



# **TLM Daily Devotions**

**February 2019**





## Intro to the month

*“Praise the LORD, my soul. LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.”*

*Psalm 104, 1*

On the 27<sup>th</sup> January we TLM worldwide were certainly even more bound together as on the “grey” normal days we are: by celebrating the World Day of Leprosy.

When preparing it well in advance, working it out in details, I felt such a great thankfulness realising and understanding the meaningful anniversaries, too, what we all may look back on and be thankful for. These special figures ment also the pillars of my commemoration on our central reunion in Budapest:

145 years of TLM,  
65 years of celebrating the World Day of Leprosy,  
45 years of TLM Hungary.

Milestones around deep inspirations and inspired, marvellous initiators... From Wellesley and Alice Bailey across Gandhi to the dedication of Raoul Follereau ,,, achieving a lot. We all know the stories behind each one of them... Blessed, holy examples of courage and of a lot of love.

But above all, these milestones are marking the infinite goodness of the Lord, who loves people affected by leprosy, who takes care of them in so many ways and through so many chosen vessels, and who of His power and majesty humbly bows down to them.

*“Praise the LORD, my soul. LORD my God, you are very great; you are clothed with splendor and majesty.”*

Marta



## The Purification

**Luke ii : 22-35** There is a story about Winston Churchill at a baptism shortly before the end of the Second World War. Fortunately the service was a « private baptism » with only the family and friends present. The Prime Minister wept copiously, and sobbed for a poor child being born into a world « such as this. » Like many things in his life, Churchill's Christianity was not exactly conventional. The account of the Purification of the Virgin Mary or the presentation of Jesus in the Temple, is similarly surprising. Simeon, a local resident and presumably quite aged, was inspired to recite what we call the *Nunc dimittis*. He said that he could die in peace because he had seen Jesus. It is a beautiful expression of the assurance of our salvation. Jesus' father and mother were appropriately delighted, but Simeon's inspiration went further than his initial delight. He told Mary that Jesus was set for the fall and rise of many in Israel. He added that a sword would also pierce her heart. We could wonder what Mary said about a funny old man when the family arrived home !

In fact the whole story, with its potentially sorrowful ending, goes beyond the beauty of the *Nunc Dimittis* on its own. It faces the reality of our human condition. It includes the kind of prayer and reflection that we should see in our own pilgrimage, though we may wish to avoid it. It is redolent of a medical mission. We want to see a comfortable future but rifampicin does not secure the repair of damaged nerves and rehabilitation takes time. This kind of mission has its own language. When things go well, we « give thanks » and ask others to do so too. When things go badly we say that we must « work at » them. That is a kind of conventional wisdom, which is quite near to saying that « prayerful advice » was or was not heeded. Churchill was about seventy and exhausted by almost five years of war. He was not giving thanks as victory was assured.

Look at the faces of elderly people as I look at my own. Wrinkles should neither be hidden nor subjected to expensive surgery. They tell their own story. The « crows feet » at the side of old people's eyes are signs of earlier laughter. There may also be signs of terrible things, at least among those who have really lived. Simeon was inspired to foretell the truth. There was suffering to come and dispute when Jesus has to « hold his ground. » For Jesus life would end in the sword that would pierce his mother's heart. The cross and resurrection are integral to our salvation.

In my Anglican Christian tradition we have to follow the « seasons » of the « Christian year. » They are a kind of recital of the life of Jesus. In Advent we look forward to Christmas and his birth. The story of the wise men is about wealth (gold) and incense, leading to myrrh and suffering. Lent is about the struggle to do the good when we are faced with the enticing voice of an adversary (that is what the Hebrew word Satan means). Reality is hard and keeping our principles is often painful, like the anger of some of the people who heard Jesus' teaching or saw his work. The story of the presentation of Jesus is also called the purification of the Virgin Mary, but we need to be careful about that as well. Many mothers suffer because of what their children have to do. Many, on both sides received the dreaded telegram in the Great War of which we have just recollected the centenary.

The price of our salvation, like the price of tyranny for some or victory for others can be very costly, but Simeon reminds us that God is there, neither more nor less. The substance of things hoped for called faith (Hebrews xi:1) is also the evidence of things unseen. There is a spiritual question. Should we thank God for taking our advice or should we continue to do his work in trust and hope, though thick and thin remembering the words of Jesus, but always with vision. « If it be possible let this cup pass from me, ». Success is hard work after all and our efforts, inspired by the spirit of God, are the best that we can offer. Simeon's vision was to be glad in knowing that, at the end of his life, he could say « Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word » because he knew that salvation was assured. That is the full reason for why the story is beautiful.

**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.



## Psalm 97

<sup>1</sup>The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad;  
let the distant shores rejoice.

<sup>2</sup>Clouds and thick darkness surround him;  
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

<sup>3</sup>Fire goes before him  
and consumes his foes on every side.

<sup>4</sup>His lightning lights up the world;  
the earth sees and trembles.

<sup>5</sup>The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,  
before the Lord of all the earth.

<sup>6</sup>The heavens proclaim his righteousness,  
and all peoples see his glory.

<sup>7</sup>All who worship images are put to shame,  
those who boast in idols—  
worship him, all you gods!

<sup>8</sup>Zion hears and rejoices  
and the villages of Judah are glad  
because of your judgments, LORD.

<sup>9</sup>For you, LORD, are the Most High over all the earth;  
you are exalted far above all gods.

<sup>10</sup>Let those who love the LORD hate evil,  
for he guards the lives of his faithful ones  
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.

<sup>11</sup>Light shines on the righteous  
and joy on the upright in heart.

<sup>12</sup>Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous,  
and praise his holy name.



## Psalm 98

*A psalm.*

<sup>1</sup> Sing to the LORD a new song,  
for he has done marvelous things;  
his right hand and his holy arm  
have worked salvation for him.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD has made his salvation known  
and revealed his righteousness to the nations.

<sup>3</sup> He has remembered his love  
and his faithfulness to Israel;  
all the ends of the earth have seen  
the salvation of our God.

<sup>4</sup> Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth,  
burst into jubilant song with music;

<sup>5</sup> make music to the LORD with the harp,  
with the harp and the sound of singing,

<sup>6</sup> with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—  
shout for joy before the LORD, the King.

<sup>7</sup> Let the sea resound, and everything in it,  
the world, and all who live in it.

<sup>8</sup> Let the rivers clap their hands,  
let the mountains sing together for joy;

<sup>9</sup> let them sing before the LORD,  
for he comes to judge the earth.

He will judge the world in righteousness  
and the peoples with equity.



## God's commands to Moses and my testimony

We are like Moses, not ready to listen and obey command of God, in the beginning. Moses was chosen by God for a very important task. We consider that Moses was very fortunate that God personally spoke to him. But Moses felt that he was the suitable person for this special task or he was not fit for this. Therefore he made excuses to God that he will not be able to do the work for which God is making him responsible. God came down to rescue His people. He called him by name... Moses! Moses!

