's from *Revelation 5.1-14*.

The scroll written on both sides is the revelation of God's plan for the world. Everything is planned, God is not surprised of what happens in the world and even in my life. He holds everything in his hands.

In verse 2, the question asked is not only "Who is worthy?" – because in Jesus-Christ we find again our dignity of God's children, but "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?"

No one was found – no one is able to fulfill God's plan to save the world. So there is no hope anymore. As John, we can only cry.

When we are in a difficult situation, a dead end in our life, there is a time to cry but then, maybe with the help of someone else, we have to lift up our eyes to the Lord (cf Psalm 121) to realise that with him there is the solution.

Good news (or Gospel!) – the Lion of Judah is the one able to open the scroll. Jesus, King of kings conquered sin, death and Satan. Then John saw a lamb (verse 6) – but it was said a lion! What could a lamb do!? Jesus, the lamb of God sacrificed himself to offer salvation to everyone.

The victory was not gained by force but by suffering and death on the cross.

And when he had taken the scroll, they fell down before the Lamb and they sang a new song (verses 7-9).

I join them with some words of worship (you can sing your own prayer) :

Oh Jesus you are worthy to be praised, I love you, I adore you.

Thank you for your sacrifice, thank you because you saved me.

"Jesus purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. He has made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God" (verses 9-10).

The Gospel is not for an elite, not just for some people who deserve it. To be part of a kingdom is related to my identity. It is not related to what I do but to who I am, it's a grace.

"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast." Ephesians 2.8-9

When we accept Jesus as our Saviour, we become part of God's people, his Church. We belong to a community of men and women from different cultures and backgrounds united in Christ.

As priests of God, we have privileges and responsibilities. We have access to God's presence at any time. God entrusts us the mission to witness his Kingdom in the world and to be intermediaries between him and men.

We are called to be channels of blessings for people around us!



Your Spiritual Core

Your spiritual core is made up of four values: intimacy, identity, integrity, and humility. These develop as separate entities within your "sit place with God," as well as work together to help you in becoming all that you were destined to be and do.

In your **identity**, it is important that you believe who you are *in Christ*. God states that *you are very precious, chosen, holy, dearly loved, and a people belonging to Him*. Believing these truths and so many more is your identity because you are created in the image of God. Believing and trusting in this identity is essential for creating a strong spiritual core.

Intimacy has already been presented in the value of sharing your voice (thoughts and feelings) openly and truthfully, pausing to receive His care and comfort, and then listening to God's voice of truth, and taking a hold of His grace in order to trust and obey the words He speaks to you regarding your relationships and circumstances. Psalms 34 expresses this beautiful imagery of intimate relationship.

Integrity is presenting to the world that what they hear and see match, that your private life matches your public life. No discrepancies. The world needs to see the good fruit of your integrity in truth, goodness, righteousness, gratitude, humility, and reverence to God.

Humility is the fourth value that is needed to strengthen your spiritual core. It is the pathway that leads out from your spiritual core of identity, intimacy, and integrity to fulfill your role in the kingdom. With a strong spiritual core, humility is the spiritual pathway to serve others with your *vision* (your purpose on earth) and *mission* (the ways you walk out your vision). Everything God works in you is for the purpose of overflow to others. As He has loved you, so love one another. Commit to fulfilling your role in the kingdom to declare God's grace to others.

Reflection

First, define your identity. If there are any discrepancies in what God says about you, replace them with the truth. Live loved. Live out those words for you and the world to see and enjoy! You are His beloved!

Second, develop a strong core of all these values. Spend time with God in the Word, applying all He speaks to your personal life. Let integrity be worked through and through, reflecting God in your words, choices, and responses. Serve others in humility, bending low and lifting up one another. Humility is the essence of love.

Third, declare your vision and mission. Write out your vision statement that you believe God gave to you when He created you and then list the ways you desire to walk out in mission that vision statement.

Taken from the Bible app YouVersion

Submitted by **Helen Walton**, Community Development Manager at TLMEW since June 2015



"Destination"

"Our citizenship is in heaven" Philippians 3:20

Many of the old churches also contain cemeteries on the church grounds. After visiting a church in England I took time to walk through the burial area, read the names and study the inscriptions.

One of the tombstones that captured my attention had the following text :

"Where you are now, I used to be

Where I am now, you too shall be.

So be prepared to follow me."

Somebody had placed a board next to the stone on which was written :

"To follow you, I'd be content

If only I knew the way you went."

The original inscription was perfectly accurate, we all have to die, but the pertinent question is : are we sure of our destination and on what basis?

Peter declared *"Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade - kept in heaven for you ..." I Peter 1:3 & 4a*

Can you echo Peter's words and say :

"Praise God?"

Silvano Perotti - Secretary for Europe then Deputy International Director and Director for Support and Development TLMI
Born in Italy - retired in Switzerland. Worked with TLMI until 1990.



Psalm 19

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

¹ The heavens declare the glory of God;
the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

² Day after day they pour forth speech;
night after night they reveal knowledge.

³ They have no speech, they use no words;
no sound is heard from them.

⁴ Yet their voice goes out into all the earth,
their words to the ends of the world.

In the heavens God has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁵ It is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber,
like a champion rejoicing to run his course.

⁶ It rises at one end of the heavens
and makes its circuit to the other;
nothing is deprived of its warmth.

⁷ The law of the LORD is perfect,
refreshing the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy,
making wise the simple.

⁸ The precepts of the LORD are right,
giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant,
giving light to the eyes.

⁹ The fear of the LORD is pure,
enduring forever.

The decrees of the LORD are firm,
and all of them are righteous.

¹⁰ They are more precious than gold,
than much pure gold;
they are sweeter than honey,
than honey from the honeycomb.

¹¹ By them your servant is warned;
in keeping them there is great reward.

¹² But who can discern their own errors?
Forgive my hidden faults.

¹³ Keep your servant also from willful sins;
may they not rule over me.
Then I will be blameless,
innocent of great transgression.

¹⁴ May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart
be pleasing in your sight,
LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.



Psalm 20

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

- ¹ May the LORD answer you when you are in distress;
may the name of the God of Jacob protect you.
² May he send you help from the sanctuary
and grant you support from Zion.
³ May he remember all your sacrifices
and accept your burnt offerings.
⁴ May he give you the desire of your heart
and make all your plans succeed.
⁵ May we shout for joy over your victory
and lift up our banners in the name of our God.

