



At the FOOT of the CROSS



2022

A Lenten Meditation

Prepared By Bishops, Clergy, Deaconesses and Members of the Laity of the Anglican Diocese of West Malaysia

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DIOCESAN BISHOP'S FOREWORD LENT 2022

We would like to thank the Rev. Dr Vijendra Daniel, and his team, for producing this year's Lenten Meditation, "At The Foot Of The Cross".

We are pleased to note that the Diocesan 10-year theme, "BEHOLD I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW" and, the three foci were highlighted throughout the devotionals based on the Acts of the Apostles. Well done! Our sincere thanks and appreciation to all who have contributed to this devotional in one way or another.

May I suggest some ways that may enhance the use of this year's "At the Foot of the Cross": -

1. Those who have completed their Diocesan Spiritual Platform program may organize a short one-day retreat during Holy Week, using this devotional.
2. Godparents and Godchildren can use this devotional to talk and pray together at least once a week; a Sunday will be nice. Remember the vows made during your baptism.
3. Married couples may use this Lenten Meditation to journey through Lent, meditating on the Word of God and praying together. Remember the vows made during your Holy Matrimony.
4. All of us commit to fasting, at least once a week, while reading through the Book of Acts in this devotional.



May God continue to empower you, so that you, in turn, may empower others and become a more Jesus shaped believer. Blessed Easter!
Veni Sancte Spiritus,

The Rt. Rev. Dr. D. Steven Abbarow
Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia



Dear People of God:

The first Christians observed with great devotion the days of our Lord's passion and resurrection, and it became the custom of the Church to prepare for them by a season of penitence and fasting.

This season of Lent provided a time in which converts to the faith were prepared for Holy Baptism. It was also a time for those who, because of notorious sins, had been separated from the body of the faithful and were reconciled by penitence and forgiveness, and restored to the fellowship of the church. Thereby, the whole congregation was put in mind of the message of pardon and absolution set forth in the Gospel of our Saviour and of the need which all Christians continually have to renew their repentance and faith.

I invite you, therefore, in the name of the Church, to the observance of a holy Lent by self-examination and repentance; by prayer, fasting and self-denial; and by reading and meditating on God's holy Word.

Liturgy for Ash Wednesday

BOOK OF COMMON PRAYER

QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

Frequently Asked About Lent



Q: *What is the Lenten season, and why is it set apart?*

A: It is a period of six weeks preceding the anniversary of the Saviour's death and is set apart as a special season for personal and corporate spiritual renewal. It is a time for intense study of God's Word, for meditation, for penitence and for the spiritual discipline of self-denial through fasting and prayer.

Q: *Why is it called Lent?*

A: Because it always comes in the spring of the calendar year, and the old Saxon word *lent* means "spring".

Q: *With what remarkable event in Jesus' life does the Lenten season correspond?*

A: The forty days which he spent fasting in the wilderness.

Q: *Why is the first day of Lent called "Ash Wednesday"?*

A: It is called so from the custom that prevailed in the early church of sprinkling ashes on the heads of penitents on the first day of Lent as a token of our humiliation and sorrow for sin, and as a sign of our mortality.

Q: *Are there any examples of this custom mentioned in the Bible?*

A: Yes, the example of Daniel and of David and the people of Nineveh, to which our Lord himself refers in Matthew 11:21.

Q: *If Lent is only of forty days' duration, why does it begin forty-six days before Easter?*

A: There are six Sundays in Lent, and as all Sundays are feast days in honour of the Resurrection, they are taken out. To make up for these, six days are added to the beginning of the season.



Q: *How should the Lenten season be observed by Christians?*

A: As a special season for drawing near to God by extraordinary acts of penitence, charity, and religious devotion, and by fasting and abstinence from all things that tend to draw the heart from God.

Q: *Why does the church require us to observe the Lenten fast?*

- A:**
1. Because repentance and humility are essential to growth in grace.
 2. Because these duties are apt to be neglected and forgotten unless some special time is set apart for their observance.

Q: *What objections do people sometimes raise against the observance of the Lenten fast?*

A: They say that it is a useless and superstitious custom, and that Christ nowhere commanded his disciples to fast.

Q: *How do we answer this objection?*

- A:**
1. Fasting was a common practice and not only among God's chosen people (Exo.34:38; 2 Sam.12:16; 1 Kings 19:8; Ps.35:13; Joel 1:14; Jonah 3:5).
 2. Jesus fasted and so did his disciples. He did not command his followers to fast; he assumed that they would and gave them directions on how to fast (Matt.6:17). Fasting has the highest divine authority.
 3. A few persons who accept the principle of Lent complain that the season is so long that people, weary of its observance, relax its discipline. But it is intentionally made long so that it must be kept by ordered rule and rational self-control, instead of impulsive actions and emotional devotions.





EDITOR'S NOTE

This year's Lenten Meditations are taken from the Acts of the Apostles. No other book demonstrates so vividly the current three main foci of our diocese: Discipleship, Church Planting and Leadership Development. We can see aspects of all three throughout the ministry of Peter, Paul and the other apostles as recorded in this book.

The passages selected are deliberately long for two primary reasons. Firstly, to cover the entire Book of Acts in 46 days and secondly, to encourage the diligent study of God's word as a valuable Christian discipline during this holy season of Lent.

I would like to thank all those who have prayed for us and encouraged us in the preparation of this Lenten Meditation. I would also like to thank all the contributors for their thoughtful and encouraging devotionals and for diligently following the guidelines and submitting their articles on time. A special word of appreciation to my editors and proof-readers, Mrs Anne Abbarow, Mrs. Joan Daniel and Mrs. Susila Packianathan. Their invaluable support and assistance have been of enormous help in helping get this publication out in good time.

May the Holy Spirit anoint these pages and bring understanding, truth, grace and transformation in our lives as we meditate on His precious word this Lent.

Revd. Dr. Vijendra Daniel
Editor



INTRODUCTION TO ACTS

Imagine if we only had the four Gospels and the Letters of Paul in the New Testament. Our understanding of God's mission for the church would be truncated. We would never know how the gospel originally took root in Palestinian soil and spread all over the Mediterranean basin. We would never know how the Gentiles were added to the originally Jewish church. We might also have had questions about Paul and his background, and how he became an apostle. We would also never know how churches in cities like Philippi, Thessalonica, Corinth, and Ephesus originated.

This is why Acts is unique among the New Testament writings. It is the only book that records the history and the expansion of the early church within the first three decades following the resurrection and ascension of Christ. It describes the ministry of the apostles empowered by the Holy Spirit, with special attention on Peter, whose focus was primarily among the Jews (Acts 1–12) and Paul, who took the gospel to the Gentiles (Acts 9–28).

The way the expansion of the early church in Acts took place is structured according to the geographical movement outlined in Acts 1:8: "you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth." From Acts 1:1–7:60, the narrative focuses on the ministry of the apostles in Jerusalem. When persecution broke out in Jerusalem (Acts 8:1,4), the church was scattered throughout Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1–9:31). However, the preaching of the gospel could not be thwarted, and the church continued to grow in strength and number (Acts 9:31).

With the conversion and calling of the Apostle Paul (Acts 9:1–30), and the growth of the church in other parts of the region (Acts 11:19–21), the gospel continued to spread powerfully to the "ends of the earth" (Acts 9:32–28:31). The narrative of Acts ends by demonstrating that the gospel had even penetrated into the heart of the Roman Empire, the city of Rome.

Together with his coworkers, Paul was the instrument used by God in bringing the gospel to the Gentile world through his extensive travels in regions now known as modern Turkey, Cyprus, Greece, and Italy. Acts records for us Paul's three missionary journeys (Acts 13:1–14:28; 15:36–



18:22; 18:23–21:17). These journeys show Paul and other missionaries constantly on the move, being guided by the Holy Spirit, in spreading the good news of Jesus Christ to all people. Yet, at times, we also see Paul settling down over an extended period of time in some major cities such as Corinth (Acts 18:11) and Ephesus (Acts 19:8, 10) as he continued to disciple and nurture new believers in Christ.

One distinctive feature in the Book of Acts is the record of many speeches or sermons. There are at least twelve of them: four by Peter (Acts 2:14–36; 3:11–26; 10:27–43; 11:4–17), one by Stephen (Acts 7:1–53), one by the Jerusalem apostles (Acts 15:7–11, 13–21), and six by Paul. There are three sermons of Paul preached during each of his missionary journeys to different audiences: to Jews in Pisidian Antioch on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:16–47), to Gentiles in Athens on his second missionary journey (Acts 17:22–31), and to the Ephesian leaders on his third missionary journey (Acts 20:17–35). The other three are his defence before the authorities in Jerusalem and Caesarea (Acts 22:1–21; 24:10–21; 26:1–29). All these speeches are bold witnesses to Christ and his gospel.

Finally, Acts also demonstrates that nothing shall prevent the gospel from being proclaimed to the world: not the religious leaders (Acts 5:39), not unbelievers (Acts 8:1–3), not the Jews (Acts 11:1–18; 15:1–35), not secular political leaders (Acts 12:1–24; 16:16–40) and not even suffering and persecution (Acts 8:1, 4).

As we begin our journey in this season of Lent by reading and reflecting on the Acts of the Apostles, may God continue to speak to us. May we be reminded that we too are called to be witnesses of the gospel of Christ. May we be encouraged to participate in God's mission in bringing reconciliation to the world. May we be empowered by the Holy Spirit for Christian service.

Rev. Dr. Lim Kar Yong

Lecturer of New Testament Studies, STM



Ash Wednesday, 2nd March

John 8: 1-11

A LEADER WITH A COMPASSIONATE HEART

Some years ago, I was with a family when a couple of policemen brought the man of the house handcuffed to search the house for stolen items in the house. Upon seeing her husband handcuffed, his wife burst into tears. I was really moved to see her and the children cry, but her tears did not move the hearts of the policemen. They came, searched the house and took the man away. The policemen were just doing their job. They had no attachment to the man's family. I was with the family when he was sentenced to prison. This incident made a tremendous impact on my ministry as to how I relate with those caught in sin.

In John 8: 3-5, we read of a similar case. A woman was caught in adultery and the men who caught her brought her to Jesus. (I presume she was not related to any of them as they didn't show any sympathy for her or her family). Apart from their intention to test Jesus and to punish her, I think they also wanted to exhibit their self-righteousness. They exposed her sin not to correct her but to condemn her. What was Jesus' response? Did he agree with their proposed action just because they quoted Moses? For them, a crime had been committed and she must be punished. But for Jesus, the woman was special and precious because she was a child of God for whom He would die on the Cross of Calvary.

Jesus took the opportunity to minister to the men and to the woman. To the men, he gently pointed out their own sins, and to the woman, he demonstrated the love and compassion of God by not condemning her. All the men left because there was none among them who were sinless. Jesus is sinless, yet he did not condemn her. Neither did he condone her sin. Through this incident, Jesus was discipling the disciples on how to treat sinners: not to be self-righteous, not to condemn and judge sinners and to extend mercy and compassion to sinners.

In the Book of Acts, we see the disciples reaching out to the lost with the same spirit of Christ. As a result, the Church empowered by God the Holy Spirit, grew from strength to strength.



Today is Ash Wednesday, the beginning of a very important season. It's a time to reflect on our own spiritual journey. At the end of the forty days of fasting and prayer, the world should see more of the love and compassion of Christ in us. If not, our fasting will be nothing more than dieting. Our fasting and prayer should transform us to be leaders like Jesus; leaders with hearts of compassion.

PONDER

How do you respond to people caught in sin? When was the last time you went on your knees and wept before God for someone living in sin?

PROMISE

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

1 JOHN 1:9 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Almighty God, our heavenly Father, we have sinned against you and against our fellow men, in thought and word and deed, through negligence, through weakness, through our own deliberate fault. We are truly sorry and repent of all our sins. For the sake of your Son Jesus Christ, who died for us, forgive us all that is past and grant that we may serve you in newness of life to the glory of your name. **Amen.***



*Ven. Edward John is the Archdeacon of the Southern Archdeaconry.
Archdeacon Edward is also the Vicar of the Parish of St. Christopher's, Johor Bahru.*



Thursday, 3rd March

Acts 1:1-11

RIGHT PRIORITIES

Leading to the final few days of her life on earth, my late mother was weak and could no longer communicate with me. During this time, I often held her hands, whispered to her my thoughts, and shared many happy memories with her. I knew that I would not have many days left, and these were precious moments for me.

Words and thoughts conveyed before the departure of loved ones can be very emotional and memorable to our hearts. A mother giving her final advice to her daughter who is leaving home for the first time to a foreign country; a father giving that final hug to his son at the airport before he flies off for his studies – these are emotional moments for families.

We could only imagine what the disciples must have felt moments before the Ascension of Christ. Even though the Lord had promised them the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:4-5), they would certainly miss the physical presence of their master. Gathering together, they seized this opportunity and decided to ask Jesus one final question: “Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6)

This question reveals what must have been the most pressing and important thought they had in their minds. Strange enough, it was not a question about when the Holy Spirit would come. It was not a question on how they might carry out the ministry of proclaiming the gospel to the people. Instead, the question exposes the selfish desires of the disciples hoping that God would establish his physical kingdom on earth to overthrow the Roman Empire. They were more concerned with who among them would be the greatest and who would be rulers with Christ in this kingdom (see Mark 9:33-34; 10:35-45). Sadly, this self-centred ambition had clouded them from seeing God’s purpose and mission for the world.

In responding to the disciples, the Lord reminded them that God’s mission is far bigger than the restoration of Israel. God is reconciling the whole world to himself, and the disciples are to be empowered by the Holy Spirit as they bring the gospel from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and to the ends



of the earth (Acts 1:8). It is time for the disciples to put aside their own aspirations. It is time for them to embrace God's plan and purpose for them.