*Exodus 3- 10 to 4-17: So, now go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt. But Moses said to God "who am I to go to Pharaoh" God said "I will be with you" Moses made another excuse.... They will ask me the name of my God, and then what shall I tell them. Moses answered "what if they do believe me or listen....that the lord did not appeared to you. Then the Lord showed him miracle through the staff he hand in His hand also that his and developed skin disease -leprosy and was also cured by God. Then again Moses made another excuse that he is not good in speaking. Moses finally said Ö Lord, please send someone else to do this work. Then God asked Moses to take his brother Aaron for this work. God assured the He will help both of them to speak and teach what to do. Finally Moses and Aaron accepted and completed the task of God.*

I am sure that this happens in our life also that we give excuses for not to follow God's command. This happened very much in my life also. - I was never interested to work in Christian organization after completion the Master degree. Then when opportunity came to me to work with Leprosy Mission in the age of 22 years in early 1976, I also made many excuses without knowing that this call is from God. I basically did not like complicated thing at that young age. I was afraid of crowd. I did not like to discipline someone and did not like administrative work. I did not feel comfortable to convey hard decision to staff members. I had low opinion about myself in handling cash responsibilities and supervising accounts & finances.

I did not want to leave my home town, the cold weather of hills. I had very lean and thin physique, no personality of an administrator and was not good in public speaking.

Finally I did join The Leprosy Mission in January 2016 and started work at Gidakom Leprosy Mission Hospital in Bhutan. The biggest thing was that I had no CALL that God is preparing me for the Mission work. I joined Mission because I wanted a job at that time.

It is also interesting what God did in my life while serving with mission which I never thought earlier. I understood my CALL from God late, by middle of 1977, I was convinced that the job in Leprosy Mission is from God and He wants me to continue to serve with this organization. The main reason behind this was very strong Christian fellowship, small group of Indians, Nepalese and few expatriates at the hospital. There was not proper church there and also in the whole country. I did attended few times the hidden Christian meetings in Nepali language there of ordinary people.

The result was great of God's work in my life, I was transformed completely. I enjoyed my job very much. I could complete 39 years and nine months service with Leprosy Mission, serving in Bhutan, Nepal and in India. I have now great sense of satisfaction for this and feel happy that I followed God's command in my life. I am very grateful to God for giving me opportunity to serve in this mission. God did use me even though I was making excuses.



## Live love in service

*24 When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. 25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Matthew 20:24-28*

"Is it the consensus of men I seek, or the consent of God? ... If I tried to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ ". Thus Paul expresses himself in the letter to the Galatians, so was the life of Jesus, and it is on this point that we read a contradiction in the life of the disciples. James and John dream of glory for them, one that pleases men, and the other ten apostles, before the exclusivist request of the two, are disdained. The community finds itself divided. There are those who want the first place close to Jesus, excluding others, and those who want to defend the master from such a shamelessly egocentric request. After all, everyone would like a privileged place. Everyone uses Jesus, praying or defending him, to pursue his own desires for recognition in the human way, in the name of discipleship, of closeness with Jesus.

Jesus, without entering into these polemics, puts an end to the discussion: "Not so with you", and places it in a different light, that of the kingdom of God, where he truly reigns, and is the answer that faithfully follows the announcement, just made, of the delivery of his life in the hands of sinners (see Mt 18.19). *"The Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many".*

Being the first is to become a servant and to be a servant is to become free to drink the cup. The only greatness or primacy of the Christian, in the image of Christ, is that of loving without earning something for himself in the eyes of the world. Jesus has shown us that the only way to overcome evil in us, it is to live love concretely by serving our brothers and sisters. Their life first and then mine. Our life that of each of us, is always the "first" for Jesus, and it is by virtue of this importance that he has redeemed us.

He shows us the way of conversion: the innate desire to dominate changes into a desire for service. Discernment is needed, service must not become a way to dominate. Being a servant is first of all to be freely dominated by the gospel. The will of the Lord remains an eternal invitation to enter into service and to freely choose it, as Jesus learned from his Father and has done so to submit to the passion not to abandon his and not abandon us to evil and despair (*"And the third day I will rise "*).

Jesus never made himself a servant of a God-commandments, but he chose to adhere to a will of love, respect, patience, justice and truth (cf 1Cor 13,1-7), in humility of the one who recognizes himself loved by the Father.





## Fearfully and wonderfully made

### *Psalm 139 v 14*

Some months ago a great niece of mine delivered a very premature baby girl, weighing barely 2lbs. A few weeks ago I received a photo of her as she is now. A lovely child, still very small for her age, with big brown eyes. The thing that caught my attention though was her hands, small and dainty and with tiny finger nails, so perfect and so beautiful.

I have delivered hundreds of babies during my lifetime, each one a miracle. But my eyes have always been drawn towards their hands, so small, perfect and beautiful, but usually with a strong grip.

Over Christmas as we were thinking of Jesus, as the Baby born in the stable, I began to think of His hands at that time, they would have been tiny grasping at His mother's breast. They would grow, as He did into a boy and then a Man. He would have worked alongside Joseph at the carpenters bench, and helped him in whatever he was making. My grandfather was a carpenter, and my eldest brother used to tell me how much he enjoyed playing in the wood shavings as a small boy! Perhaps Jesus did the same!

There are so many instances in the New Testament of how Jesus used His hands during His earthly ministry. He healed so many people with various diseases by touching them. In Luke 4 we read of the man with leprosy who asked to be made whole, and Jesus touched him, an amazing thing for Him to do in those days, and brought health and wholeness to him. We know He also touched the bread and fish and fed 5,000 people. Also at the Last supper he broke the bread and blessed it. I can only think of one instance when Jesus used His hands in anger, and that was when He turned over the tables in the temple where people were buying and selling. The people had turned God's house into a den of thieves instead of a house of prayer.

Dr Paul Brand and Philip Yancey wrote an amazing book called " Fearfully and Wonderfully Made". It tells the story of how Paul pioneered reconstructive surgery on disabled leprosy patients many years ago in India. The book is beautifully written and tells how he focussed on patients' hands. Since then many hundreds of patients have been helped.

I remember many patients I cared for who had lost all their fingers, and only stumps remained, many of them untreated patients. I also remember many patients who had surgery followed by physiotherapy, and then proudly showing their operated hands.

Jesus hands that were always used for good and blessing, were finally subjected to agonising pain and torture as He was nailed to that Cross. He showed His scarred hands when He rose from the grave, and He carried them as He ascended up to glory. His nail pierced hands are still outstretched to us all today.

*Lord, may our hands be united as we seek to use them to bless others*

**Mollie Clark** - English. Went to India in 1961, worked in Purulia for 8 years as a nurse, before being transferred to Bhutan. Worked for 18 years in four different areas in Bhutan until I was transferred to the international office in London as personnel director. I was there for eight years until I retired.





## Convinced but not Convicted

*The Story of Simon the Sorcerer (Acts 8:9-24)*

After Stephen was stoned to death, persecution against the believers in Jesus broke out in Jerusalem. It was very severe and violent. None was spared, neither men or women. They were scattered to all parts of Israel including Samaria. But they did not let go of the Word. They preached the free gift of God, His grace. They desired others be saved. Philip went to a city in Samaria to share the good news of the Messiah with the Samaritans.

The Samaritans have a history. They claim that they are the descendants of Northern Israel tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh who survived the destruction of Kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in 722 BC. They were Jews mixed with people from Assyrian places like Cutha, Hamath, Eva etc.. They had opposed rebuilding the temple in Jerusalem by Nehemiah. For them the mountain where to worship God is Mt. Gerizim and not Mt Zion. Jews considered them as untouchables, half-breeds, idol worshippers and an inferior race. (Estimates put their numbers at only 800 now.)