May the LORD grant all your requests.

- ⁶ Now this I know:
The LORD gives victory to his anointed.
He answers him from his heavenly sanctuary
with the victorious power of his right hand.
⁷ Some trust in chariots and some in horses,
but we trust in the name of the LORD our God.
⁸ They are brought to their knees and fall,
but we rise up and stand firm.
⁹ LORD, give victory to the king!
Answer us when we call!



Inclusive Christianity, day 1

During the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, we had a service for all the different congregations in our town. The sermon was given by our own minister, the Rev Dr Keith Brindle, who has agreed for it to be shared in The Bridge today and tomorrow.

In **John 17:20-26** we hear Jesus praying to his Father that, just as he and the Father are one and united, so all his followers should be one and united. He goes on to say that when his followers are united as one, others will see this and recognise that they are loved by God. So Jesus taught that our being together, working together, praying together, with Christ in our lives, is what will lead others to the love that God has for them.

Think of a single jigsaw puzzle piece. If you look at just one piece, do you see the whole picture? To see the whole picture you have to assemble the whole puzzle – or look at the picture on the box!

Of course you could take your single piece of the jigsaw and focus on it to the exclusion of everything else; you could convince yourself that ‘I have the whole picture’ – that my piece is all that matters.

Sometimes we convince ourselves that the piece of the Christian picture we have is the whole thing. But our bit of Christian truth and practice is just that; a bit of it. If we get so tied up in our way of understanding things, our way of doing things, it can lead to excluding others who understand and do things differently. Unbalanced faith – over-emphasis on certain points – leads to error.

Some people like listening to music live, or on the radio, some on vinyl records or on CDs, some by streaming from the internet. Your favourite way does not invalidate the way other people choose to get their music – the main thing is that the music can speak to our souls, soothe or uplift our spirits and connect us to something universal, and the way we listen to it is of secondary importance.

You may know that when it comes to prayer, quiet contemplation and reflection works for you. For others praying in tongues works for them. One person is helped by liturgical communion services, another likes more informal worship. One may sing contemporary Christian songs, another may prefer the well-known hymns. One may prefer to include aspects of secular culture within worship, others prefer to keep the ‘purity’ of Christian worship. If we pursue our way to the exclusion of others, we change a ‘preference’ into a ‘truth’ – and then we have then lost the actual truth; this is that there are different ways to pray, different ways to worship. God our Father is generous enough to give us forms of prayer and worship that bring us into a closer relationship with Him.

We stay loyal to the core truths of the Christian faith, but let us celebrate the broad variety of practice within the church locally and worldwide – God has made us all different but called us to be united as one!

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



Inclusive Christianity, day 2

Yesterday, I suggested that we sometimes treated our Christian life and practice like a single jigsaw puzzle piece that so takes our full attention that we never look at the 'whole picture' – which needs all the other pieces interlinked.

There is another temptation, and that is to hold our piece of the puzzle in our closed hands, and to deny its existence – to say "I have nothing" or even "I am nothing". But without each of us the picture is imperfect, there is a piece missing. How sad the jigsaw in the jumble sale with a note on it saying "incomplete."

If the one extreme view risks excluding people and groups who see things differently, this other extreme view leads us to exclude ourselves. The result of the two extremes is the same, some of God's people are excluded, and as a result we are no longer one, not united as Jesus prayed we would be.

Why might you think you are nothing and that your piece of the picture doesn't matter?

- Maybe because you're a drunk – like Noah
- Or you think you're too old – like Abraham & Sarah
- Or you're a daydreamer – like Isaac
- Or you're a liar – like Jacob
- Or you've been abused – like Joseph
- Or you have a stutter – like Moses
- Or you're afraid – like Gideon
- Or you think you're too young like Jeremiah
- Or other people think you are, like Timothy
- Or you've had an affair – like David
- Or you're depressed – like Elijah
- Or you've run away from God – like Jonah
- Or you've denied Christ – like Peter
- Or you're full of questions and doubt – like Thomas
- Or you worry about everything – like Martha
- Or you've been divorced several times – like the Samaritan woman
- Or you feel like an outcast, beyond love and forgiveness – like the woman caught in adultery, the man with leprosy, the haemorrhaging woman, Zacchaeus the tax-collector and almost every person that Jesus met, and loved, and forgave.

Why would you think you are nothing; that your piece of the picture doesn't matter? That is not what God thinks of you. That is not what Jesus thinks of you. No one is an outcast. No one is beyond his love. No one is beyond his forgiveness.

Are we excluding others or ourselves, because of how we see God's jig-saw?

God's vision and his generosity is far wider than we can imagine!

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



Jacob's Dream at Bethel – Part 1

The Background

Genesis 28 v 10-22

As Jacob flees for his life and seeks refuge with his Mother's family he stops over night and has this dream, which changes him.

If you have time to look at the chapters earlier in the story you will see that Jacob's family is mucky. The brothers are very different and do not get on. One described as a hunter, gives us the picture of a strong guy, the other stayed in the tents, not an adventurer, yet it is this one who ends up looking to the future. One loved by his father and the other by his mother. Jacob encouraged by his mother deceives both Esau and his father Isaac. As he leaves the situation is tense.

On his journey he discovers God, or does God discover him. He now has a purpose to his life.

They could dream of the life beyond. Jacob is fleeing for his life, the Lord's word gives him courage, and he discovers God. *Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land.*

This is the first time in Genesis that God reveals himself through a dream, previous appearances are informal, God appeared to Abraham and said..... This is the first mention of Jacob having contact with God. Later as Jacob returns to the promise land he has another dream. The positioning of these dreams in the texts seems important. One on leaving, the other on his return many years later. Both have references to angels, Genesis 32 v 1 *Now as Jacob went on his way the angels of God met him.*

On both occasions he is worried by his relationship with his brother. The family was a mess. Jacob had deceived his father and brother for his own ends or perhaps his Mother's end so here he is fleeing for his life. On his return he is frightened of meeting his brother Esau.

These stories passed down, and finally brought together into a written text for us to mark lean and inwardly digest, are full of families with conflicts. Jacob is labeled a deceiver, yet we feel sorry for him when he is deceived by Laban over his wives and later by his older sons about Joseph. Finally at the end of his life he meets with Pharaoh when both respect the other; Jacob the older blesses Pharaoh the younger, see Genesis 41 v 10

It is easy to think of Esau as the *baddy* the Father of Edom and Jacob the *goody* the Father of Israel but it isn't that simple.