As we begin this season of Lent, let us consider how we can participate in God's mission through every activity of life that expresses God's creativity, sustains God's creation, and brings about God's redemption in our nation and the world.

PONDER

Are we focusing on God's mission and priorities or are we, like the disciples, caught up with our own self-promoting agenda and plans?

PROMISE

"Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven."

ACTS 1:11 (ESV)

PRAYER

Thank you, Lord Jesus that you didn't leave your disciples and us alone and in despair, but you sent the Holy Spirit as a Helper to be with us forever. By the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, give us power to proclaim your Gospel to our family, our friends, our neighbours and to those from other lands.
Amen.



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Friday, 4th March

Acts 1: 12-26

DEPENDENT AND EXPECTANT WAITING

We wait all the time. We wait to fall asleep at night; we wait on responses to emails, for Lazada deliveries, for our paycheck to hit our bank account, for people with whom we are sharing Christ to respond to the Gospel, etc. What are some things you're waiting for?

Returning to Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, after Jesus' ascension, the apostles and other believers begin a time of waiting in the Upper Room as per the instruction of their Master, *"wait in the city until you are clothed with power from on high."* (Luke 24:49). They waited patiently for this indispensable gift of the Holy Spirit.

Together, the eleven remaining apostles, with Jesus' mother and brothers, and other believers, numbered about 120. This pre-Pentecost, pre-mission, embryonic Church waited, constant in prayer – expectant, but not sure exactly what would happen next. Like the gathering of ominous, dark clouds before life-giving rain falls. Nothing expresses our dependency upon God more than prayer. For ten days they wait and pray constantly, not empty, idle waiting, but prayer-filled expectant waiting. It is to prayer they turn first, in response to Jesus' parting words. It is significant that before the coming of the Spirit, prayer was already flowing naturally from the gathered believers' hearts and mouths.

Leaders must first be followers. The eleven remaining apostles are all named, and under the direction of Peter, they chose a successor to Judas. Judas' replacement is Matthias, who restores the number back to the original twelve. As one who followed Christ faithfully from the beginning, Mathias was a witness to the resurrection and proved to be a suitable replacement. St Matthias, commemorated 14 May in the Church calendar, died c.80 AD after preaching in Judea, Cappadocia, and Ethiopia. The place and circumstances of his death are uncertain, and Matthias is not mentioned by name anywhere else in the New Testament, but he comes to occupy a foundational place in the purposes of God.

Waiting and ready to go, the believers look to God in faith and for his leading to fulfill Jesus' words, *"You will be my witnesses from Jerusalem*



... *to the ends of the earth.*”(Acts 1:8) Nothing begins until the fulfilment of the promise of the Holy Spirit. Expectant, poised and available, plans and actions will only become clear as they depend on God to supply their needs. Guided by, and reliant on the power of the Divine Helper, they will be resourced and launched into mission. The urge to act is strong, but dependent on the Spirit they wait patiently for the blessing, like the coming rain.

PONDER

Waiting on God is not always easy for us. Joseph languished in an Egyptian prison for years. Martha and Mary waited while their brother Lazarus lay dying. Having to wait causes us to learn to trust Him and His perfect timing. How well are you waiting?

PROMISE

“They who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.”

ISAIAH 40:31 (ESV)

PRAYER

O Almighty God, who chose your faithful servant Matthias to replace Judas among the twelve, grant that your Church, being delivered from false apostles, may always be ordered and guided by faithful and true pastors; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Rev David Cox is the head of the Diocesan Spiritual Formation Platform and Spiritual Director of Wellspring Retreat House, Rawang. David was Vicar of All Saints' Church, Taiping (1983-1988 and 2013-2015).



Saturday, 5th March

Acts 2:1-21

THE SPIRIT COMES AS PROMISED

When I was a child, my father once told my sisters and I that we would be hosting a visitor from another country as a guest in our home. In the days leading up to his arrival, we were excited, anticipating what he would look like and what gifts he would bring with him! In short, he turned out to be very different from what we had imagined, but we had a good time getting to know him.

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, he promised his disciples that he would send the Holy Spirit to empower them to be his witnesses (Acts 1:8). At Pentecost, the second of the annual Jewish harvest feasts, 50 days after the Passover, the Spirit indeed came as promised. It came with the sound of a mighty rushing wind, and tongues of fire that divided and rested on each of them where they were gathered (vv.2-4). What happened next? They began to declare the mighty works of God in different languages! When devout Jews who had come from different regions to Jerusalem for the annual feast heard the disciples speaking in their own native languages, some were amazed and astonished, while others mocked them, saying that they were drunk “with new wine” (vv. 6-13).

So, what does all this mean? We recall the story of Babel in Genesis 11:1-9 where the peoples of the earth who shared a common language united together with one cause –to build a city and a tower with “its top in the heavens”. Their aim? To make a name for themselves, going against God’s command to fill the earth and subdue it. This resulted in God’s judgment, where he confused their languages so that they were scattered across the earth.

What we see at Pentecost is a reversal of Babel, where God’s Spirit is at work, bringing people from different nations, tribes, and tongues together to be part of his kingdom. Instead of confusion like in Babel, the Jews from different regions who were in Jerusalem heard and understood the disciples’ declaration of God’s mighty works. The Spirit has come, in fulfilment of God’s promises as the prophets of old had foretold, and “*everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved.*” (vv.17-21).



The same Spirit who came upon the disciples that first Pentecost lives in all who trust in Jesus as Lord today. All who hear and believe the Gospel are sealed with the promised Holy Spirit (Ephesians 1:13). Like them, let us proclaim the Good News of Christ to those around us!

PONDER

When Christ returns, his people from every tribe, nation and tongue will gather around God's throne, offering praise and worship to God and to the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9-12) As those who have been filled with God's Spirit, are we declaring the mighty works of God by sharing this Good News with others?

PROMISE

"If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!"

LUKE 11:13 (ESV)

PRAYER

Lord, thank you for sending your Holy Spirit, the promised divine Helper, to live in us and guide us in all things. Fill us afresh each day with the Holy Spirit and give us sensitive ears to hear His voice and hearts to keep in step with Him. In Jesus' precious name we pray. Amen.



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Sunday, 6th March

Acts 2:22- 47

FIVE MARKS OF A GROWING CHURCH

Guided by the Diocesan strategic focus on leadership development, church planting, and discipleship, today's passage gives us a description of how the early Church operated and grew. It first started with the coming of the Holy Spirit, followed by Peter's powerful proclamation of the Gospel. Many were convicted, baptised and then discipled as they *"devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, fellowship and prayers"*. This early church community had five marks that stood out: Salvation, Separation, Sanctification, Service and Sharing. These provided the people with a distinct way of living as opposed to the prevailing cultures surrounding them.

Salvation: (vv. 23-24, 37) When they realized they were complicit in the brutal, crucifixion of Jesus, they were "cut to the heart". It was *their sins* he was atoning for on the cross. They received the Good News of his resurrection with joy, repented from their sins and by faith received Jesus as Lord and Master. They displayed their commitment through baptism and began a new life in Christ.

Separation: (v. 41) Jesus called them to a new way of holy living – separated from the devil, the world and the flesh – but united in him. They were to be influencers -the salt and light of the world, the aroma of Christ, wherever they went (2 Cor. 2:15-17). It is what Paul would counsel young Timothy to do when he said, *"No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him."* (2 Timothy 2:4).

Sanctification (vv. 42-43) means "to set apart for special use or purpose". Our Anglican formularies speak of *"sanctification as a means of God's work within us by way of which we grow into the fullness of the redeemed life."* This work of sanctification was accomplished as they allowed the *"gift of the Holy Spirit"* (v.38) to transform their lives.

The early Church was also blessed and ready for **Service (vv. 44-45)**. They sold their possessions and belongings then distributed the money to those in need. For example, helping them fund burials, communal meals, and other social needs.



Finally, the Church was all about Sharing (vv. 46-47). They learned to share and had everything in common. Early Christians practised communal sharing of resources; for example, in Acts 4: 36-37, Joseph (nicknamed Barnabas) sold some land and brought the money to the apostles for distribution to the poor.

These five marks of the early church made them strong and effective. Thousands were being added to the church on a regular basis. It is incumbent upon us to follow such a great example of wholesome discipleship and fellowship.

PONDER

Lent is a time of self-examination. What hinders the growth of the Church? What is my role in fostering Christian unity and growth? Martin Luther said, *“A religion that gives nothing, costs nothing and suffers nothing is worth nothing”*.

PROMISE

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

MATTHEW 6:33 (ESV)

PRAYER

Lord, teach me to serve as you deserve to be served, to give and not to count the cost, to fight and not to heed the wounds, to labour and not to seek to rest, to give of myself and not to ask for a reward, except the reward of knowing that I am doing your will.

(Prayer of St. Ignatius of Loyola)



The Rt Reverend Dato’ Charles Samuel is the former Suffragan Bishop of the Northern Peninsula. Bishop Charles is currently Priest-in-charge at St Paul’s Church, Bukit Tengah, Penang.



Monday, 7th March

Acts 3:1-26

DARING TO DELVE DEEP?

Our passage today is about a lame beggar sitting at the Beautiful Gate asking for alms. He is so numbed by his forty years of lameness that he can't think of any good thing happening to him except receiving alms to meet his daily needs. He can't think beyond his immediate needs. All he wanted was to get some money.

But Peter and John delved deeply looking beyond his present need to his actual need. They dared to gaze beyond their ordinary human capability. They looked deep into the supernatural mighty power vested in the name of Jesus and ignored their own mortal and temporal humanness (vv. 4-8).

It would have been easier to give the man some money rather than to spend some time. Today's effective management and administrative principle is 'clear them fast' but Peter and John looked at him with grace and compassion and took the extra time to minister to him. Ultimately this act of faith and courage led to the display of God's power and glory. It provided them with an opportunity to stand and testify and gave them a wonderful opportunity to preach the gospel and to delve deeper into the hearts of those present.

Isn't it wonderful that this healed beggar began to walk and jump for joy after his miracle? No amount of money could have made him this happy. It surely would have made Peter and John smile too. They must have been glad they took the time to stop and minister to this lame beggar, instead of just walking past him like many others had done for years. But greater still was that this beggar took the time to thank and praise God! His joy was uncontainable and many, many people around him noticed this (v.9). When was the last time people noticed us praising God with such enthusiasm?



PONDER

What do I find easier to do? Give money to missions, charity and the poor or to be actively involved in these ministries? The latter will require our time, convenience and even going outside our “comfort zones”. What would Jesus have you do?

PROMISE

“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.”

ACTS 3:19-20 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Lord, look upon me with eyes of mercy. May Your healing hand rest upon me, may Your life-giving power flow into every cell of my body and into the depths of my soul, cleansing, purifying, restoring me to wholeness and strength for service in Your Kingdom. **Amen.***



Mrs Jasmine Adaickalam is a member of St. James Church, Kuala Lumpur. She is intensively involved with many governmental and non-governmental social and welfare organizations. Her passion is to restore the dignity of the disadvantaged and underprivileged people groups.



Tuesday, 8th March

Acts 4:1-22

PROCLAIM THE GOSPEL WITH BOLDNESS!

The Message: Jesus is the cornerstone (v.11). We read from the passage that Peter and John stood boldly among the people to declare the Gospel message: *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."* (v.12). The religious authorities, however, were not impressed and tried several ways to prevent the apostles from speaking this truth. Despite being interrogated, jailed and given strict warnings, Peter and John retorted that they were only speaking what they had seen and heard. The persecutors were left looking ridiculous, for there stood a healed cripple bearing witness to the reality of the apostles' message. The crowd observed the whole thing and praised God. This was indeed a bold and powerful proclamation of the Gospel.

The Messengers: Where there is a conflict of interest, we must obey God rather than men (v.19). Why did the apostles stand firm in preaching the gospel? We know that the apostles and the early Christians encountered tremendous opposition for their preaching. Yet they, empowered by the Holy Spirit, did not shy away from asserting the truth. Socrates similarly proclaimed before his death "I shall obey God rather than you" while defending his pursuit of wisdom and truth. As believers today, we can find ourselves in similar situations. We often face a challenging task sharing the Gospel in a nation where many do not accept what we believe and proclaim. In fact, there may be great resistance and animosity towards the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The world itself takes pride in delving into relative truths and pseudo truths. The question is, as a disciple of Jesus, are we willing to witness boldly to the absolute truth of the Gospel? Or are we going to compromise the truth just to please others?

The Persecutors: Commanded not to preach or teach the name of Jesus (v 18). As the apostles preached the Gospel, the authorities felt the need to deal with the situation. From their perspective, people were listening to untrained followers of Jesus. They, the Sadducees, priests and even the captain of the temple, felt compelled to guard the "orthodoxy" of their faith and the law. What if the commoners believed these apostles and started a political uprising against the Romans? There was just too much at



stake, so they tried to stop the apostles from preaching. Today, when the Gospel is preached, some may similarly feel threatened. Some may become defensive against Christianity which they dismiss as false teaching. Some are afraid of the political fallout that may arise if conversions to Christianity are not stopped. We should not be surprised at the opposition we face in preaching the gospel. Instead, we must unite further in prayer for the Gospel to be preached faithfully in the face of opposition.

PONDER

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus.” (v.13) It doesn’t matter who you are or what your educational background may be. What really matters is - are you close to Jesus?

PROMISE

“But everyone who denies me here on earth, I will also deny before my Father in heaven.”

MATTHEW 10:33 (NLT)

PRAYER

*God our Father, we thank you for Jesus through whom we receive salvation and hope. Empower us through your Spirit so that we too may learn to share the truth of the Gospel with others. Grant us courage in the face of opposition to stand firm in this faith that you have given us. In Jesus’ name we pray. **Amen.***



*Rev. Gerard Emmanuel is the Vicar of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Ipoh.
He is also a member of the Diocesan Standing Committee.*



Wednesday, 9th March

Acts 4:23-37

PRAYER, POWER AND POSSESSIONS

The passage for today's meditation is about the power of fervent prayer. It also highlights that these early disciples of Jesus were not, like the old adage says, *"so spiritually minded but of no earthly use"* but their faith translated to practical and visible acts of charity, love and sacrifice.