In that Samaritan town where Philip went, was a sorcerer named Simon. He amazed people with his mastery over sorcery. He was called the Great Power of God. But he was amazed by the miracles performed by Philip of driving away evil spirits and healing the lame. He realized that Philip had the power of God. He received baptism and followed Philip. Later, when Peter and John had joined Philip, they laid hands on people and prayed. The people received the Holy Spirit.

Simon was intrigued with this because earlier he used to invoke evil spirits on people through sorcery. He offered money to the apostles to give him the ability to place hands on people and give them the Holy Spirit. He thought that he can purchase the anointing of God, which is a (free) gift. He was rebuked by the apostles for this.

Simon's offer showed that he had followed the apostles but did not truly understand the grace of God; which is a (free) gift. A gift cannot be purchased. The ability to pass on the Holy Spirit cannot be bought. He had put a price on the anointing (power) of God. His thinking was still rooted in his past, transactional and not transformation of the soul. The miracles enamoured him, and not the miracle worker in whose name the miracles were performed.

His belief was superficial. He did not understand the ministry of God's people. His trust was in his money. He continued to be bound by the trappings of the world, the belief that everything (in this world) can be purchased at a price. Even the sacred has a price. The sin nature did not leave him even though he was baptised. Possibly baptism was a means for him to be part of the group of believers.

The mission of God is ministered in faith and gratitude to God and not by one's efforts and value in the sight of people in this world. God's blessings can be transferred only with a pure heart - one of humility which submits to His grace. Simon had continued to retain his identity and did not subsume it in the person of Jesus. He was not one in spirit with God. His soul was still apart from God. Was he really saved? He was caught up in the glitter of miracles and not God's glory. He was in God's ministry on his own terms. No real appreciation of the gift of God which is free and should be received through complete submission. Grace can be understood only through the heart and not through the mind.

*Simon was convinced in his mind of the power of God; but not convicted of the grace of God.*

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



## Life is for Living

*'Consider how the lilies grow. They do not labour or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendour was dressed like one of these.'* Luke 12: 27 (New International Version)

A friend gave us an amaryllis bulb for Christmas, complete with plastic pot and a small bag of compost. The bulb looked dry, lifeless, with a tangle of desiccated white roots but we potted it up, watered it, and put it on a warm window sill in the light.

Transformation. Three or four days later the first shoot appeared. It was very pale green and tentative, as though it was just sticking its head above the parapet to see what was going on, and ready to duck down again if it didn't like what it saw. Each day it grew a little bigger, stronger, a slightly darker green. Then a second leaf appeared. - That's where it is now, but I know from past experience that in a few weeks there'll be a straight and robust stem, several long dark green leaves and then the final glory of those huge brilliant scarlet flowers singing silent praise to their creator. That's God, not me, I only watered it. Actually, I didn't do much of that either. Barbara did.

When we were given the bulb we could have kept it carefully wrapped up in its box, but then it would never have grown. There'd have been no life, no flowers, no beauty. Life's for living. It can be tempting to stay quietly in our own little corner ignoring the world at large, but we can't, not really. We're part of the world, with all its ups and downs and we have a share in it. So come out of your box today, root yourself in reality and try life. There's a lot of beauty out there if you look for it. And you might even get in touch with the creator of it all.

*Lord of all energy, I come alive in you.*

*Help me to share the joy and thrill of living out your purposes.*

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



## Psalm 99

<sup>1</sup> The LORD reigns,  
let the nations tremble;  
he sits enthroned between the cherubim,  
let the earth shake.

<sup>2</sup> Great is the LORD in Zion;  
he is exalted over all the nations.

<sup>3</sup> Let them praise your great and awesome name—  
he is holy.

<sup>4</sup> The King is mighty, he loves justice—  
you have established equity;  
in Jacob you have done  
what is just and right.

<sup>5</sup> Exalt the LORD our God  
and worship at his footstool;  
he is holy.

<sup>6</sup> Moses and Aaron were among his priests,  
Samuel was among those who called on his name;  
they called on the LORD  
and he answered them.

<sup>7</sup> He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud;  
they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them.

<sup>8</sup> LORD our God,  
you answered them;  
you were to Israel a forgiving God,  
though you punished their misdeeds.

<sup>9</sup> Exalt the LORD our God  
and worship at his holy mountain,  
for the LORD our God is holy.



## Psalm 100

*A psalm. For giving grateful praise.*

<sup>1</sup> Shout for joy to the LORD, all the earth.

<sup>2</sup> Worship the LORD with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.

<sup>3</sup> Know that the LORD is God.

It is he who made us, and we are his  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.

<sup>4</sup> Enter his gates with thanksgiving  
and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and praise his name.

<sup>5</sup> For the LORD is good and his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues through all generations.



## John 9

I recently had my second cataract repaired. I now have HD vision in both eyes. However, I am still struggling to see and read properly since my glasses are not correct now. I will have to wait for the eye to heal and then get the new glasses before I can say with the man in this story; *“once I was blind, but now I see”*.

I love his character, don't you? Here is a stigmatized beggar sitting listening to the disciples discussing his sin? Does that sound familiar to those of us who have worked in Leprosy? He should have shouted out that he was blind and not deaf! He doesn't of course. How patient are the poor and disadvantaged. They don't expect to be listened to. Then Jesus sends him off on quite an adventure for healing.

Why did Jesus do that? He could have healed him right there and then. I wonder if it was perhaps too public for both of them. The man was born blind so would have needed time and space to adjust. Imagine all that sensory overload. It was also his opportunity to be a part of the healing and exercise faith. He could have ignored it all, but no he didn't. He went off on his expedition and found his sight.

Then the doubting and questioning started. Not from him much from those around him. First it was the neighbours, then the Pharisees and even his parents were a little nervous. He was having none of it. I love his simple faith. All that theology, what was the point of it? He was blind and now he could see. That was all that counted and surely that could not happen except from the hand of God.

That's when they got really mad. Common sense can be so irritating! They had to be right even when it was stupid. So once again, they threw him out, stigmatised him and made him the problem. Of course, Jesus was his salvation. He sought him out and accepted him. I love that little detail that Jesus went looking for him. He knew the man was in trouble and so He went to sort it. He even gave the blind man a privileged revelation. Jesus revealed who He really was. The closing verses of the chapter are telling. “There are none so blind as those who won't see” as the old proverb says. The man born blind now had both physical and spiritual sight. That is the blessing of faith and an encounter with Jesus.

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



## TLM values – Inclusion – Part 1

Opening any important theological dictionary you will find only a few lines on „inclusion“. But we are given examples which can be regarded as mosaics of the whole picture: putting together „How to relate to our neighbor“. Basically „inclusion“ is the approach responding to this question.

Inclusion seems to be very variously interpreted: reshaping country borders; the worldmap is the borderline and sensor of elections; and political covenants not just in the European Union, but all over the world. In our profile and for people affected by leprosy it is a basic issue - therefore good to have it as one of our most important values! There is also a wide range of views about inclusion as it influences and changes human relationships, church entities, families, and friendships on a daily basis.