Elisabeth Barnett - Former Leprosy mission occupational therapist 79-88 now retired and settled in France with her husband James Barnett



Jacob's Dream at Bethel – Part 2

The Two brothers

Genesis 28 v 10-22

Clare Amos in her commentary on Genesis lists their contrasting characteristics.

Jacob	Esau
Stronger	Weaker
Younger	Older <i>well just !</i>
Master	Servant
Smooth	Hairy
Stayed in Tents	Outdoor man
Loved by Rebecca	Loved by Isaac
Cook vegetables	Hunts and prepares meat
Lives for the future	Lives for the presence
Scheming	Sensual
'Female'	'Male'
Israel	Edom

A couple of points come out Jacob, stayed in the tents, implying he stayed with the woman folk, and was loved by his mother; while Esau went a-hunting with the men, and was loved by his father.

The difference I want to focus on is Esau lives for the presence, and Jacob for the future; to get the feel of this you need to read through these chapters to see the difference in their lives. Esau trying to please his father, and then his mother; Jacob scheming on how he can improve his lot. Whether we are 5 years old or a hundred we need a purpose, something beyond, something to reach for, as the french say « un projet de vie ». Jacob meets his match in Laban his father-in-law; by then he is astute and finally outstrips him.

Between leaving the family home and his return he had become a man with a vision, *the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring; 14 and your offspring shall be like the dust of the earth, and you shall spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south; and all the families of the earth shall be blessed in you and in your offspring.*

There is a complete unexpectedness of the voice of God at the end dream. *And the Lord stood beside him and said, 'I am the Lord, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; When I first went to India I had this on my prayer card 15 Know that I am with you and will keep you wherever you go, and will bring you back to this land; for I will not leave you* a looking forward, and security, confident that I would not be alone and I would return.

Strange to think I have now left what was my home, living in France for 22 years and a French citizen for over 11 I know God is with me and the land I head for is eternal.

Elisabeth Barnett - Former Leprosy mission occupational therapist 79-88 now retired and settled in France with her husband James Barnett



Jacob's Dream at Bethel – Part 3

Jacob

Genesis 28 v 10-22

Returning to Jacob, he heads off, and as the sun sets he lays down to sleep, taking a stone for a pillow, implying he has moved the stone. He shows signs of a new found strength. He dreams of the ladder reaching up into heaven *and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it*. A link between heaven and earth, and then *the Lord stood beside him*.

The God of Abraham and Isaac becomes his God, he is connected to the land and will return to become the Father of a Nation. *You will spread far and wide*, his descendants will spread outside Canaan. Appropriate when you think Jacob is heading off to Haran, and the first readers of Genesis, as we know it today were likely to have been the exiles in Babylon. A reminder to them that even when far from the promised land, they were not outside God's promise *I shall be with you, I shall bring you back*.

Jacob awakes, shocked, terrified, and humbled *'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.'* The place where heaven and earth meet, a gateway to heaven; he learns awe and fear of God. He turns the stone on end. I guess it was not the size of even a small menhir, but worthy to be called a pillar. If you read on in Genesis you will notice stones appear again in Jacob's story. The next one is lifting the stone off the mouth of the well when he sees Rachel, later at his return to the promise land he builds an altar. No longer a feeble Mummy's boy

He dedicates the place and renames it Bethel which means God's house, where he was first conscious of the numinous, the awesome awareness of God.

By escaping the family and going into the future he found God, or more likely God found him. Faith is a gift from God. He had the courage to go into the unknown and in it he found physical strength to move stones, but more important a resilience to cope with the life ahead whatever came his way; To conclude from Tom Wright's reflection on this passage like Jacob we go out into the threatening unknown, with the vision of the risen Lord promising us the inheritance, to inspire on the long road ahead. And every place where the angels meet us becomes another house of God, another gate to heaven.

Adapted from a sermon preached on 6th Sunday after Trinity, at that moment in the Anglican lectionary we were reading through the book of Genesis Sunday by Sunday.

Elisabeth Barnett - Former Leprosy mission occupational therapist 79-88 now retired and settled in France with her husband James Barnett



Psalm 21

For the director of music. A psalm of David.

¹ The king rejoices in your strength, LORD.
How great is his joy in the victories you give!

² You have granted him his heart's desire
and have not withheld the request of his lips.^[b]

³ You came to greet him with rich blessings
and placed a crown of pure gold on his head.

⁴ He asked you for life, and you gave it to him—
length of days, for ever and ever.

⁵ Through the victories you gave, his glory is great;
you have bestowed on him splendor and majesty.

⁶ Surely you have granted him unending blessings
and made him glad with the joy of your presence.

⁷ For the king trusts in the LORD;
through the unfailing love of the Most High
he will not be shaken.

⁸ Your hand will lay hold on all your enemies;
your right hand will seize your foes.

⁹ When you appear for battle,
you will burn them up as in a blazing furnace.
The LORD will swallow them up in his wrath,
and his fire will consume them.

¹⁰ You will destroy their descendants from the earth,
their posterity from mankind.

¹¹ Though they plot evil against you
and devise wicked schemes, they cannot succeed.

¹² You will make them turn their backs
when you aim at them with drawn bow.

¹³ Be exalted in your strength, LORD;
we will sing and praise your might.



Psalm 22

For the director of music. To the tune of "The Doe of the Morning." A psalm of David.

¹ My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
Why are you so far from saving me,
so far from my cries of anguish?
² My God, I cry out by day, but you do not answer,
by night, but I find no rest.

³ Yet you are enthroned as the Holy One;
you are the one Israel praises.
⁴ In you our ancestors put their trust;
they trusted and you delivered them.
⁵ To you they cried out and were saved;
in you they trusted and were not put to shame.

⁶ But I am a worm and not a man,
scorned by everyone, despised by the people.
⁷ All who see me mock me;
they hurl insults, shaking their heads.
⁸ "He trusts in the LORD," they say,
"let the LORD rescue him.
Let him deliver him,
since he delights in him."

⁹ Yet you brought me out of the womb;
you made me trust in you, even at my mother's breast.
¹⁰ From birth I was cast on you;
from my mother's womb you have been my God.

¹¹ Do not be far from me,
for trouble is near
and there is no one to help.