The apostles were not discouraged by the rebuke given by the religious authorities. Instead, they gathered together, encouraged one another and laid their situation at the foot of the cross. The first thing they declare is the sovereignty of God. That is a wonderful place to start when faced with what seems to be insurmountable odds. It is important to remember that whatever problems or opposition we face, God is always in control! When we remind ourselves of the sovereignty of God and His steadfast, everlasting love for us, there is no hardship we cannot face. The apostles *"continued to speak the word of God with boldness"* in direct opposition to the order of the authorities.

The other thing that characterized this early church was their unity and generosity. *"All the believers were united in heart and mind and they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had."* (v. 32 NLT).

One of the benefits of *WhatsApp Messenger* is that we can pray for others and post prayer requests speedily in our chat groups. This is always helpful and more so during lockdowns. As Vicar of St Katherine's Church, during the lockdown, I prayed for sufficient support to come to enable us to distribute food baskets to the poor and needy. Apart from my church mission committee's resources, I contacted the local politicians for help. Some of them came personally to the church and delivered dry groceries. We were able to distribute the food baskets quickly and efficiently to all the needy families we had identified, and additionally to those who had asked us for help. The recipients included twenty Pakistani Christian families who are staying in Malaysia as refugees. Praise God for answering our prayers and providing the food items through group support.



PONDER

What stops us from being a church like we read this morning - fervent in prayer and sacrificially generous in practice? Would “great grace” be upon us as it was on that church? (v. 33)

PROMISE

“Truly I tell you,” Jesus replied, “no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life.

MARK 10:29-30 (NIV)

PRAYER

*Father God, I praise you for your mighty providential hand in my life. You are in control and you work every detail for my good and for your glory. Even amid the unknown, that may cause anxiety, I choose to trust you and rest in your sovereignty. You are worthy to be praised for who you are. I am so thankful for your sovereignty that guides, protects, and holds my life together. Continue to strengthen my faith in you. Help me be a light to others who also need to trust your sovereignty. In Jesus’ name. **Amen.***



Rev. Reuben Daniel is Vicar of St. Katherine’s Church, Kajang.



Thursday, 10th March

Acts 5:1-11

HAVING YOUR CAKE AND EATING IT

The story of Ananias and Sapphira must be one of the saddest stories in the Bible. A couple who wanted to have their cake and eat it too! After they had seen others selling land and giving the proceeds to God, they came up with a scheme to ensure they would be praised for giving to God, yet at the same time, secretly keeping back some of the money of the land they sold. All of us can fall into this same trap of self-serving schemes which bring glory to us – rather than to God. This story warns us of the incredible danger of doing so.

When we look at Jesus' teaching on giving in Matthew 6:2-4, we see a very clear message *"So when you give to the needy, do not sound a trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by men. Truly I tell you, they already have their full reward. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. And your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you"*. Jesus tells us NOT to make it widely known that we have been generous. Instead, we should give anonymously.

The passage in Acts 4 describes a generous group of Christians, who were giving and sharing in order to look after each other. Although Ananias and Sapphira's motivations were not explicitly described in Acts 5, it seems that they wished to "purchase" a position as famous philanthropists within the church.

The question which all of us face in our Christian lives is whether we are giving or serving because we wish to glorify God – or because we wish to glorify ourselves? Clearly, many Christians have fallen into the trap of working for their own glory. Not many of them faced the instant consequences of dropping dead, as Ananias and Sapphira did. But some will surely face the consequences when they account for their deeds before God.



PONDER

Consider the ways in which you are serving God. Is there anything you are doing which you should reconsider? Is there any way in which you are seeking your own glory? Are you seeking favour from church leaders rather than from God? Repent and ask God for forgiveness and seek his wisdom on how best to serve him.

PROMISE

“But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

MATTHEW 6:3-4 (ESV)

PRAYER

*God of All Goodness, give me a heart for generosity. Show me how to hold my possessions lightly, ever mindful of their temporary value. Inspire me to share what I have in full measure, so that others are able to live without need or want. Let me know the grace of a bountiful life, one overflowing with gratitude for all that I have to give. Help me to give with the right desire and motives that I may ultimately bring glory to your name and not mine. In the name of your generous son, Jesus, I pray. **Amen.***



Mr Edward Clayton is a lay reader at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur. He is a Partner in PwC Malaysia's advisory practice, a Malaysia PR holder and the Chairman of Navigate Together, a ministry serving Third Culture Kids in Kuala Lumpur.



Friday, 11th March

Acts 5:12-42

DON'T STOP GOSSIPING THE GOSPEL

Have we become complacent to witnessing about our Christian faith? Why may you ask? What with all the lockdowns, we can't really blame ourselves can we? Unless like some who witness through digital evangelism using emojis. But not with the disciples in the early church who after Pentecost got so excited about sharing the Good News that Jesus is alive. Our text follows the frightening incident when two disobedient people were struck down dead by God for the deadly sin of hypocrisy which was a warning to the early church then.

We begin by seeing the clear demonstration of God's power according to John 14:12 and Mark 16:15-18 when Jesus said "greater works" they would do after his resurrection and his ascension. And Mark confirms it in his gospel in chapter 16:19-20, that signs and wonders of healing of the sick and those troubled by unclean spirits will take place. And as people witnessed these things happening – they decided to be part of his body the Church through believing in Jesus.

However, those who cannot stop telling others about Jesus, will face trials and opposition from enemies of the gospel – even jealous religious leaders! All of us are aware of what is happening around the world. As Christians actively participate in evangelism, so persecution becomes real for them. Yet for many of these Christians, like the disciples here, they choose to obey God rather than men, even religious leaders like the high priest and the religious council the Sanhedrin. So off to prison the disciples go.

Yet the resurrection power of our Living God cannot be held back by prison walls or prison gates. God sends His angel to rescue and release them out of the prison. As instructed by the angel to start preaching again – they just obey and find themselves back in the temple teaching the people and preaching the Gospel faithfully.

When rearrested for disobedience, God sent Gamaliel to defend them. As a result, they are only flogged and released with strict orders to stop teaching and preaching about Jesus Christ. However, we see that excited



people, who are passionate for Jesus, are unstoppable on matters about proclaiming the Good News. So off they go every day to the temple and from house to house to teach and preach about Jesus in defiance of the religious authorities.

PONDER

We live in relatively peaceful times but ponder for a moment and ask yourselves if we will have the courage or be bold if times of persecution come? Will we obey God and keep telling others about Jesus or will we capitulate to human authorities and their man-made rules?

PROMISE

“Whoever does not take up their cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds their life will lose it, and whoever loses their life for my sake will find it.”

MATTHEW 10:38-39 (NIV)

PRAYER

*O God, my Strength, You are our comfort and our hope. I pray for those believers who are separated from their families, their community, or even their spouses due to persecution. Be their rock and their peace. Let them trust in You and hold fast to Your Gospel and know that there is nothing that can ever separate them from Your love. Thank You for who You are. **Amen.***



Elisabeth Alfred is a retired nurse and licensed Lay Reader of St. Paul's Anglican Church, Petaling Jaya. Elisabeth has a heart for mentoring others.



Saturday, 12th March

Acts 6:1-15

CONFLICT FROM WITHIN AND WITHOUT

Our Christian faith causes opposition from without. What about conflict arising from within? The 'litmus test' for disagreement among believers is whether the Gospel is at stake on matters pertaining to salvation. These are not at stake in verses 1 to 7. Yet any issue that may divide the church must be taken seriously. The conflict with non-believers (6:8-15) is potentially explosive, pitting Orthodox Jews against Christian Jews. Stephen was charged with blasphemy, but the presentation of false witnesses betrays malice.

An internal dispute arose regarding the daily distribution of food. We don't know whether the complaint was true or was merely a 'hiccup' in the church's internal welfare system, but any hint of injustice or inequity would be very damaging for the unity and integrity of the fledgling church. The leadership immediately sought to 'nip it in the bud'.

First, the Apostles sought to improve the organization of the welfare ministry. Everyone took the responsibility to appoint seven men known to be full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom and faith (6:4,5). The ministry principles revealed here are first, congregational ownership of both the welfare ministry and the 'diaconate' (i.e. human responsibility) and second, the Holy Spirit's gift of godly men (i.e. divine sovereignty). This divine-inspired solution brought complete agreement among the congregation (6:5) and the apostles (6:6).

However, the most important lesson learnt here is- the priority of the teaching and preaching ministry (6:2, 4). All divine-inspired ministries are important, but we must discern what is the priority. We must not be distracted from what is central to the work of the Gospel and salvation. We know God was pleased with the outcome because the Apostles' preaching flourished and more disciples were added to the fledgling church (6:7).

The conflict from without occurred because Stephen performed 'signs and wonders' which upset the Greek-speaking Jews from the Synagogue of the Freedmen (6:9). Their dispute was ineffective (6:10) until they "*privately*



whispered” to some men that Stephen had committed blasphemy against Moses and God (6:11, 13-14). The testimony of the false witnesses (6:13) reminds us of the situation the Lord Jesus faced in Mark 14:58.

This commentary does not allow us to examine Steven’s speech which pertained to the relationship of Christianity to the temple and the law. However, we note the person of God the Holy Spirit at work through Stephen (6:10). This is again reemphasized in v.15 giving us a glimpse of God’s majesty and glory, just like when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (Exodus 34:29-30).

PONDER

Do we know when to apply the ‘litmus test’ for disagreement among believers? Will we allow God to do things his way, or is our word the final end of the matter?

PROMISE

“This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us.”

1 JOHN 5:14 (NIV)

PRAYER

*Father, today we ask for your help to walk humbly with our brothers and sisters. Lord, help us to humble ourselves in order that we do not let the lies of the enemy overtake us, rather, help us to count ourselves as equals with one another. It is then that we will stop attempting to be better than others, and we can love their hearts for the unique person You made them to be. Help us to value one another in this humble spirit so that we may live to the fullest. In Jesus name, **Amen**.*



Article by the Reverend Lee Kon Yim, a Chartered Quantity Surveyor by training and Priest at St Mary’s Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.



Sunday, 13th March

Acts 7:1-19

ABRAHAM'S JOURNEY OF FAITH

As I write this, I am travelling on a flight from Kota Kinabalu back to Kuala Lumpur. I was visiting family in Sabah. Where is your family? Have you ever moved to a different part of the country or overseas for educational or economic purposes? Or has God called you to go to a different country to serve him? In our passage today, Stephen reminds us that Abraham heard God's call and, in simple obedience, left his country and his people to a place where he knew nothing about. He trusted God implicitly – without question or reservation.

Stephen's testimony highlights three key points. First, the importance of hearing God's voice. The forty days of Lent are a perfect opportunity to come before God, to pray, praise and listen to him. As we read God's Word we will hear his gentle whisper. Perhaps you are at a crossroads? When Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, he wrestled with temptation. Like Abraham, the decisions we make will affect not just us but future generations. Let us use this Lenten season to listen to what God is trying to say to us.

The second key point is to not give up on God even when the going gets tough. We do not have a choice when it comes to siblings. When Joseph's brothers sold him to the Ishmaelite traders, that was just the beginning of his troubles. This pandemic is also a period of uncertainty: we never know when a new variant will emerge, its potential impact in terms of transmission or risk of reinfection, or its susceptibility to vaccines. What we do know is that when a famine struck all Egypt and Canaan bringing great suffering (v.11), Joseph was already strategically placed by God to ensure the survival of his entire family. Let us remind ourselves that God is with us and will rescue us from all our troubles.

The final point is that God always keeps his promises (v.17). We may not live to see our churches grow in number and in the knowledge of God. Instead, we may only see edicts to execute church leaders like Stephen or even worse, be forced to throw out infants so that they would die (v.19).



By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going (Heb. 11:8).

PONDER

We chose to bring up our children in Malaysia knowing that the culture will shape them to be who they are today. God has specific plans for you. He kept his promise to Abraham, and he will keep his promise to us. Is God asking you to do something that requires great faith? Don't hesitate – we have an even greater God!

PROMISE

"And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or lands, for my name's sake, will receive a hundredfold and will inherit eternal life."

MATTHEW 19:29 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Lord, help me to listen to your voice. I know that by embarking on a journey of faith with you, it will have an impact on the lives of those around me and future generations. May my testimony be as strong as Stephen's. Give me wisdom so I can be part of your plan for building your kingdom. **Amen.***



Article by Janet Clayton, Chairperson of the Board of Governors, Pudu English Secondary School, Kuala Lumpur. Janet studied at St Paul's Theological College, KL. She worships at All Souls' International Community Church, Kuala Lumpur.



Monday, 14th March

Acts 7: 20-60

THE FIRST MARTYR OF CHRISTENDOM

Many of us find ourselves afraid to share our faith with others. Often, we stay silent because we're afraid of rejection or persecution. Perhaps we're afraid of upsetting our families, losing friendships, curtailing our work progression, or attracting unwarranted attention from the authorities. We avoid suffering, but the gospel doesn't grow either. What can give us confidence to share our faith even though we may suffer for it? In Acts 7:20-60 the climax of Stephen's speech culminated in his incensed rejection, making him the first martyr of the church.

In his unravelling of Israel's history, Stephen focuses mainly on the opposition Moses received from his own people, despite being called by God to save his people. Though God had miraculously saved Moses at birth (vv. 20-22), and put it in his heart to save his people (vv. 23-25), he was rejected by his people, who cried out, *"Who made you a ruler and a judge over us?"* (v. 28).