Inclusion became and remains a very sensitive topic primarily because it is a creation-principle. It is almost a „Too big issue“! *Genesis 1 28: „God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”* This perfect and total authorisation God has given to man, expresses HOW God regards His created man: with an endless openness and confidence handing all over to him, confiding all to him, INCLUDING man into His own self, as all that God has created is essentially His own self. INCLUSION therefore naturally belongs to God's self and His creation!

Secondly „inclusion“ has been directly damaged by the original sin. *Genesis 3,23-24: So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out.”* This is therefore EXCLUSION. And since this EXCLUSION all that has happened is under this burden. And always God tries to somehow RESTORE the lost INCLUSION. As a result all our efforts should be to try to restore the lost, bringing them into INCLUSION and restore God's original creation plan. Could we have ever greater honor and task, than to be God's co-workers in His work of restoration? „Inclusion“ and exercising it is one of the main areas of this.

How can this happen? Our efforts on restoring the destroyed original harmony are building walls, to indicate the limits with them. The core of the difficulties is hidden in the term „purity“: protecting pure from impure. What is pure and what not? What we may regard as acceptable and what not through the filter of purity? Whom we regard „clean“ and whom not? Whom we let in and whom not? Whom we INCLUDE and whom not? We navigate between the extremities like Scyllas and Caribdysses: „No limitation! God's infinite love embraces all!“ - A whole theological branch called “Gospel of Inclusion” represents this radical approach. “Jesus will save you whether you agree or not!” This controversial doctrine is claiming that Jesus Christ saves all people no matter what their beliefs or actions.

The reaction or self defense against „inclusion“ is a stupid narrowmindedness. Miniscule measuring all in a pharisaic way: filtering and filtering just a few are left: the purest! – they say. In conflict the two parties comically exclude each other in the „holy“ battle for inclusion: „I am excluding you as you don't share my views about inclusion!”

*„What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?” Rom 7,24*



## TLM values – Inclusion – Part 2

For us Romans 15,7 is the guide: *„Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.” (kjv).* *„Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.” Niv*

Clear, simple words. For us the question is not: what our **conditions** are before we can accept others. If we start manipulating with conditions, and limits, we would be lost in the same uncertainty and arrive at the same disputes as the secular world and politics do with inclusion and exclusion theories.

But for us the question is: What is our **purpose** with inclusion? What the Bible demonstrates about God's inclusion is that it is led by a quite specifically expressed PURPOSE. **Not conditions! But purpose!**

Abram: *“I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and ALL PEOPLES ON EARTH WILL BE BLESSED THROUGH YOU.”* God's early and eternal, powerful restoration purpose on the re-inclusion of all mankind, a definitive desire to re-embrace mankind and bring them back to the original and lost destination and the unity with Him through one chosen vessel. God definitively stretches his arm, calls and wants to re-include all human beings into His blessing.

Temple of Solomon: a large court for the Gentiles was expressing the missionary purpose of Israel towards Gentiles: they were welcome to attend, be part of the prayer and holy processes, though might not bring their sacrifice. Purpose: offering them opportunity to listen, hear, follow the deliberating worship of God of Israel.

Isaiah 56, the prophetic poem reflects an argument about inclusion and exclusion *„These I will bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer; their burnt offerings and their sacrifices will be accepted on my altar; for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples. Blessed is the man who does this, and the son of man who holds it fast, who keeps the Sabbath, not profaning it, and keeps his hand from doing any evil. The foreigners who join themselves to the LORD, to minister to him, to love the name of the LORD, and to be his servants, everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it, and holds fast my covenant”*

Ancient Judaism had a very strong God given sense of mission towards gentiles (as we see it in Abram's call), a strong purpose to lead all nations to Sion. Later this dynamic collective missionary conscience turned into a closed cluster thinking, and elitism.

The New Testamental approach is clearly culminating in *John 3,16. „For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son.”* His loving arms are potentially including all into the love of God. His redemption is valid for all. Until this point it is similar with the Gospel of Inclusion, what we otherwise cannot accept!

But it goes on: *„that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.”* Here is the PURPOSE! This is why the sacrifice of Jesus was not a martyrdom. But the purpose of it was to express, restore and fulfill God's eternal saving purpose. In his prayer of high priest, Jesus reports to the Father: *John 17, 1-26 “Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him. And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.* This is why in his ministry on earth he called everyone, invited everyone.

**Marta Risko** – country leader, TLM Hungary. Bible study held on the TLM Members' Meeting, Addis Ababa, Sept 2019





### TLM values – Inclusion – Part 3

*„Come to me all you who are weary....”* When he included children into his love, (*“Let the children come to me; do not hinder them”*) his purpose was to point to the Kingdom of God, and how to receive it. And when a leper came to him, imploring him he said to him *“See that you say nothing to anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer for your cleansing what Moses commanded, for a proof to them.”* the purpose was to rehabilitate, reintegrate and include the leper into the covenant of God. And when Zacheus, the sinner tax collector came to him, he fully included him and causing indignation, but He did it with the purpose: *„For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.”* – that Zacheus will be saved.

On the general level Jesus stretched out his hand to everybody. In diaconal aspects it is the parable of the Good Samaritan which reflects that doing good towards even the enemy, is an unquestionable demand from Jesus. In diaconal matters: healing, helping, lifting up socially, etc.etc. inclusion has been demonstrated by Jesus as a large net, involving all.

But Jesus was not a humanitarian. He was God and His purpose has been clearly expressed: *John 14,6 “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*

But He was not even stopping there and He opened the door large and in Luke 9, 50 said: *„Whoever is not against you is for you!”* including anybody who consciously or unconsciously is contributing to the purpose of the gospel.

Jesus at the same time definitely excludes those who consciously deny the Gospel! Who have already brought the decision in their heart not to follow Him or to refuse him! *Luke 10,10-12 But whenever you enter a town and they do not receive you, go into its streets and say, ‘Even the dust of your town that clings to our feet we wipe off against you. Nevertheless know this, that the kingdom of God has come near.’ I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town.” „Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me, scatters.” (Luke 11,23)* Very strong words expressing that where a decision has already been made consciously denying or refusing Jesus, inclusion loses its obligation. But this is the ultimate end, and until this point the PURPOSE of bringing the Kingdom of God near to everyone, remains valid.

The New Testament church faced the same issue as it moved beyond its Jewish origins to include all those loved by God, even Gentiles who were for some the abhorrent "other."

*Acts 8:26-40 Now an angel of the Lord said to Philip, “Rise and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza.” And he rose and went. And there was an Ethiopian, a eunuch, a court official of Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who was in charge of all her treasure. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning, seated in his chariot, and he was reading the prophet Isaiah. And the Spirit said to Philip, “Go over and join this chariot.” So Philip ran to him and heard him reading Isaiah the prophet and asked, “Do you understand what you are reading?” Here is a clear appeal on inclusion with the purpose of making God’s word heard, understandable and accepted to those who do not know it yet!*

We can imagine that the dream from God was deeply upsetting and that Peter found the mandate shocking: *„The voice said to him again, a second time, ‘What God has made clean, you must not call profane.’” (Acts 10:15)* And Peter obeyed!!