¹² Many bulls surround me;
strong bulls of Bashan encircle me.
¹³ Roaring lions that tear their prey
open their mouths wide against me.
¹⁴ I am poured out like water,
and all my bones are out of joint.
My heart has turned to wax;
it has melted within me.
¹⁵ My mouth is dried up like a potsherd,

and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth;
you lay me in the dust of death.

¹⁶ Dogs surround me,
a pack of villains encircles me;
they pierce^[e] my hands and my feet.

¹⁷ All my bones are on display;
people stare and gloat over me.

¹⁸ They divide my clothes among them
and cast lots for my garment.

¹⁹ But you, LORD, do not be far from me.
You are my strength; come quickly to help me.

²⁰ Deliver me from the sword,
my precious life from the power of the dogs.

²¹ Rescue me from the mouth of the lions;
save me from the horns of the wild oxen.

²² I will declare your name to my people;
in the assembly I will praise you.

²³ You who fear the LORD, praise him!
All you descendants of Jacob, honor him!
Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!

²⁴ For he has not despised or scorned
the suffering of the afflicted one;
he has not hidden his face from him
but has listened to his cry for help.

²⁵ From you comes the theme of my praise in the great assembly;
before those who fear you I will fulfill my vows.

²⁶ The poor will eat and be satisfied;
those who seek the LORD will praise him—
may your hearts live forever!

²⁷ All the ends of the earth
will remember and turn to the LORD,
and all the families of the nations
will bow down before him,

²⁸ for dominion belongs to the LORD
and he rules over the nations.

²⁹ All the rich of the earth will feast and worship;
all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—
those who cannot keep themselves alive.

³⁰ Posterity will serve him;
future generations will be told about the Lord.

³¹ They will proclaim his righteousness,
declaring to a people yet unborn:
He has done it!



Coincidences?

"But Mary treasured all these things, and pondered them in her heart." Luke 2.19

"But his mother treasured all these things in her heart." Luke 2.51

"When I pray coincidences happen; when I don't pray they don't." William Temple

Whenever I read the first part of Luke's Gospel I have in my mind a picture of a very elderly Mary in her house, probably in Ephesus, chatting with a visitor - a middle-aged, well travelled Dr Luke, and sharing with him all that happened around the conception and birth of her first son Jesus. I would love to have been a fly on the wall, listening in. We owe a debt to Luke for recording what he had been told in such detail.

Of course, the conversation may not have occurred in the way I imagine, but I do wonder who else would have been able to give Luke so much intimate detail, not only about Mary's own story, but that of Zechariah and Elizabeth and the birth of John the Baptist, about Simeon's words when Joseph and Mary took the baby Jesus to the Temple, and the occasion when they took Jesus to the Temple when he was 12 years old. So let us assume for now that the conversation between Mary and Luke did take place. Mary would have been telling him about incidents that happened possibly 40 or 50 years earlier. Immediate testimonies to God's goodness are important, but so are the stories in our history, too.

I still look back on my own conversion 50 years ago with amazement, because in a very pedestrian way I first experienced the truth of William Temple's comment: *"When I pray, coincidences happen. When I don't pray, they don't."* It was at the end of my first year of my degree course, and the exam the following day was on a subject that I had not coped with. We had been told that if we failed an exam we would be chucked off the course, and I was staring failure in the face.

That evening I got on my knees and invited Jesus to come into my life and help me, because my life was in shreds around me. I had been brought up a Christian, but never before had I reached the point of handing my life over to the Lord in this way. Sure enough, the next morning I made a total and utter hash of the exam and knew I had failed. Incredibly, though, I was given the opportunity to retake at the end of the summer holidays. I swotted all summer, and not only passed the exam the second time, but built a solid foundation of understanding of the subject for the following years.

Through this, not only did I discover for the first time how much God is involved in our everyday lives, but I was filled with wonder at the kindness of God in enabling me to retake that exam and make good – a wonderful, Godly coincidence! Yes, it was 50 years ago, but these moments are so important!

However we often need, like Mary, to take time to contemplate what has happened before we fully appreciate those Godly coincidences, God's hand on our lives. Like Mary, we need to take time to digest what is happening and to ponder, so that our trust in God is deepened – and then we can share them when the time is right!

"When I pray coincidences happen; when I don't pray they don't."



Persecutor to Proclaimer – Transformation of Paul

A major part of the recorded epistles is ascribed to Paul. The transformation story of Paul is unique.

Saul – the persecutor of Jesus

To know Paul, we must first understand Saul.

The story starts with Stephen's testimony before the Sanhedrin (*Acts 6 & 7*) of Jesus as the Messiah who the Jews had rejected and put to death (*Acts 7:52*). He claimed that he saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God (*Acts 7:56*). This was blasphemy to the Jews. Neither then, nor now do the Jews accept Jesus Christ (the Anointed Saviour) as the Messiah (deliverer of Jewish nation). He does not qualify to be their Messiah for a number of reasons: (a) He did not build the Third Temple (*Ezekiel 37:26-28*); (b) He did not gather all Jews back to the land of Israel (*Isaiah 43:5-6*); (c) He did not usher in an era of world peace (*Isaiah 2:4*); (d) He did not spread universal knowledge of the God of Israel, which will unite humanity (*Zechariah 14:9* "The Lord will be king over the whole earth. On that day there will be one Lord, and his name the only name") (e) He did not release them from Roman oppression; (f) The Messiah must be divine. But Jesus was born to a woman.; (f) Death of Jesus on the cross as a common criminal demeans the Messiah. If Jesus is the King of Jews, he can't be crucified.

These possibly were some "valid" reasons for Saul, a Greek speaking Jew to hate the followers of the (Jesus) Way. Saul was from Tarsus, part of the Roman empire. He lived in Jerusalem. He was a tent maker by profession living in Jerusalem. A Pharisee and a proponent of the Jewish faith. He was trained in Jewish law by Gamaliel (*Acts 22:3*) who was a respected member of the Jewish high council, the Sanhedrin. (Incidentally, Gamaliel himself for whatever reason advised the Sanhedrin not to persecute the apostles and let them go their way, *Acts 5:33-42*). Saul was well versed in Greek and Jewish philosophies. He was the best Jew and best Pharisee of his generation (*Phil 3: 4-6*).

For Saul it was shameful that Jews were following a fake messiah. This angered the Pharisee in Saul. He was committed to Jewish law and religious practices in the Torah. How can a Jew claim himself to be the Messiah? It is heresy. It's fake news. It is possible that Paul believed that the Jewish converts to the Way mingled too freely with Gentile converts thus associating themselves with idolatrous practices. The young Saul certainly would have rejected the resurrection of Jesus because God cannot favour Jesus by raising him from the dead before the final judgment.