God appeared to Moses in the burning bush and sent him to Egypt to save his people (vv. 30-34) but the very one *"God sent as both ruler and redeemer"*, they rejected (v. 35). Though Moses performed miracles (v.36), God's people *"refused to obey him, but thrust him aside"* (v. 39). As punishment, God gave his people over to idol worship (vv. 40-43). They fell into depravity despite all that God had given them: the Tabernacle, the Promised Land and the Temple (vv. 44-50).

Stephen concludes in dramatic fashion, accusing them of being "stiff-necked", "uncircumcised in heart and mind", "always resisting the Holy Spirit", persecuting the prophets, and finally betraying and murdering Christ, the Promised Messiah (vv. 51-52). They were concerned with Moses, the law and temple (6:11-13), but rejected the one to whom all these pointed. As lawbreakers, they were urged to repent (7:53). Instead, filled with rage at his testimony to Christ (vv. 54-56), they viciously stoned Stephen to death (vv. 57-60).

We observe from this passage, the deep-seated idolatry and sin of the human heart. People reject Christ because they don't want Christ to be Saviour and King. They may seem religious or devoted on the outside but



in their hearts, they serve idols. These may take the form of gold and silver, gods of other religions, good gifts like family, or work-related matters. Unless people are convicted of their sin, they will never turn from their idolatry to receive Christ as King.

Secondly, we observe the inevitable rejection that results from boldly confronting people's sin. Our suffering may not be as severe as Stephen's, but nevertheless, we will suffer. Only if we are convinced like Stephen, that the gospel is true, and Christ has indeed been exalted to the right hand of God, will we have boldness to speak. For if Christ is risen, what have we got to lose? Even if we are killed, Jesus will receive our Spirit, and we'll be with him in the end.

PONDER

What makes you afraid to share the gospel with others? How does knowing that Christ has been exalted to God's right hand give you boldness to speak?

PROMISE

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

MATTHEW 5:10-12 (ESV)

PRAYER

Father, help me like Stephen, at any time, to be able to give up that which I cannot keep, to gain that which I cannot lose. Amen.



Article by the Reverend Tim Nicholls, Curate at St George's Church, Penang.



Tuesday, 15th March

Acts 8:1-25

THE SPREADING FLAME

Hindsight, as they say, is 20/20. Who would have thought that the sad expulsion of missionaries from China because of the Boxer rebellion could benefit the advancement of the gospel? The closing of China's door to foreign missionaries saw the redeployment and influx of missionaries into South-East Asia, including Malaysia. The gospel moved powerfully albeit in an unexpected direction.

How could any good have come from the great persecution (8:1) that followed Stephen's tragic martyrdom? Surely this would severely hamper Jesus' intention for the gospel to go from Jerusalem into all of Judea and Samaria and eventually to the ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). But the attempt of the Jewish leaders to quash this new movement only succeeded in fanning the spreading flame of the gospel into Judea and Samaria, as the disciples who scattered into the region 'gossiped' the gospel 'wherever they went' (8:1).

Our present passage focuses on another obstacle that the gospel had to overcome before it could spread further afield. An obstacle that might have been more formidable for it existed within the hearts of the Jewish Christians themselves. For many generations, Jewish people despised and would not associate with Samaritans (John 4:9). Yet now it looked as though the Samaritans were putting their faith in Jesus. What 'authority' had Philip to preach to the Samaritans? Perhaps that is why, on this occasion, the pouring out of the Holy Spirit had to wait until Peter and John arrived to see the situation for themselves.

God had planned for the leaders of the church to witness and testify to His acceptance of the Samaritans into the family, for this was precisely what the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on them meant. When that happened, even the apostle John, who had earlier wanted to call fire from heaven to destroy some Samaritans (Luke 9:54), could no longer deny that the precious news of the gospel was for them as well. And so, though previously despising them, he and Peter now went and continued preaching the gospel in 'many' Samaritan villages (8:25). What a remarkable transformation the gospel makes on those who hear it!



Good Friday reminds us that God's wrath and mercy meet at the Cross. His righteous wrath on sinners and his unfathomable mercy and grace were demonstrated as Jesus bled for sinners to redeem them from their slavery to sin and death. As our Diocese focuses on discipleship and church planting, let us remember that at the core of both activities is the desire to get on board with God's plan of transferring sinners, regardless of colour or creed, from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of the Son and to present them fully matured in Christ (Col. 1-2). Acts reminds us that this process isn't always going to be easy. Sometimes it comes at great cost. But behind all our efforts is the work of the mighty Christ and his Gospel which is unstoppable.

PONDER

Often our own partiality, racism and discrimination prevents us from being effective witnesses to Christ's gospel and love. Can you ask the Lord to reveal areas of intellectual, spiritual, ethnic or social prejudice in the way you respond to others?

PROMISE

"After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb."

REVELATION 7:9 (NIV)

PRAYER

*Good and gracious God, you invite us to recognize and reverence your divine image and likeness in our neighbour. Enable us to see the reality of racism and free us to challenge and uproot it from our society, our world and ourselves. This we pray in Jesus' name, **Amen.***



Article by the Reverend Nick Loi is the Pastor of Christ Church, Ipoh.



Wednesday, 16th March

Acts 8: 26-40

THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

Have you ever been driving on a main road when suddenly Waze directs you to turn off and take a back route down quieter, smaller roads? Do you obey or keep going on the highway? Have you ever felt prompted by God to take an alternative route in life, maybe switching jobs, roles or circumstances, from something that looked successful to something less obvious?

At the start of Acts 8, the apostle Philip is in the middle of a 'successful' mass movement of God in Samaria, but suddenly God, through an angel, tells him to change course and take the quiet desert road south from Jerusalem towards Gaza (v.26). Philip immediately obeys, upon which the Holy Spirit tells him to stay close to a chariot on the road (v.29). In the chariot was an Ethiopian eunuch, an important official in charge of the treasury of the Kingdom of Cush (in modern day Sudan). The eunuch is reading from Isaiah 53:7-8, about the one who was led like a sheep to the slaughter. Philip begins a conversation with the Ethiopian and then explains how this passage of Scripture refers to the saving sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, sharing the good news with him. When they come to some water the eunuch asks to be baptized, which Philip does before being taken away by the Spirit, and the Ethiopian goes on his way rejoicing.

What do we learn from this amazing story? Firstly, obey the Lord, even if it seems He is asking you to leave something fruitful and take the road less travelled. The conversion of this Ethiopian was very significant. This may well have been the first Gentile to convert to Christianity, even before Cornelius and his household in Acts 10. The early church believed that the conversion of this man was the fulfilment of Psalm 68:31, which declared that Cush would submit to the LORD. They believed this treasurer returned to preach the gospel in Cush, and as a result began the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (which today has 36 million people in it!).

Secondly, we see that Jesus is the key that unlocks the Old Testament and who opens the eyes of the spiritually blind. It was only when the good news of Jesus was explained that the Ethiopian could fully comprehend the words of the prophet Isaiah. Jesus is the lens through which we must read



the whole of the Bible, and he is the one we must proclaim when sharing our faith.

Thirdly, we see that when we share or do ministry for Jesus, we become more like Jesus. Acts was written by Luke, and this story about Philip has parallels with Jesus on the road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13-35. In Luke 24 Jesus walks with two travellers on the quiet road to Emmaus. He explains how the Scriptures are all about him, the Messiah. He shares a sacrament with them (breaking bread rather than baptism), and then he is miraculously taken away too.

PONDER

Be encouraged, as you obey and take the road less travelled; not only will the Lord have significant things for you but in so doing you will become more like Christ.

PROMISE

"Call to me and I will answer you and will tell you great and hidden things that you have not known."

JEREMIAH 33:3 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Heavenly Father, thank you that Jesus is the one who saves us, who opens our eyes of faith and who unlocks the meaning of your Scriptures. Please give us the courage to obey you and take the road less travelled, and may we ever grow more into the likeness of Christ as we love those around us. We pray this in the name of Jesus, **Amen**.*



Article by the Reverend Miles Toulmin, Vicar of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur. Miles is also the Executive Director of Alpha Asia Pacific.



Thursday, 17th March

Acts 9:1-31

SINNER TO SAINT - A LIFE TRANSFORMED

Acts 9 shows Saul moving away from just being a spectator of Stephen's persecution, to becoming a leading prosecutor of the Jewish authorities. *'Breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples'* (v.1) this self-righteous, fanatical, Pharisee began ravaging churches to persecute Christians.

The Greek word 'ravage' describes a wild boar ripping a garden to shreds. With its head-on attack, it fells everything in its path and plunges its way through, attacking its enemy until the enemy is incapacitated. Can you feel the brutality, viciousness and hatred in Saul's heart? He was incredibly sinful but here is the good news. While he was still incredibly sinful, God could and would save him. Listen to what Paul would declare later, *"... but God shows his love for us in that **while we were still sinners**, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8). God knew Saul and He had other plans for him - what followed was the most dramatic conversion in human history.

What brought about this complete transformation in Saul's life? It was a light he saw, a voice he heard and a choice he made. Saul experienced 'a light from Heaven,' a dazzling light that forced him to his knees and blinded him. He heard a voice from Heaven that knew his name and asked, *"Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"* Through his question *'Who are you Lord?'* and the Lord's reply, Saul was given the chance, the choice, to follow Christ. Jesus offered shell-shocked Saul full forgiveness and he offered Saul a new mission for life.

What can we learn from Saul's experience? It reminds us that no one is beyond the reach of God's grace and His forgiveness. No one. Not even someone as sinful and vile as Saul. Anyone, anywhere, anytime can receive God's forgiveness if they repent and put their faith in Christ. Like Saul, we have done nothing to deserve God's mercy. It is a free gift of grace.

Saul's experience also reminds us of the importance of the church in the eyes of God. Saul was told, that when he persecuted Christians, he was in fact, persecuting Christ, for every Christian is part of Christ's body and precious to Him.

Today the world is seeing unprecedented attacks on Christians, but Christ warns that those who persecute Christians will be held accountable to the Lord for their actions, for they are ultimately harming him.



Finally, Saul's experience reminds us that Christian conversion must lead to action. Saul's life-changing experience on the Road to Damascus led to his baptism, instruction in the Christian faith and the immediate proclamation of Jesus as the Son of God. We too like Paul, must be eager to share with our family and friends our faith and the forgiveness and eternal life offered by the risen Christ. Through his experience, Paul led thousands to know Jesus as their risen Lord and Saviour.

PONDER

If God can show grace, mercy and compassion on such a vile person as Saul, and he can do the same for us, what will it take for us to extend that same grace to others?

PROMISE

"For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

ROMANS 5:10 (ESV)

PRAYER

Lord, create in me a clean heart. Life is so complicated, busy and chaotic but amid the mess, please give me the strength and courage to see people, places, things and events through Your lens. Please guide me and change me, oh God. Please give me Your heart for others and the world around me. Every day, help me to see, through Your eyes, the truth of what is, what has been and what will one day come. In the name of Your son Jesus I pray, Amen.



Article by Ms Esther Richards, former headmistress and editor of the Diocesan Anglican Messenger. She is currently involved in coordinating the Community Bible Study in St Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya.



Friday, 18th March

Acts 9:32-43

WE ARE GOD'S WITNESSES

Today's passage continues from chapter 5, during which time Peter and the other apostles preached the good news of Jesus from house to house. He was travelling about the country and had stopped in the town of Lydda, 45 miles northeast of Jerusalem. While in Lydda, he met Aeneas, a man who was paralyzed and bedridden for eight years. He proclaimed Jesus' healing on him and as a result, all who lived in Lydda and Sharon, who saw the healed Aeneas, turned to Jesus.

Peter was then called to Joppa (three hours on foot from Lydda) to heal Tabitha (aka Dorcas). She had fallen ill and had died, and her body was being prepared for burial. Tabitha was well-loved in her community for the good works she did among them, and some of the disciples figured that Peter could do something about the situation. When he arrived, he knelt to pray and then he called Tabitha to rise. This miracle again, caused many to believe in Jesus.

Peter was no stranger to miracles because he had seen Jesus perform them. Examples are the healing of the lame man in John 5:1-9 and the raising of the ruler's daughter in Luke 8:49-56. In fact, he was obeying Jesus' command to "heal the sick, raise the dead, ..." in Matt 10:8. But here, without Jesus beside him, we see Peter's reliance on Jesus' power to heal and raise the dead. He pointed the community to the risen Saviour who was still at work among them, and they believed in Jesus.

Although beliefs differ as to whether miracles of healing still take place today, there is no doubt that Jesus can, and still heals many of their spiritual blindness and oppression. Peter's preaching outside of Jerusalem too, was a case in point of the fulfilment of Jesus' words in Acts 1:8, that the apostles "*will be [his] witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

We are those at the ends of the earth who were once spiritually blind but have now heard and believed in the good news of Jesus Christ. We hope for the final healing of all our physical, mental, and emotional maladies.



We look forward to the greater resurrection to come. Finally, we await the consummation of God's kingdom where every nation, tongue, and tribe will be gathered unto him to sing his praises forever.

PONDER

Do our acts of service point people to Jesus Christ as Lord and Master, or to ourselves to feed our own egos? Do we show love and kindness equally to our brothers and sisters in our churches from different cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds, or do we show favouritism? Do we make known our trust in God's sovereign power and thus bring glory to him?

PROMISE

"Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up."

JAMES 5:14-15 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Lord, you said you came to proclaim liberty to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind and to set at liberty those who are oppressed. Heal those who are suffering from physical, mental or spiritual bondage and may they know freedom in Jesus Christ. **Amen.***

Peter's Early Ministry
SCAN TO OPEN THE LINK



Article by Mrs Melissa Raj, Chairperson of the Diocesan Youth Council.
Melissa worships at St Mary's Cathedral – SMACC, Kuala Lumpur.