## TLM values – Inclusion – Part 4

Peter obeyed, and this was the greatest breakthrough ever: *„And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God.”* – so the former purpose reached its goal. Alongside Peter, Paul became the great missionary for evangelical openness, recognizing — against his own fearful tradition — that none can be ejected from the church because we feel threatened by them and are unlike us. Paul draws the conclusion: *„For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; the same Lord is Lord of all and is generous to all who call on him.”* Rom 10,12

Colossians 1,16-17 *„For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”*

Ephesians 4,25 *„Therefore, having put away falsehood, let each one of you speak the truth with his neighbor, for we are members one of another.”*

Galatians 3,28 *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”*

Colossians 3,11 *„Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”*

CULMINATION: *Philemon: Perhaps the reason he was separated from you for a little while was that you might have him back forever— no longer as a slave, but better than a slave, as a dear brother. He is very dear to me but even dearer to you, both as a fellow man and as a brother in the Lord.*

The Jewish church had to make room for those Gentiles whom they had formerly categorized as "impure"!! Out of Paul's new awareness there came an inclusionary trajectory in the church, not uncontested but eventually accepted. This is the greatest victory of God's transformational power in human mind and soul!

But the ultimate, final and perfect restoration of inclusion, as a creation principle is:

*„The Spirit and the Bride say, 'Come.' And let the one who hears say, 'Come.' And let the one who is thirsty come; let the one who desires take the water of life without price. After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!' And they sang a new song, saying, 'Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals, for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.'”*

As conclusion to our case we remind ourselves and reflect on what the Bible expresses about inclusion: that it is with a definitive demand and purpose. God included man into His own self with a definitive purpose and His ongoing aim is to restore this. He gives us as task to do the same. For us, inclusion should not be bound to conditions, but to purpose. Bringing the Kingdom near and including everyone in it. But in this purpose – directly or indirectly –there is the condition as well, and this is the beauty of philosophy, that while we refuse to set up conditions, they are there: choices, options, possibilities. And THIS is why we must be inclusive! To help everyone, to guide everyone, to offer to everyone the saving purpose of God.

*Having this purpose we will be blessed by Lives transformed : people receiving Life in All its Fullness.*



## Psalm 101

*Of David. A psalm.*

<sup>1</sup> I will sing of your love and justice;  
to you, LORD, I will sing praise.

<sup>2</sup> I will be careful to lead a blameless life—  
when will you come to me?

I will conduct the affairs of my house  
with a blameless heart.

<sup>3</sup> I will not look with approval  
on anything that is vile.

I hate what faithless people do;  
I will have no part in it.

<sup>4</sup> The perverse of heart shall be far from me;  
I will have nothing to do with what is evil.

<sup>5</sup> Whoever slanders their neighbor in secret,  
I will put to silence;

whoever has haughty eyes and a proud heart,  
I will not tolerate.

<sup>6</sup> My eyes will be on the faithful in the land,  
that they may dwell with me;  
the one whose walk is blameless  
will minister to me.

<sup>7</sup> No one who practices deceit  
will dwell in my house;  
no one who speaks falsely  
will stand in my presence.

<sup>8</sup> Every morning I will put to silence  
all the wicked in the land;  
I will cut off every evildoer  
from the city of the LORD.



## Psalm 102

*A prayer of an afflicted person who has grown weak and pours out a lament before the LORD.*

<sup>1</sup>Hear my prayer, LORD;  
let my cry for help come to you.  
<sup>2</sup>Do not hide your face from me  
when I am in distress.  
Turn your ear to me;  
when I call, answer me quickly.  
<sup>3</sup>For my days vanish like smoke;  
my bones burn like glowing embers.  
<sup>4</sup>My heart is blighted and withered like grass;  
I forget to eat my food.  
<sup>5</sup>In my distress I groan aloud  
and am reduced to skin and bones.  
<sup>6</sup>I am like a desert owl,  
like an owl among the ruins.  
<sup>7</sup>I lie awake; I have become  
like a bird alone on a roof.  
<sup>8</sup>All day long my enemies taunt me;  
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.  
<sup>9</sup>For I eat ashes as my food  
and mingle my drink with tears  
<sup>10</sup>because of your great wrath,  
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.  
<sup>11</sup>My days are like the evening shadow;  
I wither away like grass.  
<sup>12</sup>But you, LORD, sit enthroned forever;  
your renown endures through all generations.  
<sup>13</sup>You will arise and have compassion on Zion,  
for it is time to show favor to her;  
the appointed time has come.  
<sup>14</sup>For her stones are dear to your servants;  
her very dust moves them to pity.

<sup>15</sup>The nations will fear the name of the LORD,  
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.

<sup>16</sup>For the LORD will rebuild Zion  
and appear in his glory.

<sup>17</sup>He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;  
he will not despise their plea.

<sup>18</sup>Let this be written for a future generation,  
that a people not yet created may praise the LORD:

<sup>19</sup>“The LORD looked down from his sanctuary on high,  
from heaven he viewed the earth,

<sup>20</sup>to hear the groans of the prisoners  
and release those condemned to death.”

<sup>21</sup>So the name of the LORD will be declared in Zion  
and his praise in Jerusalem

<sup>22</sup>when the peoples and the kingdoms  
assemble to worship the LORD.

<sup>23</sup>In the course of my life<sup>(b)</sup> he broke my strength;  
he cut short my days.

<sup>24</sup>So I said:

“Do not take me away, my God, in the midst of my days;  
your years go on through all generations.

<sup>25</sup>In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth,  
and the heavens are the work of your hands.

<sup>26</sup>They will perish, but you remain;  
they will all wear out like a garment.  
Like clothing you will change them  
and they will be discarded.

<sup>27</sup>But you remain the same,  
and your years will never end.

<sup>28</sup>The children of your servants will live in your presence;  
their descendants will be established before you.”



## Let Your Light Shine

As I write this, it is a lovely sunny day with a wind that seems to come from the Arctic (certainly feels like it). This month we have had some really “grey days” and the view has been grey – the sky, the water and the horizon – I could only just make out the light from the lighthouse some distance away. It is amazing how that affects your thoughts or even makes you think slower.

Today as I looked out I was reminded of talking with some people at our Prayer Meeting about the pictures God paints around us and in our lives. One lady did not understand me so I took her outside to look at a most wonderful sunset and then she understood. A few days later when the cloud base was really low and we could not see any of the islands or hills she phoned me to ask what had happened to God’s painting! Whether the sky is blue or grey, God is painting His glory for us, if we take the time to look up and around to see it. But as we see the picture God “paints” for us we can see ourselves within the picture – we are part of God’s picture in the world today.

Last Sunday in church we were looking at Light. With the children we thought about the dark and how we see in the dark. Here in UK it is difficult to find places that, even in the hours of darkness, are indeed dark. I am sure that many of you will see darkness all around – not just the darkness of the sky and atmosphere but also darkness in the soul. It is into that darkness of the soul, and we all meet it at times, that Jesus tells us that He is the Light of the World (John 8:12) and He tells us that we are to be light in the world (Matt 5:14). We are to shine out like a city that is at the top of the hill. We are to be beacons, like that light from the lighthouse or like the city at the top of the hill, shining out into the dark places of the world, into the dark places of peoples’ lives.