Paul, the Pharisee enforced the Jewish laws of the Torah. In his passion to re-claim followers of Jesus to Judaism, he travelled from synagogue to synagogue urging punishment to Jews who had accepted Jesus. He could have been assigned by the Sanhedrin to be where Stephen was stoned to death (*Act 7:58* ... Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul). He must have been angered and perplexed when Stephen had said that he could see Jesus standing at the right hand in the glory of God. The human birth of God (as Jesus), His death on the cross (unbecoming of a king) and standing next to God after the resurrection (divinity) were the stumbling blocks for Saul to accept Jesus as the Lord.

In gratitude, for His glory

PLN Raju - Formerly with The Leprosy Mission Trust India



Paul – the proclaimer of Jesus

While Saul was working to reclaim followers of Jesus to the Jewish law; the Lord had a plan to claim him to Himself. The passion of Saul for persecution must be changed to conviction to proclaim the Gospel to the nations.

Saul was on his way from Jerusalem to Damascus to persecute the followers of the WAY (Acts 9: 1). The power of Almighty God had manifested as the bright blinding light from heaven around him. Saul fell from his horse. It was the same glorious light that surrounded God within which Stephen saw Jesus. The Lord could have struck Saul with a bolt of lightning and decimated him. That would have stopped all persecution of His followers, forever. That is not God's nature. All God's miracles work through His love. His convicting power is in His forgiving love and not condemning punishment.

The conversation between Jesus and Saul reveals Jesus' relationship with his followers. Saul heard the voice (Acts 9:4-5) *"Saul, Saul why do you persecute me?" "Who are you, Lord?"* Saul asked. *"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,"* he replied. Jesus experiences the same persecution that His believers experience. Once I accept Jesus as my Saviour, His Spirit resides in me. Anyone who grieves a believer, grieves the Lord. It is personal. All the trials believers undergo because of their faith in the Lord, are laid on the Lord and they are delivered *Psalms 34:19 "The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all"*. It is a great relief to realize that my persecution is not mine, and neither the response to it (Romans 12:19 *"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord"*).

In the case of Saul, the Lord's repayment was not condemnation but conviction. Once Saul came face to face with Jesus and experienced His majesty, his journey to serve the Lord Jesus had started. When Saul got up, he was blind. He did not eat or drink for three days. It was the time for prayer, meditation, repentance and cleansing. God allowed Saul to stay in that experience to reflect on who he was then and earlier. At times a challenging experience must be gone through to be convicted of the power and love of God.

After the shocking encounter with Jesus, Saul was not abandoned. Ananias, a believer, but one who feared Saul was sent to Saul to lay hands, pray and anoint him with the Holy Spirit. What an amazingly gracious God? The persecuted (Ananias) was used to lead the persecutor (Saul) to the saving grace of Jesus (Acts 9:17 *Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord — Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here — has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit."*).

God had a plan for Saul. To take the gospel to the gentiles, their kings and the people of Israel (Acts 9:15 *But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel"*).

Most difficult people are also the most passionate. They are driven by strong commitments. The Lord uses them in His service to bring glory to Himself.

Jesus did not destroy Saul; He convicted him to believe Him through a miracle of power and love. Saul questioned Jesus as the Messiah. A miracle delivered and transformed the soul of Saul to Paul. Transformation of Saul (the persecutor of Jesus) to Paul (the proclaimer of Jesus) demonstrated the majestic power and magnificent love of Jesus.

In gratitude, for His glory

PLN Raju - Formerly with The Leprosy Mission Trust India



Paul: A Servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ – Part 1

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness — a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour”. Titus 1:1-3

In his letter to his spiritual son Titus, Paul reiterates his relationship with God and his ministry.

His relationship with God - Servanthood

Paul was saved by the grace of God through a personal encounter with Jesus while on his way to Damascus to persecute the followers of The Way.

Paul was bought as a servant by Jesus through His blood shed on the Cross. When Paul had realised the sacrifice of Jesus, he had no option but to submit himself as a servant to the Lord. It was voluntary service by Paul to Jesus. It was an act of submission in gratitude to the saving grace he had received through Jesus. A grace that was given to him despite his persecution of the believers in Jesus. Paul had on his own transferred the rights on his life to God because he truly understood the transaction that took place on the Cross; God redeeming mankind to himself.

Paul’s allegiance was to Jesus as a person, God incarnate and His grace. Serving to redeem the sinful mankind to God as a servant and not as a ruler differentiated Jesus from all other preachers. It is to that Jesus, Paul submitted himself as a subject. The desires, wishes, purpose, direction, commands of the master were received by Paul in an attitude of servitude, deserving nothing by his own merit, but through complete subjugation.

Paul was first a servant before anything else. His master was Jesus. He would do what his master commands him to do. He had no voice of his own but that of his Lord’s. He had given his life to serve Jesus. His interests do not matter. He yielded himself to Jesus fully. His eyes were focused only on Jesus. He would go where his master tells him to go. He would do what the master asks him to do. As a servant Paul would serve the Lord diligently. He had only one master, not many masters and not many Gods ie., the true God who came into this world as a servant to serve and save the lost souls.

Paul poured out his life into the hands of Jesus and waited on the Lord to be used by Him for His work. It was being fully available to God’s work. He no longer existed, but only Jesus in him. He emptied himself so that the Lord could fill him with the salvation story-promise of eternal life. It was giving his physical and intellectual abilities to God for Him to use them for His purpose. He no longer had an identity of his own, apart from Jesus.

Till his martyrdom Paul had remained a servant of Jesus. He did not consider himself worthy to be crucified the way Jesus was crucified, but desired to be crucified upside down. Whether they were travails, tests or commendations they did not take Paul away from his servanthood to Jesus. In spirit Paul had accepted Jesus as his master and the Lord. It was the only way he could connect with the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of God.

In gratitude, for His glory

PLN Raju - Formerly with The Leprosy Mission Trust India



Paul: A Servant and an Apostle of Jesus Christ – Part 2

“Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness — a faith and knowledge resting on the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time, and at his appointed season he brought his word to light through the preaching entrusted to me by the command of God our Saviour”. Titus 1:1-3

His ministry - Apostle of Jesus Christ

Paul claims himself as a messenger of the message of eternal life through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross, where He made himself a servant of God. Out of the servanthood flows his apostleship, carrier of the Good News of Jesus.