Saturday, 19h March

Acts 10:1-48

THE GOD WHO SPANS DIVIDES, SENDS SERVANTS AND SEES IN SECRET

Have you ever wondered if your prayers are being heard and if they actually mean anything to the Lord? Have you ever wondered if your good deeds go unnoticed? The exchange between Cornelius and the apostle Peter reminds us that the answer to these questions is a resounding “yes”.

At the start of Acts 10, we are introduced to Cornelius and his family as *“devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly.”* (v. 2). However, God still wanted Cornelius to meet with the apostle Peter so that Peter could share the good news concerning Jesus’ death and resurrection with his family. In this passage, God orchestrated an encounter that would not have happened naturally: not only was Cornelius a Gentile, he was also a Roman centurion, representing the enemy occupation of Israel. Then there was Peter, a Jew, for whom it was unlawful to associate with a non-Jew (v. 28).

Why was it so important for God to orchestrate this encounter that would not have happened naturally? And what does it tell us about God?

Firstly, it tells us that **God’s love spans any divide**. When Peter addressed Cornelius’ family, he said *“I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism”* (v.34), and later on, *“everyone who believes in Him receives forgiveness of sins through His name”*. Peter needed to go to Cornelius’ home to let him know that everyone who believes in Jesus will receive forgiveness, regardless of their race, gender, or political affiliation. This story is important because it was through Cornelius’ household that the Lord publicly included the Gentile world into the fold of the church.

Secondly, it shows us that **God sends his servants** when we need help. It was obvious that God was the main mover in this story: He sent an angel to Cornelius, He gave Peter a vision, and Peter had stayed at the home of a tanner, whom the Jews viewed as unclean as they had daily contact with dead animal skins. While God prepared the way for this encounter, He also needed to work on Peter’s prejudices, and He did it graciously and



gradually, incident by incident, so that Peter could ultimately be sent on this important mission of sharing the Good News to the Gentiles.

Thirdly, it reminds us that **God sees in secret**. That which is done for the Lord in private means more to Him than outward appearance. When the angel appeared to Cornelius, he said *“your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God”* (v.4). Whenever you pray for someone to get well or are serving your family quietly at home or when you send an encouraging private message to a loved one, God sees you and He knows and loves you.

PONDER

God’s love spans a great divide. There is no prejudice or favouritism found in him. What about us? Have we shown discrimination to those around us who are different?

PROMISE

“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile.”

ROMANS 1:16 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Jesus, I thank you that through your death and resurrection on the cross we can know your love that spans divides, sends servants to help, and sees in secret. Holy Spirit, would you fill me afresh today in the same way you came upon “all who heard the message” in Cornelius’ household in Acts 10:44. Please sustain me with an enduring and steadfast love, so that I can share the love of Christ with those around me. In Jesus’ name, **Amen**.*



Article by Deaconess Jacintha Tagal who serves, together with her husband Reverend Abel, in Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang, Kuala Lumpur



Sunday, 20th March

Acts 11:1-18

“WITH GREAT POWER COMES GREAT RESPONSIBILITY”

As the axiom in the Spider-Man comic books written by Stan Lee goes **“With great power comes great responsibility”**. In today’s devotional we see Peter, one of Jesus’ closest disciples, doing things that he never imagined he could. We as Christians today who love the Lord, are we like Peter? I would like to focus here on three main points, namely Leadership, Discipleship and Church Planting, which align with our *Diocesan strategic focus*.

Leadership – Peter, a disciple/apostle appointed by Jesus to go and share the Good News, did exactly that. Indeed, we see Peter going one step further from his comfort zone to share the Gospel to the Gentiles (**Acts 10: 34-48**). Peter did so because he knew he was not alone, or he was not doing it in accordance to his own will. It was God telling him to go and therefore he went. It was through Peter that the Gentiles now know the Gospel of Jesus. As a leader, Peter did what a responsible leader would do: he went out of his comfort zone to share the Gospel to the Gentiles.

Discipleship – As a disciple of Christ, our path will not be smooth. There will be lots of trials, rejections and unwanted accusations. In verses 1 – 3, we see the Christian council themselves criticizing Peter for gathering with the unclean and eating with them. But Peter did not give up nor did he say, “I’m done lah”. He stood up and explained to them “how” and “what” happened there. I think Peter himself was surprised at the work of God when he testified as to how he saw a vision (**11:5-9**), and how everything happened exactly according to the vision (**11:11-13**) up to the coming of the Holy Spirit upon Cornelius and his household.

At that moment, all objections hurled against Peter were dropped and the Jerusalem church praised God for the work of God that led to the salvation of Gentiles. This shows that the Gospel of Christ is for everyone and the distinction between clean and unclean people has been removed. As a disciple, Peter did not give up but knew what he was called to do and he did it knowing that it was God who was leading him through the Holy Spirit.



Church Planting – Peter trusted and obeyed God and because of this a new church was planted in Caesarea for the Gentiles through the household of Cornelius. God’s purpose is that not only the Jews, but also the non- Jews should hear the Gospel and be saved. Like Peter, sometimes we need a paradigm shift in our thinking and not stand in God’s way (v.17).

PONDER

God’s Gospel is unstoppable and we, its messengers, must carry on the work without fear or favour. How do these truths affect the way you think as a **leader**, a **disciple**, and as a **church planter** in the situations we live today? We have been given “great power” by the Holy Spirit and, with that power, we are entrusted with “great responsibility” for the Kingdom of God.

PROMISE

“Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

MATTHEW 28:19-20 (ESV)

PRAYER

Eternal God, who are the light of the minds that know you, the joy of the hearts that love you, and the strength of the wills that serve you; grant us so to know you that we may truly love you, and so to love you that we may fully serve you, whom to serve is perfect freedom, in Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



Article by Reverend Avean Elvin is Priest in Charge of St. Mary’s Hall, Segamat



Monday, 21st March

Acts 11:19-30

JERUSALEM TO ANTIOCH: THEN AND NOW

Antioch was part of God's glorious purpose of salvation for the whole world. It marked the beginning of a global church which includes present day believers like us. So, you can give thanks that He has saved you within the framework of this great salvation plan. Crucially, God is still saving people today. Consider asking Him to enable you to tell this gospel news to many more?

Antioch was proof that when the Spirit is at work, God will bring people into the church. But be warned, numbers are just the start. For true conversions must result in transformed lives, which are then tested through time and countless trials. Leaders need not feel discouraged nor be competitive, for God brings the souls and they belong to Him. Be zealous instead, to guard His glory, lest it be tainted by the motivations of our flesh.

Unlike Jerusalem, Antioch preached to the wider Greeks and beyond. What about you? Have you been preaching mostly to the choir? Some Christians stick to doing what they're comfortable with, as if evangelism should happen on their terms instead of God's. Rather than going out to seek the lost, they prefer to wait for them to turn up in church. Remarkably, Christ did the opposite. He came for us, the rebels and outcasts. It's not the healthy who need the Physician, but the sick.

Like Antioch, God continues to do amazing work today. Don't let ministry turn you into a dull cynic that dismisses God's daily miracles. Then again, don't get too preoccupied with signs and wonders alone. Ministry cannot consist of prioritising frivolous emotions. In reality, true revival is found in the Spirit's daily work of sanctifying the ordinary Christians, growing us in love and repentance. Without love, even gifts of healing and tongues will profit little.

The famine prophecy shows more about the importance of responding than foretelling. The Antioch church provided for everyone, including Jerusalem members because God's church is now one; there's neither Jew nor Greek. During troubled times, Christians are not bystanders, but frontliners. Together, churches unite to respond with justice and mercy against the darkness of this world. As we extend glimpses of lifeline alongside our proclamation, the world shall then experience the true power of the gospel.



In church history, many laboured faithfully but are often unacknowledged. Yet, God will consider each one's obedience at the end. Likewise, be encouraged. God remembers your every effort, tears and sacrifices. They're not for nothing. In due time, the faithful shall be rewarded.

Antioch was known as the place where believers were called Christians (belonging to Christ) for the first time. You share this same identity. You belong to Christ your Lord. In return, He promised that nothing shall separate you from His love. So, you can take heart and sing Hallelujah Amen!

PONDER

Do not fear persecution. God uses it to grow His church, by purifying you and bringing you to maturity. Instead, pray for God to prepare you for it.

PROMISE

"Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it."

MATTHEW 16:18 (NLT)

PRAYER

Bountiful God, giver of all gifts, who poured your Spirit upon your servant Barnabas and gave him grace to encourage others: help us, by his example, to be generous in our judgments and unselfish in our service; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.



Article by Ms. Lee Sue Yee, the Regional Network Director of Christianity Explored. She is a member of the Diocesan Synod and sits on the Diocesan Ordination Interview Board. She worships at St Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur.



Tuesday, 22nd March

Acts 12:1-25

THE STORM BEFORE A MIRACLE

A pattern most prominently observed in the Bible reveals that the people of God will experience heightened difficulties prior to a great miracle. All the way from the Old Testament to the New Testament we see this pattern. This passage in the book of Acts records one such trend.

All of us desire to be fully God-dependent in every aspect of our lives. However, there will be times when things look good enough for us to walk comfortably on our own. This is not wrong. It only means we are sufficiently confident that we are in the presence of God. There are also times when things are not so good and we turn to God in desperation. We see that happening often in recent times – threats from the enemy, persecution against the church, the pandemic, or even when as individuals we face tough times that shake our health, finances, or career.

Tough times will come but how ready are we to brave through them? The passage tells us that persecution increased and leaders of the early church became the target of the authorities. What was their “mistake”? It was none other than answering the divine call to lead God’s church. That’s all to it. Simply being a leader subjected them to bear the brunt of persecution! How the church as a whole responded is a lesson for all of us today.

Verse 12 tells us that many believers gathered for prayer and it tells us the importance of corporate prayer – united, fervent intercessory corporate prayer. While prayers were ascending, God sent His angels to perform miracles. Something “unpredictable and unexpected” took place while the church was praying. An angel was sent to miraculously rescue Peter from prison and the clutches of evil. Events that unfolded seemed like excerpts taken from a fairy tale book. Even Peter was not sure if what was taking place was for real but it was for real! Chains just fell off his hands; he appeared as if invisible, walked past prison guards, and iron gates simply opened. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church:

“What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him” (1 Cor. 2:9)



PONDER

Truly, this is the promise of God to us. Trials of all kinds will come our way. Becoming the people of God will not guarantee a smooth-sailing passage on this end of heaven. However, what is sufficient is the confidence in the promise of God that He will surely carry us through. The closer to deliverance, the stronger the enemy will weigh in. But faith will see us through.

PROMISE

“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you.”

ISAIAH 43:2-3 (ESV)

PRAYER

*God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time, enjoying one moment at a time; accepting hardship as a pathway to peace; taking, as Jesus did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; trusting that You will make all things right if I surrender to Your will; so that I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with You forever in the next. **Amen.** (Reinhold Niebuhr)*



Article by Deaconess Dr Tan Swee Bee. She works with the indigenous people groups in Malaysia and currently lectures full-time in Seminari Theoloji Malaysia where she is the Assistant Director of Centre for Missions & Evangelism.



Wednesday, 23rd March

Acts 13:1-12

USE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO PREACH

Children can be picky and unpredictable with food. Even siblings, despite growing up together, can have different responses to particular foods. Similarly, people have different responses to the word of God. In our passage for today, Barnabas and Saul were set apart and sent off to do God's work. They sailed to Cyprus and preached the word of God there where they met the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, and his attendant Elymas, a sorcerer and false prophet.

In this incident, we see two opposite responses to the word of God. The proconsul, a man of intelligence, was keen to hear the word of God, and even called for Barnabas and Saul to teach him. Elymas, a man of "all kinds of deceit and trickery", opposed them and even tried to turn the proconsul from his faith. As judgement, God struck Elymas blind for a time.

The judgement may seem harsh, but we need to remember that Elymas was in fact jeopardising the proconsul's eternal fate. Rightly, he is a "child of the devil", deserving to have a millstone hung around his neck and drowned in the depths of the sea (Matt 18:6). The judgement on Elymas was likely the confirmation for the proconsul that God's word was the truth, and our passage ends with the proconsul believing all that he had been taught.

We can draw three points from the passage:

1. As we reflect on Christ's sacrifice on the cross this Lent, it is helpful to be reminded that there will be people willing to hear and even accept the gospel, just as there will be people unwilling and even opposing the work of the gospel.
2. Because we don't know how people will respond to the gospel, our duty is to use the opportunities God provides to preach the gospel faithfully to everyone - the marginalised, the commoners or even the elite - and let God work in their hearts according to His own time and will.



3. The plans and will of God prevail in all situations. Despite Elymas being “full of all kinds of deceit and trickery” in opposing Paul and Barnabas, and trying to turn the proconsul from the faith, the proconsul believed.

PONDER

Are we discouraged by people’s rejection of the gospel? In our sharing of the gospel, or in the ministries of the church, are we reaching out to everyone? Are there groups of people omitted because we anticipate rejection? Let us take heart and continue to share the gospel faithfully. For even Jesus himself faced rejection, and by the very people he came to redeem at that. Yet, he was faithful to complete the work God set before him.

PROMISE

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?”

ROMANS 8:31-23 (ESV)

PRAYER

*O Lord, give us wise, self-controlled, patient, understanding, devout, faithful, and courageous hearts. Fill our souls with devotion to your service, and strength against all temptations; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen.***



Article by Mr Daniel Chai, a member of the Diocesan Standing Committee. He worships at St Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya.



Thursday, 24th March

Acts 13:13-52

COMMITMENT TO OUR CALLING

Today's passage narrates the activities of Paul at the beginning of his first missionary journey. From Cyprus, he went to Pisidian Antioch through Perga in Pamphylia. Firstly, it tells us of Paul's great **commitment to his calling**. At Paul's conversion, God spoke to Ananias and told him that Paul was His chosen instrument to carry His name to both the Gentiles and the Jews (Acts 9:15). Like his Master Jesus Christ who was to be '*a light to the Gentiles and bring salvation to the ends of the earth*' (v. 47), Paul faithfully obeys and embarks on his mission.