As we explored the darkness with the children we looked at what helps us to see in the dark – a match where the light does not last long but it can enable us to find something, a candle where the light lasts longer and gives off a soft light which can be all we need but it does not give light good enough for some tasks, a torch where the beam can show a good distance ahead or its beam might be good to complete some tasks. How do we reflect God’s light where we are today – a match, a candle, a torch? Let us shine into the lives of those we meet today reflecting God’s light and love to others – a smile can lift someone’s spirits, a prayer can really make a difference in someone’s life, a walk with someone on their journey of life can be a real encouragement. I read recently of a man who sat in the church just where people came in the door and said Hello to everyone. If he did not know the person, he asked their name and where they were from. At the time in the service when the Peace was shared, he made a point of going to those strangers and greeting them by name and with a handshake. Being light in the world is simple – it is not a complicated instruction that needs a plan – just be Jesus to those you meet.

*“You’re here to be light, bringing out the God-colours in the world. God is not a secret to be kept....shine!”  
(Matt 5:14... from The Message)*



## Men look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart

*1Samuel 16:7*

In studying 1 Samuel 16: 1-13 we are going to look at the process God used to employ His workers. The Lord called Samuel to rise up from his state of regret and mourning over King Saul's failure and the fact that God has rejected him as king. Samuel was sent by God to the family of Jesse the Bethlehemite to anoint a king for the Israel.

We note first the reaction of Samuel was fear, if Saul heard he will kill him; this is a genuine concern because it is not a pleasant situation for someone's job to be made vacant while the person is still occupying the position and not willing to quit or retire. There are many servants of God whose position heaven has declared vacant even though they still occupy it on earth, we therefore need to be careful because no one is indispensable especially in the household of God. Once our values and conduct does not align with God and we are not willing to repent; we may be rejected by God even though in the eyes of the world we look fit and qualified.

Samuel invited Jesse and his sons to come to the sacrifice as instructed by God. Samuel asked Jesse to consecrate himself and all his sons and prepare them for the interview or assessment. When Jesse's first son Eliab appeared at the interview panel Samuel got carried away with the outward look of Eliab and said '**surely** the Lord's anointed is before Him', the saying 'first impressions matter' came to play here; we do not know why Samuel quickly ran into that conclusion but we know the appearance of Eliab was significant. How often as leaders we get carried away by the CVs, physical and beauty of candidates. Today there are corporate organisations that specialise in training and priming people in preparation for job interviews. Some come with very intimidating CVs such that when they appear at the interview panel people get carried away and choose based on appearance and impression.

But the Lord said to Samuel 'do not look at his appearance or his physical stature, because I have rejected him'. This is a very strong statement that demands every leader's attention, it will be catastrophic to employ into God's work someone who has been rejected by heaven! It calls for caution and being very sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit in order to make a right choice when employing or even promoting someone. Only God knows the heart of man, He alone can search the heart because what goes on in the heart does not always correspond with the looks or physical statures.

In taking decision on whom to employ or assign roles and responsibilities in the Global Fellowship or our individual country, as TLM let us always pray like Jesus disciples in *Acts 1:24 'and they pray and said, You O Lord, who know the hearts of all, show which of these two You have chosen'*

Samuel quickly learnt the lesson and waited until David who was rejected by men, and left to tend sheep in the bush, but accepted by God, came and the Lord command Samuel to anoint him as King. Because of that right choice, David became the best king that children of Israel ever had and was the most successful king in battles and war.

*God, please make us a man/woman after Your own heart, such that we will be fit to be employed to serve in Your kingdom at all times, may we not be like Eliab, Abinadab or Shammah, who though they had a good physique, looked smart outwardly, spoke very fluently, or bore very fine names had no place in your kingdom. Also give us a listening eye and discernment so that we can chose according to your will. Amen*

**Bunmi Oluloto** - Bunmi and Loveth Oluloto live in Niamey, Niger Republic. Bunmi works for TLM as Country Leader for Niger and Chad





## Burn out... burn on!!

Reflecting on the life of Jesus... I was wondering at His busyness. He packed his entire life in 3 and a half years. There was never a moment of relaxation, vacation or rest. He chose to go to neglected people and hard to reach places. He did not take the easy way out... rode on a donkey just once in His entire life ... rest of it He walked.

Sitting in the office of The Leprosy Mission Trust India, I tend to get overwhelmed with the mind work my job demands, treating patients was much more easier, I thought. Just 5 days after a vacation, and I am looking forward to the weekend.

Jesus balanced both with alacrity. When He was not treating patients, He was setting guidelines, speaking case stories, stimulating discussions, mentoring people. There was always much to do ...., more people to hear Him, more wanting healing, more wanting food, more places to reach out and more to reach out to. Wasn't He burnt out? I am sure He was! He was human just like us! He got overwhelmed, weary, depressed, frustrated and angry. But He burnt on .... for His light to shine on us.

*Matthew 5, 16 says: „Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”*

To shine, my friend, we need to burn on. Are you feeling burnt out today? Take heart. Jesus has lived your situation and He knows perfectly well what you are facing. You are burning out .... yet burning on .... and your light is shining. And you are glorifying God!

**Joydeepa Darlong MD** — Head Knowledge Management, TLM Trust India



## **"He goes on ahead of them and His sheep follow Him because they know His voice"**

*John 10:4*

The sun was setting and a number of people were working hard to drive the large flock into the sheep pen. Some were on motorbikes, others were running behind, waving sticks and throwing stones. The dogs, excited by the yells and revving engines were barking wildly and nipping the sheep's legs.

The sheep, panic stricken were being driven forward but many kept on breaking away from the flock and scattering in every direction, pursued by people and dogs frantically struggling to round them up. Eventually, after much effort, the task was completed.

Watching all this happening in this "new" sheep country, my mind went back to another scene I had witnessed years before in the hills of Greece.

It was also sunset and the flock was being guided home. There was only one old shepherd and he walked in front of the sheep, talking to them all the time. The sheep obviously knew his voice, trusted him and followed without trouble. Occasionally one sheep would stop or get side-tracked. He called out to it gently and it soon joined up with the others.

Jesus presents Himself as the good shepherd Who not only knows His sheep but has given His life for them. He goes before us, calls us by name and we can follow him with confidence knowing that He will bring us home safely.

*Thought.*

- 1. As His child, do I hear His voice and trust Him enough to follow Him?*
- 2. In my service for Him, am I trying to drive and push others or am I setting the example that by seeing the way I follow Him they may desire to join me?*

**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.



## God's Plans

We are well into the new year. Plans are up and running. I'm guessing your calendar is filling up. Do you feel stressed out by it? Are you worried about all the things you have to do this year? I know I feel that way.

I was fortunate enough to have some time off during the Christmas break. On the night before I went back to work I was praying. I felt the weight of all the things I was hoping to do, and to achieve in the year ahead. It felt heavy. I'm not sure I was even articulating a request; just feeling weighed down in the presence of God.

As I prayed I sensed God was reminding me 'Trust me'. I pushed back with 'how', but as I did I remembered/was reminded 'Does not God love people affected by leprosy?' And I thought 'Of course he does. Far more than I could, and with more intentionality, and more resources.' God wants the plans I have, the duties you have, our combined efforts for people affected by leprosy to be successful.