God’s promises are always true from the beginning of time. The promise of eternal life for mankind was brought to light (revealed) through the person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Restoration of man’s holy relationship with God through the person of Jesus Christ is the central issue.

An apostle (messenger) is sent out with the message. He does not go out with his personal understanding of what he is supposed to communicate. He is only a carrier. The message is given to him. He can’t change anything in the message. He must truthfully communicate the message. Apostleship is the responsibility given to Paul.

All the promises of God are eternal in the new creation of life upon receiving Jesus as the Saviour. The Saviour is a person, the person of Jesus and not any theology, religion, practices and laws. Paul was not just conveying the theology of grace but the person of Jesus Himself. He was standing up for Jesus as a person because it is the person of Jesus who demonstrated God’s grace on the cross. Thus, it was very significant that Paul had represented a person who had justified us to God.

The purpose of being part of the journey to save souls from damnation in hell was the excitement that led Paul from place to place, community to community, to hostile people groups and through many journeys that were fraught with danger. He was willing to go through all troubles and consider them pure joy compared to achieving his goal.

Since his foundation was deeply rooted in the person of Jesus Christ nothing could deter him from carrying his mission. It was not a job. It was a mission for the benefit of others, not for his own self-glorification, but to glorify the living God, his personal saviour, Lord Jesus Christ. He received the peace that surpasses all understanding in Jesus. The love of Jesus was the eternal spring of living waters that nourished Paul. He let his faith roots deep into the living Word to be nourished to nourish others.

Lessons for me

To expound the message of grace of God needs revelation knowledge of the scriptures. The message is simple but can be understood only when it is revealed by the Holy Spirit. Without such a revelation, the message of grace will not manifest in our lives. So, apostleship has as underlying phenomenon of revealed scriptures to the apostle.

Paul had a reason and purpose for his ministry. He was to preach of eternal life through Jesus Christ. He knew why he was commissioned by God as a servant. He was not an also-ran preacher. There was absolute clarity in his work. He was effective.

We must reach out to the world with the message of the person of Jesus Christ and provide an opportunity for the spiritually blind to receive Jesus as their personal Saviour and be justified to God.

Discipleship is not an option. It is a mandate for Paul as a servant of God, so it is mine.



Psalm 23

A psalm of David.

- ¹ The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.
² He makes me lie down in green pastures,
he leads me beside quiet waters,
³ he refreshes my soul.
He guides me along the right paths
for his name's sake.
⁴ Even though I walk
through the darkest valley,
I will fear no evil,
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff,
they comfort me.
- ⁵ You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies.
You anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.
- ⁶ Surely your goodness and love will follow me
all the days of my life,
and I will dwell in the house of the LORD
forever.



The Coming of Zion's King

Zecharia 9

- ⁹ Rejoice greatly, Daughter Zion!
Shout, Daughter Jerusalem!
See, your king comes to you,
righteous and victorious,
lowly and riding on a donkey,
on a colt, the foal of a donkey.
- ¹⁰ I will take away the chariots from Ephraim
and the warhorses from Jerusalem,
and the battle bow will be broken.
He will proclaim peace to the nations.
His rule will extend from sea to sea
and from the River^[b] to the ends of the earth.
- ¹¹ As for you, because of the blood of my covenant with you,
I will free your prisoners from the waterless pit.
- ¹² Return to your fortress, you prisoners of hope;
even now I announce that I will restore twice as much to you.
- ¹³ I will bend Judah as I bend my bow
and fill it with Ephraim.
I will rouse your sons, Zion,
against your sons, Greece,
and make you like a warrior's sword.

The LORD Will Appear

- ¹⁴ Then the LORD will appear over them;
his arrow will flash like lightning.
The Sovereign LORD will sound the trumpet;
he will march in the storms of the south,
- ¹⁵ and the LORD Almighty will shield them.
They will destroy
and overcome with slingstones.
They will drink and roar as with wine;
they will be full like a bowl
used for sprinkling^[c] the corners of the altar.
- ¹⁶ The LORD their God will save his people on that day
as a shepherd saves his flock.
They will sparkle in his land
like jewels in a crown.
- ¹⁷ How attractive and beautiful they will be!
Grain will make the young men thrive,
and new wine the young women.



The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross - 1.

Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they are doing (Luke 23,34)

Is Jesus here praying for pardon for those condemning him? As if it had not been so serious, just a mistake? How is it possible that he weakens the weight of their deed?

The common reaction should be in Jesus' situation that he prays for *punishment* on those who had caused all this for him! This would be the *natural* level: sin must be punished in a direct way and in appropriate measure. - What is behind this type of thinking? Anger. Boiling feelings, and regarding the other one as an enemy, whom I should struggle with, exercise righteousness myself – a kind of sharia – arrange it locally, sufficiently –and then we can relax: it is done, it is over.

A morally higher level is asking for *justice* upon them. That God will demonstrate his justice at least later, punishing sin in an indirect way, as sin may not remain without punishment. Judgement confined to God, shifted to later times, but surely it will happen – this gives at least comfort, a feeling of anticipated satisfaction. This would be the *ethical* level. - What is behind this thinking? A relative subjectivity.

But the prayer of Jesus is totally different. Neither punishment, nor justice... but a prayer: *"Father, forgive them...."* This is the *divine* level! Primarily, because Jesus here comments in an indirect way on his own, soon upcoming death, the global, perfect and total sacrifice for all the sins of mankind who ever lived. But also He gives an explanation: *"they do not know what they are doing..."* But they did! They firmly knew what they wanted to achieve with his crucifixion, they seemed to know all the political and clerical reasons why Jesus ought to die!

Jesus here points to that depth of stupidity where theoretical and practical knowledge splits. "Thinking to know", but not "experiencing". They were sure about their own knowledge of who Jesus was. They were certain in themselves, their pre-suppositions and false ideas. But not experiencing anything of Jesus, they did not "taste" him in practice!

Western Christianity in our times probably loses most people due to this fact. They "know" much about God, about Jesus, about theology and church, but on their own. Having regiments of pre-suppositions and even more false ideas. But in darkness as they do not "taste", do not experience it in practice. They do not want to see who Jesus really is. Therefore the power of Jesus has no strength in their lives. What they do, how they live: is out of their knowledge and control.

Jesus is not angry with them as we often are. He has pity for these ones. "They only think they know!... but they do not! It they only knew what a chance they have missed!..."