Secondly, the **contents of his preaching** were clear and coherent to his mainly Jewish audience. He begins with what they knew well, an overview of the Old Testament, beginning with the days of slavery in Egypt to King David, their revered king. In this passage, Paul provides the only reference in Acts to King Saul, his namesake (vv. 21-22). Saul's reign is remembered for his lack of regard for God's Word but, by contrast, Paul will lead fruitfully because of his zeal and obedience.

At this point, he also introduces Jesus Christ, a descendent of King David, whom God brought as the Saviour whom He had promised (v. 23). Although David, a man after God's own heart, was a sinner like us, Jesus was a man who was sinless. He was unjustly crucified as he bore our sins on the cross. God validated the salvation Jesus brought us by raising him on the third day, there being many witnesses to testify to this (vv. 30,31). To bring this truth out further and to convince the Jews, he added that David died and his body decayed, but Jesus whom God raised from the dead, did not see decay (v. 37).

Thirdly, Paul **challenged his hearers to believe** (vv. 38,39) that forgiveness of sins comes only through knowing and accepting what Jesus had done for them on the cross at Calvary. No prophet, no matter how great, could achieve this for them.

However, his preaching (v. 44) provoked jealousy and opposition in the Jewish leaders but Paul was **courageous in the face of opposition** and



spoke out boldly against these troublemakers (v. 46). Despite persecution, the Word of the Lord spread throughout the region (v. 49). After Paul and Barnabas were expelled from the city, they went to Iconium, not discouraged but filled with joy and the Holy Spirit.

PONDER

We have “to make disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Can we, like Paul, summarize the gospel message in a clear and concise way for unbelievers?

PROMISE

“Therefore, my friends, I want you to know that through Jesus the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you. Through him everyone who believes is set free from every sin, a justification you were not able to obtain under the law of Moses.”

ACTS 13:38-39 (NIV)

PRAYER

*Dear Lord, help me to speak clearly to others when you direct me, and to proclaim boldly the Good News that Jesus died for me to anyone who needs to hear the Gospel. Let me never be afraid or ashamed to tell my God-story. Use me to leave a legacy for your name, dear Jesus! Empower us by your Spirit in this mission. I love You, Lord. **Amen.***

PAUL'S FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY (ACTS 13:4-14:26)
(PLEASE SCAN THE QR CODE ON THE RIGHT TO SEE A LINK)



Article by the Reverend Canon Emeritus Dato' Dr Yeoh Beng San, former priest at Cornerstone Sanctuary, Ipoh. Rev. Dato' Dr. Yeoh together with his wife, Dss. Datin Mary, are now residing in Melbourne, Australia.



Friday, 25th March

Acts 14:1-28

PERSECUTED FOR LOYALTY

Today we read about Paul and Barnabas in Iconium and Lystra on their way back to their sending church in Antioch of Syria. In Iconium, they barely escaped being stoned and in Lystra, Paul was stoned and dragged out of the city. There are three things about preaching the Gospel to others that we can learn from this passage.

First, we need to remember that our audience may be totally ignorant about the Christian faith and our Lord Jesus Christ. When Paul miraculously healed the man who was lame from birth in Lystra (vss. 8 -10), the crowds immediately associated Paul and Barnabas with two Greek gods (Zeus and Hermes) and wanted to offer sacrifices of oxen and garlands (vss. 11 -13) to them. Could this situation have been caused by some miscommunication or language barrier? Witnessing and preaching to others means that we need to take time and effort to explain clearly who Jesus really is and show by our lifestyle what it means to be Christian. It also means that we need to avoid using religious jargon and keep the message of salvation really simple so that people can understand.

Second, the Gospel is about *“turning away from worthless things and focus(ing) on the living God who made all things in heaven and earth”* (v. 15b). Yes, there is a living God who has lovingly provided for us in every way just as Paul said He did - by giving them rain and crops, plenty of food and happiness (vss. 16 -17). People were probably ignorant in the past (Acts 17:30) but now they must hear the proclamation of the Good News of Jesus Christ and respond. Their response, like ours, must lead to turning away from worthless things and “idols” and turning towards Jesus Christ. This is so relevant in the carnal society we live in where we are easily distracted by many trivial and insignificant things.

Third, Christians must endure many hardships before we can “enter the Kingdom of God” (v. 22). Those who are faithful in preaching the Gospel must be prepared to go through tribulation and persecution. This is an acid test. This may be a test of our faith, loyalty, commitment and love for our



Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Are we ready to pay the cost of being his disciple?

PONDER

Are we willing to embrace hardship in this present life as a genuine test of our faith and to be bold and faithful witnesses of Jesus to our neighbours, family and friends?

PROMISE

“Remember what I told you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also. If they obeyed my teaching, they will obey yours also. They will treat you this way because of my name, for they do not know the one who sent me.”

JOHN 15:20-21 (NIV)

PRAYER

*Give us, O Lord, a steadfast heart, which no unworthy affection may drag downwards; give us an unconquered heart, which no tribulation can wear out; give us an upright heart, which no unworthy purpose may tempt aside. In Jesus’ name, **Amen.***



Rev Dr Richard Loh is from St George’s Anglican Church Penang and currently serves in the Diocesan Spiritual Formation Platform ministry. He has retired from a full-time academic position in 2019 and was formerly Professor of Medicine in two universities in Malaysia.



Saturday, 26th March

Acts 15:1-41

WHEN CHRISTIANS DISAGREE

A married couple may disagree on anything from parenting styles, spending and saving money or planning a holiday. Parents may disagree with the career choices of their children or even the choice of a life partner. And in churches, members, the leaders and pastors may have a wide range of disagreements.

However, in our passage today, the disagreement goes beyond marital bliss or church governance. Certain people had come to Antioch, the centre of the Gentile church with a teaching, that to be truly saved, these new believers had to be circumcised. They insisted, wrongly, that faith in Jesus Christ alone does not guarantee the gift of eternal life.

The matter was serious. It brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with that group (15:2). In their meeting with the apostles and elders, the problem was clearly expressed by the Judaisers, *"The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses"* (15:5b).

However, the Apostles Peter and James both spoke in favour of the Antioch Church. Peter had this to say, *"No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved just as they are."* (15:11). James then spoke, that indeed God had chosen a people for His name from the Gentiles (15:14). Thereafter he quoted from Amos 9:11-12.

The message from these apostles and elders was simple but decisive. They will not burden anyone, including the Gentiles with any requirements that made it difficult for them to turn to God (15:19). Instead, three things were asked of these believers; abstain from idolatry, avoid sexual immorality and refrain from meat that had been strangled or had blood in it. (15:20-21).

The decision sent a strong signal that the apostles and elders were willing to take risks to offend some of the Jewish believers. They then chose two of their leaders to accompany Paul and Barnabas with the encouraging message to the church at Antioch. These leaders of Jewish background, extended their hand of fellowship to the Gentile church.



The Gospel message of salvation by faith alone, grace alone and Christ alone (as expressed by the Reformers) has triumphed over ethnicity (Jews), religious and cultural background (being Jewish) to embrace the all-encompassing gift of eternal life to all who will respond to that Gospel invitation. The Gospel, and therefore the Church is to be inclusive insofar as it must welcome people “different” from us.

PONDER

Christians may disagree on methods, church governance and non-core doctrines but we must stay faithful to the Gospel. That is the purpose of our Lent season, to be reminded of the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross, and to renew our faith, love and commitment to Him.

PROMISE

“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

EPHESIANS 2:8-9 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Thank you, God, for saving me by your grace and mercy. Although I could never repay you, let everything I do give you glory, honor and praise! **Amen.***



Article by the Reverend Tan Meng Poo, Pastor of Hosanna Anglican Church, Johor Bahru. A lawyer by training, he is the Senior Vice President, Asia Pacific for Our Daily Bread Ministries.



Sunday, 27th March

Acts 16:1-40

ALL IN GOD'S PERFECT PLAN

Planning is important to achieve a degree of success in almost any activity. There's a popular saying that goes, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail". However, what if, despite your careful preparation, things don't go as planned? Do you get frustrated when your plans go awry? How do you react to situations like this when things don't go your way?

Paul, Silas and now, young Timothy had planned to travel to Asia and Bithynia (present day Turkey) but they were prevented by the Holy Spirit, who directed them, instead to Macedonia (Europe). On their way there, they met Luke the physician in Troas and together they travelled further west to Macedonia, where they planted many strong and vibrant churches (like the Church in Philippi and Thessalonica). Today, this region is still predominantly Christian, and, because of Luke, we have an amazing account of the Acts of the Apostles.

In Philippi, there was a lady named, Lydia. Her plan that day was just to join a small group of women by the river to pray. Little did she know she would meet Paul and his friends, become convicted by the Holy Spirit and be baptized, together with her entire family! Would this prominent woman from Thyatira later be instrumental in planting a church in her hometown (Rev. 2:18)?

Further in their journey, Paul and Silas' plans did not go as expected once again as they were imprisoned due to their evangelistic work. Despite their situation, Paul and Silas continued to pray and sing hymns in the prison. They did not show any kind of frustration and grief throughout their time there. Then, a sudden earthquake caused all the jail doors to be opened and their chains to be broken. This incredible event astonished the prisoners and the jailer but gave an amazing opportunity for Paul and Silas to share the gospel to those who were there. God made their ugly situation into something beautiful again. How wonderful!

In the same way in our lives, we tend to get stressed when things don't go as planned and we tend to draw conclusions that our plans will turn ugly.



Remember that God's plans and timing are always perfect. We just need to trust Him and completely surrender our will and plans to His will and timing.

PONDER

Paul surrendered his missionary journey completely to God and remained sensitive to the leading of the Holy Spirit. If you experience "failure" in your plans, just remember to trust God and believe that he is more interested in the process of shaping you and developing your faith rather than in your (short-sighted) plans.

PROMISE

"And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose"

ROMANS 8:28 (NKJV)

PRAYER

*O Lord, my God, your perfect will is always best for me. Help me to trust you with my decisions and my future. Let me lean on you with all my heart instead of relying on my own imperfect understanding. Give me clear guidance in my life, Lord. In Jesus' name, **Amen.***

**MAP OF PAUL'S SECOND MISSIONARY JOURNEY
(ACTS 15:36 – 18:22)**

PLEASE SCAN TO OPEN THE LINK



Mrs Rethi Grace Balachandran is the chairperson of the Diocesan Women's Committee and a lay representative of the Diocese to the Provincial Synod.

She serves as a Lay Reader in the Church of the Redeemer, Bagan Ajam, Butterworth where she worships regularly.



Monday, 28th March

Acts 17:1-34

PERSEVERANCE IN MISSIONS

Are our churches enthusiastic about Missions? Paul the Apostle set an example for us to spread the Gospel. He usually went to share in the synagogues where Jews gathered for teaching and prayer. When he faced opposition from the Jews he moved on to Berea where many Jews became followers of Jesus. When faced with opposition again, Paul went to Athens where many Greeks lived. Besides the synagogues, he also preached in the market places and in the Court of the Areopagus.

When we embark on missions, we are bound to face opposition but like Paul, we need to have courage and determination. In Thessalonica, as Paul reasoned for three days in the synagogue about Christ having to suffer and rise from the dead, some Jews and a large number of God-fearing Greeks, including a few prominent women, joined Paul and Silas (Acts 17:1-4). This prompted the Jews to become jealous. They formed mobs and accused Paul and Silas, together with their host Jason, before the crowd and city officials of defying Caesar's decrees by saying there is another king called Jesus. There was chaos but Paul and Silas were allowed to go when Jason and the other disciples posted a bond.

The brothers sent Paul and Silas to Berea and they went again to another Jewish synagogue (Acts 17:10). The Bereans were an encouragement to them as they received and diligently examined the Scriptures daily to see if what Paul said was true. This resulted in many Jews and prominent Greek people becoming believers.

The Thessalonians having learned about Paul's success in preaching the Word became jealous and arrived in Berea to cause problems. Paul moved to Athens while Silas and Timothy stayed in Berea. Paul must have been disappointed but he persevered, an example my church emulated when opening a chapel for East Malaysian students in Puncak Alam. It was a difficult ministry initially but with perseverance the ministry grew slowly.

In Athens, Paul made a startling proclamation, *"Men of Athens, I perceive that in every way you are religious"* (v.22). Indeed, Greece was famously



known for its twelve gods: Most ancient Greeks recognized the twelve major gods and goddesses—Zeus, Hera, Poseidon, Demeter, Athena, Ares, Aphrodite, Apollo, Artemis, Hephaestus, Hermes, and either Hestia or Dionysus that ruled the universe from Mount Olympus. And as Paul discovered there was also an altar to “*An Unknown God*”.

This gave Paul, the ideal opportunity to tell them about the One and Only Almighty, Creator God and the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ.

PONDER

We can be “religious” in many ways too, but do we really know the Living God and have a vibrant relationship with His Son, Jesus Christ?

PROMISE

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”

MATTHEW 7:21 (ESV)

PRAYER

Father, we ask for opportunities like Paul, to share the Good News. Empower us with your Holy Spirit and give us grace and wisdom to know what to say at the right time.

*In Jesus’ name. **Amen.***



*Article by Nesam Ebenezer, Lay Pastor of St. Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya.
She is also Chairperson of St. Paul’s Day Training Centre,
a ministry to people with learning difficulties.*



Tuesday, 29th March

Acts 18:1-22

TOO SOON TO QUIT?