Yes, we are called to be obedient in this process. Yes, we should pray about our plans. But God wants people affected by leprosy to be cured, cared for and restored in the name of Jesus. This was a helpful reminder, and I slept peacefully. The next night my reading was in *Isaiah 49, and verse 6* stood out to me:

*"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant  
to restore the tribes of Jacob  
and bring back those of Israel I have kept.  
I will also make you a light for the Gentiles,  
that my salvation may reach to the ends of the earth."*

God is speaking that the restoration of Israel from captivity, heartache and disaster is too small a thing for his glory. Instead there will be restoration for the whole world, through Jesus. What may seem big to us, is small to God.

Perhaps this year, the plans God has for people affected by leprosy are bigger and better than ours. And his promise is to be with us as we obey him. May we seek not to make our plans Godly, but rather to seek and find God's plans.



## Psalm 103

*Of David.*

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul;  
all my inmost being, praise his holy name.

<sup>2</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul,  
and forget not all his benefits—

<sup>3</sup> who forgives all your sins  
and heals all your diseases,

<sup>4</sup> who redeems your life from the pit  
and crowns you with love and compassion,  
<sup>5</sup> who satisfies your desires with good things  
so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's.

<sup>6</sup> The LORD works righteousness  
and justice for all the oppressed.

<sup>7</sup> He made known his ways to Moses,  
his deeds to the people of Israel:

<sup>8</sup> The LORD is compassionate and gracious,  
slow to anger, abounding in love.

<sup>9</sup> He will not always accuse,  
nor will he harbor his anger forever;

<sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.

<sup>11</sup> For as high as the heavens are above the earth,  
so great is his love for those who fear him;

<sup>12</sup> as far as the east is from the west,  
so far has he removed our transgressions from us.

<sup>13</sup> As a father has compassion on his children,  
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him;

<sup>14</sup> for he knows how we are formed,  
he remembers that we are dust.

<sup>15</sup> The life of mortals is like grass,  
they flourish like a flower of the field;

<sup>16</sup> the wind blows over it and it is gone,  
and its place remembers it no more.

<sup>17</sup> But from everlasting to everlasting  
the LORD's love is with those who fear him,  
and his righteousness with their children's children—

<sup>18</sup> with those who keep his covenant  
and remember to obey his precepts.

<sup>19</sup> The LORD has established his throne in heaven,  
and his kingdom rules over all.

<sup>20</sup> Praise the LORD, you his angels,  
you mighty ones who do his bidding,  
who obey his word.

<sup>21</sup> Praise the LORD, all his heavenly hosts,  
you his servants who do his will.

<sup>22</sup> Praise the LORD, all his works  
everywhere in his dominion.

Praise the LORD, my soul.



## Psalm 104

<sup>1</sup> Praise the LORD, my soul.

LORD my God, you are very great;  
you are clothed with splendor and majesty.

<sup>2</sup> The LORD wraps himself in light as with a garment;  
he stretches out the heavens like a tent  
<sup>3</sup> and lays the beams of his upper chambers on their waters.  
He makes the clouds his chariot  
and rides on the wings of the wind.  
<sup>4</sup> He makes winds his messengers,<sup>[a]</sup>  
flames of fire his servants.

<sup>5</sup> He set the earth on its foundations;  
it can never be moved.  
<sup>6</sup> You covered it with the watery depths as with a garment;  
the waters stood above the mountains.  
<sup>7</sup> But at your rebuke the waters fled,  
at the sound of your thunder they took to flight;  
<sup>8</sup> they flowed over the mountains,  
they went down into the valleys,  
to the place you assigned for them.  
<sup>9</sup> You set a boundary they cannot cross;  
never again will they cover the earth.

<sup>10</sup> He makes springs pour water into the ravines;  
it flows between the mountains.  
<sup>11</sup> They give water to all the beasts of the field;  
the wild donkeys quench their thirst.  
<sup>12</sup> The birds of the sky nest by the waters;  
they sing among the branches.  
<sup>13</sup> He waters the mountains from his upper chambers;  
the land is satisfied by the fruit of his work.  
<sup>14</sup> He makes grass grow for the cattle,  
and plants for people to cultivate—  
bringing forth food from the earth:  
<sup>15</sup> wine that gladdens human hearts,  
oil to make their faces shine,  
and bread that sustains their hearts.  
<sup>16</sup> The trees of the LORD are well watered,  
the cedars of Lebanon that he planted.  
<sup>17</sup> There the birds make their nests;  
the stork has its home in the junipers.

<sup>18</sup> The high mountains belong to the wild goats;  
the crags are a refuge for the hyrax.

<sup>19</sup> He made the moon to mark the seasons,  
and the sun knows when to go down.

<sup>20</sup> You bring darkness, it becomes night,  
and all the beasts of the forest prowl.

<sup>21</sup> The lions roar for their prey  
and seek their food from God.

<sup>22</sup> The sun rises, and they steal away;  
they return and lie down in their dens.

<sup>23</sup> Then people go out to their work,  
to their labor until evening.

<sup>24</sup> How many are your works, LORD!  
In wisdom you made them all;  
the earth is full of your creatures.

<sup>25</sup> There is the sea, vast and spacious,  
teeming with creatures beyond number—  
living things both large and small.

<sup>26</sup> There the ships go to and fro,  
and Leviathan, which you formed to frolic there.

<sup>27</sup> All creatures look to you  
to give them their food at the proper time.

<sup>28</sup> When you give it to them,  
they gather it up;  
when you open your hand,  
they are satisfied with good things.

<sup>29</sup> When you hide your face,  
they are terrified;  
when you take away their breath,  
they die and return to the dust.

<sup>30</sup> When you send your Spirit,  
they are created,  
and you renew the face of the ground.

<sup>31</sup> May the glory of the LORD endure forever;  
may the LORD rejoice in his works—

<sup>32</sup> he who looks at the earth, and it trembles,  
who touches the mountains, and they smoke.

<sup>33</sup> I will sing to the LORD all my life;  
I will sing praise to my God as long as I live.

<sup>34</sup> May my meditation be pleasing to him,  
as I rejoice in the LORD.

<sup>35</sup> But may sinners vanish from the earth  
and the wicked be no more.

Praise the LORD, my soul.

Praise the LORD





## Psalm 23 – Part 1

*A psalm of David*

*The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing.*

*He makes me lie down in green pastures,*

*he leads me beside quiet waters,*

*he restores my soul.*

*He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.*

*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.*

*You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.*

*You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.*

*Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,*

*and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.*

### **The Lord is my shepherd,**

Jesus said in *John 10* : *"I am the good shepherd"*. He lays down his life for his sheep (v.11), He and his sheep are in relation (v.14).

The relationship I have with Jesus is defined by the knowledge I have of him. If the way I know him is too down to earth or too narrow, I will have trouble fully trusting him. The more accurately I know Jesus, the more my relationship with him is alive.

*"Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and forever! Amen."* (2 Peter 3.18)

### **I shall lack nothing.**

My first idea was that this means that the Lord will supply all my needs. But I have realised that this is not about my physical, social, psychological needs. It's a confession of faith related to a person. I will lack nothing because the Lord is my shepherd; in the relationship with him, I lack nothing because He's my everything.

### **He makes me lie down in green pastures,**

Entering into God's rest means having confidence in Him, letting him act in my life.

In order to be able to lie down, a sheep has to be free from fear, tension, torment and hunger. And only the shepherd is able to free it from these concerns.