*Neither natural, nor judicial level. But divine! Even in this foolishness, even in this depth:
Jesus is the loving, merciful God. Wanting to save all!*



The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross - 2.

"Amen, I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise" (Luke 23,39-43)

This is a brilliant point in the absolute darkness. Jesus, standing himself, too, before his own death, proclaims life! He suffered himself, and in the meantime filled suffering for the other one with hope!

What could he discover in this man, and why did he immediately proclaim mercy and eternal life for him?

It was the sincere and simple confession of sin. The other one was just mocking on Jesus even with his last energy and words. He finished as he had lived before: without penitence, any knowledge of his sinfulness, and died, as had lived. - How often we are even proud saying "This is me! Do not want me to change!"

But this one, on the other side of Jesus said something quite new: *"Don't you fear God even when you have been sentenced to die? We deserve to die for our crimes, but this man hasn't done anything wrong. Jesus, remember me when you come into your Kingdom!"* It was a revelation, a confession! It was the result of a deep self-examination – amidst the most painful sufferings and agony! There were too many happenings in those moments for all three of them. It would be quite understandable if someone in that depth of suffering was not able to look out of himself, just concentrate on his own sufferings, on his own pains, on his own problems.

But this one observed what was happening all around, what Jesus was doing, saying beside him on the cross. It was as if he had made a photoshot of Jesus in agony! He was perceptive! Had still energy and was keen to register in his mind what the other one at the other side of Jesus said and how he behaved. Great thing! He was not just simply in silence – but see, how active he was! He even was strong enough to try to correct his co-sinner colleague! Who maybe had been his fellow in crime earlier! Who knows? But now he warns his teammate. *"Don't you fear God since you are under the same sentence...." "...we are punished justly, but this man has done nothing wrong."* His words can be regarded as a theological clarification on penitence, confession and pardon. Three in one. It is all there, on the lips of this criminal!

What is extremely difficult is to pronounce: to be "punished justly". One of the sins of sin is that the evil makes us blind and deaf – and makes us say and even believe that we are innocent. Same as in the Paradise - "Not me, but she! not me, but they! not me, but the whole world!"

"I am the cause!" – this is the great announcement of this criminal. "Mea culpa! Mea culpa! Mea maxima culpa!" – as our Catholic brethren point to themselves in the liturgy, as sign of penitence. "Remember me Jesus!"

Why is that great? Because it is personal. It is about ME. My status. It is full of helplessness. But it is full of hope as well! This man positioned himself besides Jesus. Formerly his position was on the side of the other criminal. But now he is changing his position and stands to the other side, on that of Jesus! He gives up past – and takes up future!

"I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." Jesus proclaims perspective to an agonising man! No matter you WERE NOT with me in the last few decades, but you WILL BE forever!

Past has gone. Those coming to Jesus with penitence have just future, anytime! Me, too?



The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross - 3.

“Standing near the cross were Jesus’ mother and his mother’s sister, Mary (the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother standing there beside the disciple he loved, he said to her: Woman, here is your son. And he said to his disciple: Here is your mother. And from then on this disciple took her into his home.” John 19,25-27

This one is the most touching, a really tearful, scene: Jesus on the cross, beneath huddle his mother, his aunt and the beloved disciple – just a few steps from him– he sees those who had been the closest ones to him.

These words of Jesus: *“Woman, here is your son!”* does not only mean that they should take care of each other. But refers on that new relationship Jesus had mentioned well before, too: the spiritual fellowship through Him in love. He now commands it from the cross, and there under it this new “model” becomes reality.

Fellowship through Jesus is a mystery. One of the wonders and strengths of TLM is THIS kind of fellowship –enough to think of arrivals and farewells to and from our meetings, how happy and how sad they are – and all emotions in between: the sincere love, being bound together, and that inexpressible warmth TLM Fellowship means: we can only say thank you to the Lord for this miracle! Where totally strangers from all ends of the world, speaking one language - and now I do not think of English!- sorry- but that of love! When all differences disappear, when we are united in Christ! When we have the same feeling as the disciple on the mountain: *“Lord, it is so good for us to be here”* – and behind this is the feeling of keeping as important the same principles and values, and taking it seriously our following the same Lord.

The same mystery as when a lonely widow pops in to church and is warmly welcomed, invited and treated with love – and she becomes a pillar of the church-family within a year. Or when a young child “chooses” a spiritual grandmother from the church, just by feeling or by a kind of sympathy, and mysterious bonds are created, emotional and deep links between biologically strangers.

But above all, this was the moment where Jesus and his mother finally became one family and were finally united in spirit, too! Those who in blood belonged together are finally created a spiritual unity as well! After disagreements about his person and duty (we know about that of Jesus’ age of 12, then later, when his mother called after him to go back home) it seems that by now they really are MET in spirit, too. A very powerful reminder that differences of generations, family conflicts, disagreements can only be dealt with by Him, through Him, under His cross.

Jesus not only appraises the mysterious bond of strangers by faith in Him, but also expresses that his aim is a “two-in-one relationship”: natural and spiritual. That families by blood should be bound by faith, too, together!

Praise the Lord if we are blessed with real fellowship in love among strangers!

*Praise the Lord if we are blessed with a family where former and next generations are besides genetics,
bound also by faith, together!*

Both is a mystery and a miracle, and great cause to be very thankful for!



The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross - 4.

Eloi, Eloi, lama sabakhtani! My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Matt 27:45-46)

This scene on Golgotha is majestic, powerful, triumphant and glorious. We have in our minds all the spiritual heritages of 2 000 years of Christianity, victorious interpretation of the cross by the apostles, martyrdom of millions for this cross in the arenas of Rome and elsewhere in the Roman Empire. We have in our mind the pompous gothic stones carvings in wonderful cathedrals, marvellous baroque paintings with shining glorias above the head of Jesus, we have in our mind all those Golgothas all around the Christian world in villages, along the roads where the cross in the middle of the three is much higher than the two other ones. And even bleeding, even with a crown of thorns, Jesus is full of majesty and power in our minds. We have in our ears the heavenly music of Bach and Handel, the Agnus Dei and Lacrimosa – and we shiver from the holiness and highness of the feeling.