Paul separated himself from the philosophers and itinerant teachers in Corinth by supporting himself as a tent maker: the first bi-vocational missionary! By God's providence he met Aquila and Priscilla who became part of Paul's team. That allowed him to witness boldly in the synagogue on Sabbath days - his main purpose of being in Corinth. After Silas and Timothy arrived from Macedonia (v.5), bringing financial aid, Paul devoted himself full time to the preaching of the Gospel.

Friends like Aquila, Priscilla, Silas and Timothy and others encouraged Paul when he needed it most. There would not be a church in Corinth if not for the devotion and service of many different people; an example for us in our diversified Malaysia.

A man was cleaning his driveway of leaves when two boys approached him. "Rake your leaves sir?" one of them asked. "Only RM10!" A little puzzled the man replied, "Can't you see I am doing it myself?" "Sure", said the enterprising lad, "that's why we asked. We get most of our business from people who are halfway through and feel like quitting!" When God opens doors, the enemy tries to close them. Are there times when we close the doors on ourselves because we get discouraged and quit? As Paul served in Corinth, the Lord encouraged him to keep going. That same encouragement is available for us through the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

When God is blessing a ministry, we can expect increased opposition as well as increased opportunities. To walk by faith means to see opportunities even in the midst of opposition. A pessimist sees only problems, an optimist sees only potentials, but a realist sees the potentials in the problems. Doing God's will, despite difficult circumstances and consequences is an act of faith. There is never an easy place to serve God. If there is, then it is possible that something is wrong.

The conversion of Crispus opened up more opportunities for evangelism and it also brought more opposition from the enemy. The Jewish community in Corinth was furious at Paul's success and tried to silence him. The situation



was probably difficult and dangerous. Same as when we try to witness to others (especially our cousins of the other faith). Paul may have been thinking of leaving Corinth but the Lord came to him and gave him the assurance he needed. Paul was not only encouraged by the presence of the Lord but also by his promises!

In Corinth, Paul was determined to stay and get the job done and his friends were an encouragement for that to happen. Remember, it is always too soon to quit!

PONDER

How can we be an encourager to others?

- Be a friend (like Aquila, Priscilla, Silas and Timothy)
- Be hospitable (like Titus Justus, v.7)
- Share your faith (Paul shared with Crispus and family, v.8)

PROMISE

"Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved."

MATTHEW 24:12-13 (NIV)

PRAYER

Father, you understand all my struggles and you have reasons why I should go through them. I am weak and on the verge of giving up. Renew my strength and let my faith be unshaken. Let my eyes be blinded from seeing other easier options of handling this and focus on your finished work on the cross. Let my ears deafen from hearing the ridicule from enemies. I look up to you for endurance. Amen.



*Article by Mr Jaccob Thomas, a member of Peace Community Church,
Bukit Jalil.*



Wednesday, 30th March

Acts 19:1-20

CONSEQUENCES OF MISGUIDED FAITH

We all know that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light but what we often fail to realize is that “his servants, also, disguise themselves as servants of righteousness” (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). In today’s passage we see two examples of this.

The first example occurs in the synagogue where for three months Paul has been faithfully preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He spoke boldly, reasoned with them and tried his best to persuade them about the kingdom of God (v.8). However, these religious Jews refused to have anything to do with Paul and the Gospel. Their spiritual pride, arrogance and hardness of heart made them unreceptive to hearing the truth. They continued in their unbelief and even maligned the name of Jesus (v.9) thus forfeiting the greatest benefit and privilege in the world that could have been theirs.

Having been publicly rejected in the Jewish synagogue, Paul began to preach mainly to the Greeks in the lecture hall of Tyrannus. Most Christians have no recollection of ever hearing about the Hall of Tyrannus, yet it's the most successful evangelistic strategy reported anywhere in the entire Bible! The Hall of Tyrannus was Paul's last, biggest, boldest, and most successful strategic venture. According to some commentators, *“situation analysis ... creative thinking ... developing targeted content ... using Socratic teaching method ... finding suitable venue and carriers ... and creating excitement”* were the reasons he managed to reach *“all the residents of Asia – both Jews and Greeks”* in two years (v.10)! Friends, that may be close to two million people!

The second example in today’s passage of Satan’s servants disguising themselves as servants of righteousness is the seven sons of Sceva, the Jewish high priest. These lads tried to emulate Paul’s successful exorcisms but discovered demons cannot be cast out via a formula or ritual or simply by invoking Jesus’ name. There is no power in incantations, even if they include the name of Christ. The power belongs to Jesus alone. Probably the greatest mistake the seven sons of Sceva made was their failure to realize



that **Paul** was not doing the exorcisms but that Jesus Christ was doing the exorcisms through Paul.

The demon's question "Who are you?" is chilling in its implications to the seven sons of Sceva and their total lack of authority (v.15). They were not apostles. More than that, as religious as they were, they had no relationship with God. They were not believers in Christ. They did not possess the power or the presence of the Holy Spirit. There was nothing in them or their words that would cause a demon to pay them the slightest heed. One proud demon in particular seems to have been fed up with their stage show and gave them a beating they would remember (v.16). Their nudity further enhanced their humiliation!

PONDER

Am I just going through superficial religious "forms and traditions" without a real relationship with Jesus and the Holy Spirit? If I am not teachable, I may miss out, like the Jews in the Synagogue in Ephesus, on the greatest blessings of my life.

PROMISE

The seventy-two returned with joy, saying, "Lord, even the demons are subject to us in your name!" Jesus replied, "Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven."

LUKE 10:17,20 (ESV)

PRAYER

Lord, help me to be a genuine Christian. Amen.



Article by Reverend Dr. Vijendra Daniel, Vicar of St. Paul's Church, Petaling Jaya



Thursday, 31st March

Acts 19:21-41

HOW TO HANDLE OPPOSITION

As a Christian, have you ever felt convicted to do something good which went against common practice or thinking of the day? A life with Jesus is a life enriched and empowered by God but often, this also means taking the road less travelled and as a result, meeting with opposition. Our passage for today sees Paul's spreading the Gospel in Ephesus, causing local idol-makers to spark a riot but through this, we have a model of how to deal with opposition and keep our eyes fixed on God in the process.

1. EXPECT OPPOSITION

The people in Ephesus were quick to turn to empty promises from false gods. This was the key to the booming industry of the idol makers, so it's little wonder why they were upset when their customer base turned to Jesus!

Our opposition may not come in the same form as we see in today's passage. Instead of large protests, maybe it's discouraging advice from a friend (even Paul's own disciples advised him not to address the crowd). Instead of false gods, we may be fixated on success at work or perhaps material wealth.

In Jeremiah 29:11, God promises to *"prosper you and not harm you... to give you a hope and a future."* Ultimately, we know that our investment in our walk with God is the only one with a guaranteed return – one that will transform us and those around us for the better.

2. DISRUPT GENTLY

The opposition from the idol makers was so tumultuous as they gathered in the city that verse 33 says, *'Most of the people did not even know why they were there.'*

People are easily influenced but what is interesting is despite the strong opposition, we see an unlikely ally in the city clerk who manages to quell the riot.



He starts by acknowledging the Ephesians' reverence for the false god, Artemis, but then points out that the Christians had '*neither robbed temples nor blasphemed our goddess.*' (v.37)

Paul's mission wasn't to disrupt the sociopolitical fabric of Ephesus; it was a spiritual one – lovingly spreading the Gospel and as a result, allowing the Holy Spirit to convict the Ephesians against corrupt practices and worship of their false gods. The mission wasn't to close businesses, but to change hearts!

PONDER

One of the most effective ways we can preach the gospel is through the way we live and interact with others. We influence others in more ways than we realize. And the more we abide in Jesus, the more like him we become, and as a result, the more like him we encourage others to be (even our naysayers)!

PROMISE

"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose."

ROMANS 8:28 (ESV)

PRAYER

Lord, thank you that even in the face of opposition, your plans for me aren't moved. Help me to choose you over empty promises and fill me with grace and wisdom to love and influence the naysayers. In Jesus' name, Amen.



Article by Pastor Leon Jala who heads the digital content for Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang, where he also serves as a worship leader. He is passionate about how we can use creativity to help people encounter Jesus.



Friday, 1st April

Acts 20:1-38

BEWARE OF WOLVES!

In this farewell speech to the elders of the church at Ephesus, Paul informs them that this will be the last time he will ever see them. To ensure that the Church in Ephesus and beyond thrive, Paul gives them wise advice on how to stay faithful and committed to the missionary work of the church which is important for us too.

1. He reviews the past. (vss.17-21, 33-35)

Paul reminds them that for three years he had fearlessly preached Christ among them. He had been faithful in declaring God's Word. He fully supported himself, taking money from no one. He challenged them to remember Jesus' words: *"It is more blessed to give than to receive."* (v.35)

- He served the Lord humbly, and willingly suffered many trials for the sake of the Gospel. He declared the whole Gospel without fear of its opponents in public speeches and debates, in private house meetings, with both Jews and Gentiles.

2. He overviews the present (vss. 22-27)

As Paul considers his future, he is convinced it is completely in the hands of God. The Holy Spirit revealed to him that his future will involve both imprisonment and hardships "in every city". Nevertheless, Paul affirms the Lord's faithfulness to him and his commitment to remain faithful to the Lord. *"However, I consider my life worth nothing to me; my only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me—the task of testifying to the good news of God's grace."* (v.24). Paul writes these words with a heavy heart reminding them they would not see his face again (v.26).

3. He previews the future (vss. 28-32)

Paul exhorts them to feed and shepherd God's flock with "careful attention" (v.28) and he commends them to God and the word of his grace (v.32). There comes a time when disciples must take responsibility



for themselves so they can take responsibility for others. Paul tells these elders to be good shepherds of the church of God, which Jesus bought with his own blood (v.28)

He warns them to watch out for false teachers in the church. They will be like wolves, not sparing the flock. Wolves will come from the outside and, also *“from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw the disciples after them.”* (v.30). The “word of his grace” and the “whole counsel of God” will expose the wolves. You will understand and enjoy the fullness of your salvation, and inheritance which will take away the love of money and the love of the things of this world.

PONDER

Despite the limitations of money, power, the arduous of long-distance travel and the numerous incidents of persecution and adverse incidents, Paul proved to be one of the most effective missionaries of all time. What can we learn from him?

PROMISE

“And now I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.”

ACTS 20:32 (ESV)

PRAYER

O Almighty God, O Lord God, as I submit myself to you, like the Apostle Paul, I commit to doing everything I do, to saying everything I say, and to choosing everything I choose, for the sake of Your Kingdom and not mine. Amen.



Canon Emeritus Dr. Teoh Song Kee is an accomplished doctor, pastor, author and a friend to many.



Saturday, 2nd April

Acts 21:1-36

STAYING THE COURSE

I had gone to bed well and content the night before. Early the next morning, while sliding out of my bed, I felt excruciating pain in my abdomen. I flopped back hoping it would go away; but it didn't. It only grew more intense. That day and the next few days saw me scurrying to a GP and a Specialist, before inevitably going under the scalpel of a surgeon. Post-surgery, tethered to and skewered by various medical devices, I felt miserable for the most part of my stay in the hospital. If anyone had offered me a lifeline out of the ordeal before it happened, I would have grasped at it.

This was not so in the case of Paul. Paul would willingly and resolutely continue his journey to Jerusalem although he was forewarned it would be a destination of suffering. As he journeyed towards Jerusalem, people who loved him tried to dissuade him from going to Jerusalem. In Tyre, the disciples he stayed with for several days urged him, through the Spirit, to not proceed, but to no avail.

At Caesarea, a prophet by the name of Agabus implored Paul to abort his journey. Speaking not of his own volition but by the Holy Spirit, he demonstrated with Paul's belt and his own hands and feet, the torture awaiting Paul in Jerusalem. On hearing this, the people around were dismayed and joined in with pleas for Paul to stay. Paul, however, would not be swayed. He was determined to continue his journey. He was even willing to be bound and die in Jerusalem. So consumed was he in his mission to spread the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's persistent and dogged steps towards Jerusalem may be similarly seen as an emulation of Jesus' own journey to Jerusalem. *"We are going up to Jerusalem,"* he said, *"and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death and will hand him over to the Gentiles, who will mock him, flog him and kill him. Three days later he will rise."* (Mark 10: 33 – 34).



PONDER

Jesus willingly suffered and died that we might be forgiven of our sins and have eternal life. Paul was willing to suffer and die for the spread of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Our “Jerusalem” might mean a loss in job or educational opportunities, suffering social ostracization or facing discrimination for being a Christian. Are we willing to remain steadfast and faithful to Jesus?

PROMISE

“To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on the throne, just as I overcame and sat with my Father on His throne.”

REVELATION 3:21 (NKJV)

PRAYER

*Lord Jesus, help me stay the course of being a devout Christian. I want to be obedient and resilient in my journey with you. I know in this life there will be times of suffering and hardship but help me take heart because I know you have overcome the world. Give me the courage to face the challenges that come. Help me to persevere and not give up. Give me the strength to face these storms. Pour out your peace over me and keep me in your perfect peace. I want to always look to you when trials come. Instead of blaming you or looking elsewhere for the answers I want to look to you and trust completely in you. **Amen.***



Mrs Susila Packianathan is a retired government headmistress and member of the Anglican Missions Schools Board. Susila worships regularly at St. Barnabas Church, Klang.



Sunday, 3rd April

Acts 21:37-22:29

ONCE, TWICE, THREE TIMES ...A WITNESS

It is estimated that the average person makes over 35,000 conscious decisions a day, and lives about 26,280 days in a lifetime! We are, in a sense, the sum of our choices; each decision is both a revelation of our character and an unfolding of our future.

In today's passage, Paul makes three conscious decisions that reveal his complete conversion as a disciple of Christ and it will foreshadow his future ministry as an apostle. In each of these decisions, Paul chooses to be a witness for Christ, at the cost of his own safety and pride. This is the journey of the people of the Way.