Let's live like Jesus lived : *"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to finish his work."* (John 4.34)

### **He leads me beside quiet waters, (so I can drink)**

According to the vocabulary of spiritual life, to drink is to receive, to accept, to believe.

*"whoever believes in me will never be thirsty."* (John 6.35)



## Psalm 23 – Part 2

### **He restores my soul (or he gives me new strength)**

*“He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak. Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.” (Isaiah 40. 29, 31)*

Sometimes a sheep falls on its back and can't get on, the sheep is scared and discouraged, vulnerable to predator attacks.

The shepherd helps a sheep fallen on its back, he stays close until the sheep can again confidently walk. What a comfort it is to realise that Jesus is there to help me getting back on my feet each time I fall down.

### **He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake.**

In the Bible the name is the person, so we could say : He guides me in paths of righteousness because of who He is. He is God, He is love and justice.

Jesus, whose name means God saves, has paid the price so we can follow him in paths of justice.

### **Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me;**

We do not know if the sheep went astray or if the shepherd has lead the sheep through this valley, but we know one thing for sure: the shepherd is not far away from his sheep.

As we talk about difficult moments, the language becomes more personal, more intimate. I speak directly to my shepherd : you are there whatever the circumstances.

### **Your rode and your staff, they comfort me.**

The rode and the staff symbolise care and comfort. They are used to guide, to gather, to protect (even from deviations).

*“I will take note of you as you pass under my rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.” (Ezekiel 20.37).* We pass under his rod – we are under his authority but we can also say that God examines us (the stick is used to rule out the wool to examine the skin).

### **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies.**

The prepared table reminds me of the Lord's table. Taking part of the Lord's Supper is a way to express my gratitude for His love, and also a way to fully realise what it costs him to prepare this table before me.



## Psalm 23 – Part 3

**You anoint my head with oil;** In the Old Testament, the oil unction was generally used to set a person apart for the service. So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. (1 Samuel 16.13) But maybe David was thinking about one of the activities a shepherd does. To prevent torments due to flies, the shepherd applies on the head a special product oil-based.

When we are saved, we receive the Holy Spirit, we are anointed with the Holy Spirit. *“You were included in Christ when you heard the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation. When you believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God’s possession to the praise of his glory.” (Ephesians 1.13-14)* - We cannot stop the flies, representing Satan’s attacks, flying around us, but the Holy Spirit prevent these flies from landing on us.

**My cup overflows.** Jesus wants to offer us an abundant life, a life full of overwhelming blessings. For us, to benefit from it, Jesus agreed to drink the cup of sufferings. *“Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done.” (Luke 22.42)*

**Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life,**

It’s a proclamation of trust in my shepherd, I trust His goodness and His love for me, even when difficult times come. *“For his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him.” (Lamentations 3.22-23, 25)*

But do goodness and love really follow me? What do I leave “behind”? Do I let goodness and love benefit those around me?

**And I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever**

The house of the Lord was the meeting place between God and His people, people went there for celebrations. David aspired to stay there in the presence of God forever.

Because Jesus opened the way (the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. Matthew 27.51), we have the privilege to be in God’s presence. And even that God established His house in my heart, I’m in His presence at any time. *“If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him.” (John 14.23)* Just a thought about home : home is where the family members live together. I’m part of the shepherd’s family – what a grace!

### Conclusion

The Lord, my shepherd loves me and takes care of me.

I invite us to become more and more aware of the shepherd’s presence by our side, whatever the situation we are going through. And when it is difficult, Jesus tells us : *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God, trust also in me. In my Father’s house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.” (John 14.1-3)*



**“Cast the net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some.”**

*John 21:6*

Scenes from the Sea of Galilee play out daily on my beach, where the local fishermen still employ heavy wooden boats which they row out into the bay, dragging a sein net behind them and then pulling the net back to shore where they empty their catch at the feet of delighted holiday-makers.

They are guided by an observer on the hill overlooking Fish Hoek, who alerts them to the presence of the fish and then directs them in the direction of the shoal. The observer also works as a shark spotter and warns bathers to get out of the water when a shark enters the bay. [I noticed tonight that the “Cape Doctor” has blown down the antenna which connects the shark spotter to the siren on the beach, so I do hope that the sharks are taking a break].

The observer used to use flags to direct the boats in the direction of the fish, but cell phones replaced flags and whistles many years ago. Another change has been the inclusion of women in the fishing team. It's tough work. The wind is fierce, the surf crashes over the crew and the boats are carried back up the beach on rough wooden poles. Once the net has been deployed, a process that takes at least an hour but often longer - bringing the nets ashore takes about another hour and often they come up empty – I can only assume that the fish use the twisting of the net in the turbulent surf as an opportunity to dash for freedom. Due to the rough surf, it is usually impossible to tell from the shore whether there is anything in the net – it is only when it reaches the beach that you can see the shimmering of the yellow tails or the lone bewildered crab who finds himself being tossed back in disgust into the surf. Depending on the wind, surf and fish, this process may be repeated three times a day. The fishermen need to understand the tides, weather and seasons. Generations of experience also play a role.

Over the years, the net has served as a powerful metaphor in the work of the Leprosy Mission and I was wondering what lesson we might learn from the people whose net is anything but allegorical – these fishermen who brave all seasons in search of a catch. The lesson I think I discern is this: no matter how many times the net comes ashore empty, they always go out again. I've never heard them say “The net was empty yesterday, why bother today?” They're persistent and goodness, they work hard.

But all the hard work in the world is pointless if it is not wisely directed. The fisherman could drag their nets around False Bay all day long and never catch anything more interesting than a piece of kelp. They need guidance from above and so do you and so do I. Maybe we need to let our nets down on the other side today. We need to let go of some of our habits and embrace new, uncomfortable ways of doing things. When the spotter tells the fishermen to spread their nets, they obey. They know that he can do things that are invisible to them. Let us give thanks today that we serve One who sees all things [Hebrews 4:13] and let us set out with confidence as He directs our ways. May He indeed fill your nets to bursting this year.

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

## Authors in Alphabetical Order

## Textuarium

James Barnett	1 February		Exode 3,10 – 4,17	4 February
Anne-Claude Jonah	25, 26, 27 February		1 Samuel 16,7	19 February
Arianna Bobba	5 February		Psalm 23	25, 26, 27 February
Bunmi Oluloto	19 February		Psalm 97	2 February
Christine Osman	18 February		Psalm 98	3 February
David, psalmist, king of Israel	16, 23 February		Psalm 99	9 February
Eddie Askew	8 February		Psalm 100	10 February
Joydeepa Darlong MD	20 February		Psalm 101	16 February
June Nash	11 February		Psalm 102	17 February
Marta Risko	12, 13, 14, 15 February		Psalm 103	23 February
Mollie Clark	6 February		Psalm 104	24 February
Peter Laubscher	28 February		Psalm 139,14	6 February
Pradeep Failbus	4 February		Isaiah 49,6	22 February
Raju, PLN Dr	7 February		Matthew 5,14	18 February
Silvano Perotti	21 February		Matthew 5,16	20 February
Tim Collison	22 February		Matthew 20,24-28	5 February
			Luke 2,22-35	1 February
			Luke 12,27	8 February
			John 9	11 February
			John 10,4	21 February
			John 21,6	28 February
			Acts 8,9-24	7 February
			Romans 15,7	12, 13, 14, 15 February