But 2000 years ago in the Roman Empire, a crucifixion meant for everyone the shame of shames, the horror and the getting rid of dangerous criminals, partisans and rebels. The crosses along the roads by then had no right and left hand wings, embracing east and west, north and south – as we so often interpret the open arms of Jesus like this. Crosses at that time were rough, and people by then regarded those hanging on a cross as to be the worst ones. They might throw anything upon them, a sharp stone or anything to express endlessly - we have got rid of you, you are now in our hands, unable to react, to defend yourself, we do whatever we want to do with you! Till now YOU were dangerous to us, but now – finished, you are weak, helpless and WE are strong. They might mock them, amuse themselves on the agony of those hanging, and the elementary cruelty and animal of mankind expressed itself in these legally permitted reactions.

The words „*He saved others, but he can't save himself. He is the King of Israel. Let him come down now from the cross, he trusts in God, let God rescue him if he wants*” were sharper blessings to the heart of Jesus, than were the stones. Where were those who had followed him? Nowhere. They split off from fear. Neither an eye contact, nor the strengthening security of a well known face was there in the proximity of Jesus. Just the darkness. Which totally covered heaven. It was darker than ever before or since.

With his sentiments and words here, feeling forsaken by God, Jesus touched the depth of depths: hell. He now: „*descended to hell...*” Not with his corporal sufferings! They were not the worst ones for him! But with the idea that God had forsaken him. This thought itself was the depth of hell. Because Jesus was just now completing the greatest act of obedience of the universe, He was just step by step fulfilling entirely and completely what God had asked of Him - and amidst this most faithful obedience, Satan attacked Him by tempting Him with God's forsaking Him. Never true! Satan just wants to cut even the very last thread in this way in our heart, that instead of holding even with the last strength that thin thread, we should cut it. And how often we experience this temptation: while remaining faithful to His grace, carrying the burden or being under His trial - and yet feeling ourselves forsaken and lonely, as if God were not in control.

This is Satan's most evil manipulation, darkest trick, and ultimate attack to mash that small faith and to destroy that small hope and to make us uncertain about God and His presence and His power.

Jesus did not avoid, but experienced, this very last and strongest temptation, too. He descended and touched the depth of hell for a moment, the feeling of God's absence, the absolute loneliness.

But He immediately won ultimate victory over it!



The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross - 5-6.

„I thirst.” (John 19:25-30)

Jesus has been hanging for 6 hours on the cross. Bleeding and having high fever. No need to explain or underline what kind of sufferings he might meet in those minutes, adding to all the warmth and strong sunshine. He was truly and corporally suffering.

This one is his most human word from the seven utterances: a basic need of water, of drinking, of smoothening the terrible pain of thirst. Formerly Jesus refused the wine with myrrh, as a sedative, because he wanted to suffer and die consciously.

Physical suffering and pain, terrible feelings also belonged to his redeemer's task. But these ones meant his greatest sacrifice or depth! Therefore we may and should celebrate and bless the sufferings of Jesus, instead of too much thinking and analysing the agony of Jesus in a naturalistic and humiliating way!

This short cry now expresses the human character of Jesus having basic physical needs. But at the same time and all along: He is Lord, fulfilling His divine redemption, as real God, equal with the Father!

„Father, I entrust my spirit into your hands.” Luke 23, 46

Psalm 31

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.



The Seven Last Words of Jesus on the Cross - 7.

It is finished - John 19,30

The very last moments of the human Jesus.

They say our entire life comes again visible in the very last minutes at the end of our lives. In a transcendent way, like a film – deeds and sounds, events and persons, failures and successes, a final huge repetition of the whole – in a very concentrated way. There are no hiding places any more, nor masques, just light and anticipation of the soon upcoming judgement.

Now it is the great, cosmic and eternal report of Jesus about having perfectly fulfilled his task.

What has been perfectly finished? Maybe the same that Jesus responded to his parents when aged 12: „Didn't you know that I had to be about my Father's business?"

His career on earth was to fulfil the wish of the Father. His main task was demonstrating who the Father is and making visible His invisible person, love and deeds. All had been directed towards one point from the beginning to the very end: redemption. To this final purpose had Jesus been born, to accept this human body for a certain time. For this purpose he suffered 33 years long, as, for him, it was a real suffering to live in this body amidst human beings like we are.

This task has now come to the end. And Jesus' report to the Father is something like a final summary of the whole process: nothing is missing. There is no job left. „All that had been my task to do, I have done. All is completed."

We like to interpret it in a sad way, as finished: this is the end, non plus ultra – till now but no further. But Jesus did it in a triumphant way: completely finishing that divine task all along which is described in Philippians 2! He put the last dot, put the crown, the terminal glory upon his ministry! With the ultimate victory!

„Christ Jesus, who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." Phil 2:5-11 Amen.

Marta Risko - country leader TLM Hungary



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 (λέγω 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.

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.



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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Authors in Alphabetical Order

Textuarium

Anne-Claude Jonah	7 March		Gen 28,10-22	14,15,16 March
David, King of Israel	3,4,10,11,17,18,24, March		Psalm 17	3 March
Elisabeth Barnett	14,15,16 March		Psalm 18	4 March
Glynis Forbes	19 March		Psalm 19	10 March
Gunnel Ericson	5 March		Psalm 20	11 March
Helen Walton	8 March		Psalm 21	17 March
James Barnett	1 April		Psalm 22	18 March
Jannine Ebenso	6 March		Psalm 23	24 March
John S.B. Monsell	2 April		Isaiah 40,31	6 March
Keith Brindle, Rev Dr	12,13 March		Zechariah 9	25 March
Marta Risko	26,27,28,29,30,31 March		Matthew 27,45-46	29 March
Otto Kingsley	2 March, 4 April		Mark 10,46-52	5 March
Paul and Niki Jakeman	12,13 March		Luke 2,19	19 March
Peter Laubscher	1 March		Luke 8,2	3 April
Raju PLN Dr	20,21,22,23 March, 3 April		Luke 23,34	26 March
Silvano Perotti	9 March		Luke 23,39-43	27 March
Zecharia prophet	25 March		Luke 23,46	30 March
			John 15,13	1 March
			John 17,20-26	12,13 March
			John 19,25-27	28 March
			John 19,25-30	30,31 March
			John 20,19-30	1 April
			Acts 6-7	20 March
			Acts 9,4-5	21 March
			1 Cor 1,18 ff	4 April
			Gal 6,9	6 March
			Phil 3,20	9 March
			Titus 1,1-3	22,23 March
			James 4,14	2 March
			Rev 5,1-14	7 March