Shortly after his arrival in Jerusalem, Paul is accosted and beaten by an angry crowd of Jews. Roman soldiers break up the mob and stop the beating, taking Paul back to the barracks for questioning. However, on the way there, Paul makes an unusual request: he asks to speak to the people who had just beaten him (Acts 21:39). He shares the gospel and tells his story of conversion. ***His first decision is to choose mission over escape.***

Then, he addresses the very people who accuse him of "*teaching everyone everywhere against our people and our law and this place*" (Acts 21:29). This claim would have pained Paul, who had the highest Jewish pedigree. Yet, he decides to narrow the gap and reach out to them in love. He graciously addresses them in Aramaic and calls them his "brothers and fathers" (Acts 22:1) and he gives them his testimony as a Jew brought up in this very city (Acts 22:3). ***His second decision is to choose love over pride.***

As his testimony finishes, the crowd goes berserk at the notion of the Gospel being preached to the Gentiles. The commander, initially intending to interrogate Paul further, is alarmed that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains (Acts 22:29). It becomes clear that Paul does not deserve any of this injustice and yet, he chooses to make a defence for the Gospel (Acts 22:1) instead of defending himself. ***His third decision is to choose truth over comfort.***



Later, in his writings to the church in Corinth, Paul would say, *“For Christ’s love compels us ... that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who died for them and was raised again”* (2 Corinthians 5:14-15). The light of Christ had shone into his life, forever changing him. On that road to Damascus, the love and truth of Christ had knocked him off his high horse of ambition and self-sufficiency. Now, he no longer lived for himself, but for Him who died for all and was raised again.

PONDER

William Barclay wrote: “Jesus promised his disciples three things – that they would be completely fearless, absurdly happy, and in constant trouble”. Will we be His witnesses at the cost of our own comfort and convenience?

PROMISE

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”

JOHN 6:37 (ESV)

PRAYER

Father, help me to live in surrender to your will and to choose love over pride, mission over escape, and truth over comfort. Today, I receive your love, and choose to walk in your ways, because you rescued me from mine. Amen.



Reverend Abel Cheah is the Curate for “The Five” - the evening service of Holy Trinity Bukit Bintang. He is also the Chief Operating Officer of Alpha Asia Pacific.



Monday, 4th April

Acts 22:30-23:35

ENCOUNTERING THE LORD

Our God is sovereign in all circumstances. This is a phrase we often hear but, in reality, we sometimes doubt His sovereignty. For example, the on-going pandemic. When facing a mutating virus which has caused so much fear and uncertainty some have asked, "Is God still sovereign in these precarious times?". Our answer to this question is revealed in the way we respond.

The Apostle Paul was arrested and brought for trial before the council. His life was under threat from Jewish assassins as there was a plot to kill him. As he goes through these uncertain times, he responds calmly and seems to be at peace even in this troubling season of his life. What made the difference for him? What gave him this peace? There were, at least, three important things:

God's Presence: In verse 11 we read that ***the Lord appeared to him and spoke to him.*** This encounter was God's way of affirming His love and care for Paul as ***the Lord stood by Him.*** He is reminded that he is not alone and that the sovereign God is with him even in the midst of one of the most trying times of his life. We can similarly reflect and remember the words of Jesus assuring us of His presence – 'Behold! I am with you always, to the end of the age' (Matthew 28: 20b). He who promised us is faithful in fulfilling His promise with His continuous presence in our lives. Do you sense His presence now?

God's Word: The first words the Lord spoke to Paul here was: ***"Take courage."*** The Lord recognizes the fear within Paul in the midst of the uncertainties surrounding him. There would have been a sense of anxiety and worry within him as he was in the barracks but the Lord's word removed this fear and encouraged him. We can take courage in the Lord knowing that He is with us even now. What is your fear? What do you worry about now? Take courage in the Lord Jesus.

God's Will: The Lord continued to speak to Paul about His plan and purpose for his life. Paul's ministry to testify in Jerusalem is confirmed by the Lord as



he testified to the Jewish Council. The Lord encouraged Paul by reiterating that He had a specific plan and purpose for him in the future. Paul ***must also testify in Rome***. I am sure this gave Paul great comfort knowing that God was not done with him yet.

We may also face similar roadblocks in life when we wonder what is happening, but we can be assured that God's purpose and plans for our lives are ultimately within His sovereign control and will. In the meantime, the Lord's purpose for our lives is to remain faithful and fruitful in His calling despite any circumstances.

PONDER

The true test of our faith is how we respond in difficult and hard times. Friends, why should we worry if the ship should sink, if God is the ocean?

PROMISE

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

PHILIPPIANS 4:6-7 (NIV)

PRAYER

Father, help us to realise and fully trust that you are sovereign over every area of our lives in the past, present and also in the future. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.



*Rev. Jesvinder Singh is the Vicar of St. James' Church, Kuala Lumpur
and Priest-in-Charge of St. Matthew's Church, Selayang.*



Tuesday, 5th April

Acts 24:1-27

KEEP OUR CONSCIENCE CLEAR

Many things happen around us every day. Sometimes we may feel that the more zealous we are for the ministry, the more discouragement we face. This discouragement may be caused by our own attitude or may be inflicted by others. When this happens, some people who get discouraged may allow themselves to become lukewarm disciples of Christ. In hoping to draw encouragement from others, we may need to learn from Paul: **keep our conscience clear before God and man.**

Paul's ministry to the Gentiles in Asia, Macedonia and Achaia made the Jews from Asia very unhappy. At first, they provoked the crowds in Jerusalem to seize Paul and have him killed. On failing to do that, they hurled false accusations against Paul in front of the Governor as they wanted Paul to be punished and be put to death.

At the beginning of Chapter 24, the high priest Ananias brought a lawyer to sue Paul before the Governor Felix. Praising Felix for the peace he had instated and reforms he had enacted, the lawyer shrewdly appealed to the pride of the Governor via flattery. The Governor was put into a predicament, where he felt obliged to declare Paul guilty to safeguard his own good name. Paul was accused of being a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world, a ringleader of the Nazarene sect and desecrating the Jerusalem Temple.

Without fear, Paul defended himself, proving that all the accusations against him were untrue and without substance. After the interrogation, the governor did nothing, so that he could maintain his "good reputation". He left Paul in the prison for 2 years, until his retirement. In the meantime, he did not forget to hint to Paul to give him a bribe.

In the face of all the false accusations and unfair treatment, Paul, besides defending himself, took the opportunity to witness for Christ. He preached the hope in God of the resurrection (vs.14-15, 21), the sharing of the good works of the church to the poor and the giving of offerings to God (v.17). He taught Governor Felix and his wife Drusilla about the Kingdom of God



(v.25). In his great distress, Paul didn't magnify his current problems or indulge in self-pity; he utilized every single opportunity to share Christ. This is the attitude of Paul as a disciple of Christ; ***he keeps his conscience clear before God and man.***

PONDER

We are living in a world that is full of challenges. Paul has set a positive example for us to follow when there is tribulation around us. What does it mean to be a faithful disciple of Christ and to keep your conscience clear before God and man?

PROMISE

Jesus said, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me."

LUKE 9:23 (NIV)

PRAYER

Dear Lord, help me keep my conscience clear before God and man daily. Let me not remain distressed, but please help me move forward, carrying my cross daily, following you more nearly and loving you more dearly. Amen.



Rev. Joseph Soon Jun Jer is the Vicar of The Cornerstone Sanctuary in Ipoh and assists at St. Luke's Church, Teluk Intan when necessary.



Wednesday, 6th April

Acts 25:1-27

CONFRONTING LEGALIZED OPPRESSION

Paul has been in prison in Caesarea on 'trumped up' charges proffered by the Chief Priests and Jewish Leaders for two years already. Felix, the previous Governor of Caesarea, had dragged the hearing in the Roman Court with convenient indecision. So now, the Chief Priests and Jewish Leaders pressed Festus, the new Governor of Caesarea, for closure. Festus is sympathetic to Paul's Jewish accusers and decides to consult with King Agrippa who had legal authority over Jerusalem. Festus hopes that Agrippa might assist him with referring Paul to the 'Supreme Court' of Rome, as requested by Paul, on the basis of his Roman citizenship.

The underlying essence of the case is simply the antagonism of the Chief Priests and Jewish Leaders towards the Gospel message that Paul was preaching relentlessly and unflinchingly. This antagonism played out in unstinting unrest and mob riots among the Jewish people, to the extent of wanting to kill Paul.

Allegations against Paul rose from his persistent witness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul's response was that he had not committed any crime against the Jewish laws, the Temple or the Roman government. Paul's defence is entirely based on his experience and convictions of the authenticity and integrity of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. On this and for this, he would not compromise nor retreat, nor even seek to 'save his own skin'! What a witness and testimony for the power and glory of Jesus Christ!!

We need to emulate Paul in our commitment and response. We would not be alone in pursuing this. Jesus perfectly exemplified this journey on the 'Way to the Cross'. Paul and the other Apostles 'finished the race' (**2 Timothy 4: 7**) on this path. Since then, countless of other faithful servants and people of God have traversed this course and this cause, serving as 'shining stars' (**Philippians 2: 15**) for us today.

PONDER

As Christians in Malaysia, we are constantly confronted with resistance and antagonism, both social and official, when we live out our Christian



commitment and convictions. This becomes more ominous when we undertake evangelism and mission among certain groups of people. What is our response in such circumstances and challenges? What is our commitment and stand in witnessing to and ministering for the Gospel of Jesus Christ?

PROMISE

*O Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
My Master and my Friend;
I shall not fear the battle
If Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If Thou wilt be my Guide.*

Author: John Ernest Bode (1869)

PRAYER

*Lord, help me become a 'shining star' today for the advancement of the Kingdom of Christ and for the generations of Christians tomorrow. **Amen.***



Article by Rev. Tom Cherian, Vicar of St. John's Church, Ipoh.



Thursday, 7th April

Acts 26:1-32

TRANSFORM A CRISIS INTO AN OPPORTUNITY

Acts 26 is a fascinating account of apostle Paul's awesome ability to convert his trial into an amazing personal testimony for Jesus. Paul, in chains, was on trial for testifying what the prophets and Moses said would happen - that the Messiah would suffer, rise from the dead and bring the message of light to both the Jews and Gentiles (vss. 22 & 23). Paul demonstrated that no crisis or adversity can "lockdown" Jesus or "breakdown" the power of the Gospel.

How was Paul able to redefine himself from a slayer of Christians (vss. 9 – 11) into a fervent mission leader? A dramatic supernatural, personal encounter with Jesus transformed Paul's life radically. It became his powerful personal salvation story which he proclaimed courageously to both the Jews and Gentiles.

Have we had a personal life-transforming encounter with Jesus? Is Jesus real in our lives? If 'YES', we too must share our personal gospel stories lovingly and passionately through words and deeds. We may be called "insane" for proclaiming the Gospel, the way Governor Festus labelled Paul. We may even be asked whether we are trying to convert them (like King Agrippa). It is our fundamental constitutional right to practice, profess and propagate our faith. Like Paul, we too can proclaim the Good News without breaking the law. It is our prayer and hope that *"every knee shall bow and every tongue shall confess that Jesus is Lord"* (Philippians 2: 10 -11).

Amid crisis, let us inspire and encourage one another in the mighty name of Jesus. We must be proactive and undertake sustainable micro socio-economic empowerment initiatives by establishing outreach centers to connect, equip and uplift suffering communities. We need visionary, dynamic and impactful Christians to pave the way for renewed discipleship training and church planting initiatives. We need Christian trailblazers to fearlessly advocate social justice and to passionately champion the cause of protecting "Mother Earth". May the gloom in our midst recede into oblivion. By the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit, we shall venture into new frontiers enabled by technology and be a great blessing to society



for the sole glory of God. Let us unlock and unleash this potential that is within each of us. We shall “bloom afresh”.

Do we want our families and churches to be renewed beacons of hope for the communities around us? Do we want to reset Malaysia so that our nation will be ruled with love, grace, righteousness and justice? GO ON YOUR KNEES. FIX YOUR THOUGHTS ON JESUS, the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). Soon we will be up on our feet doing the unimaginable under challenging circumstances. Jesus offers an ETERNAL DEAL which embodies a grace-filled redemptive and wholesome perspective. It’s an electrifying connection!

PONDER

Has the current COVID-19 pandemic shaken our faith, paralyzed us and cast us into a state of helplessness and hopelessness? How can we allow the Holy Spirit to embolden and empower us afresh to transform any crisis into an opportunity?

PROMISE

“Behold, I am making all things new.”

REVELATION 21:5 (NIV)

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, empower us afresh to enable us to transform every crisis in our midst into an opportunity to advance your Kingdom. Amen.



*Mr D Raja Singam is the Diocesan Registrar and a member of the Provincial Synod.
He is also an active member of the Church of the Holy Spirit, Ipoh.*



Friday, 8th April

Acts 27:1-44

EXACTLY AS GOD HAS PROMISED

Today's bible passage gives us a vivid account of Paul's tumultuous voyage across the Mediterranean and Adriatic Sea (a distance spanning over 2800 kilometers!). As a prisoner, Paul had appealed to Caesar in response to the trumped-up charges concerning his proclamation of the Gospel (25:11).

This journey was arduous (vv. 4-8). It was marked by delays, conflict of opinions, and escalated into a storm-tossed frenzy that led to a period of despair (vv.14-20). In the midst of rock-bottom gloom and hunger, Paul audaciously pointed to the sovereign promise of his God's revelation.

Firstly, Paul the prisoner had earlier experienced the accommodating favour of the accompanying centurion, Julius (v.3). However, from 27:21, a significant reversal of roles took place: By the mouth of Paul the apostle (on behalf of the living God), a salvific experience of favour was proclaimed upon the desperate and helpless centurion and all aboard the ship.

Secondly, the salvific message of God's angel was an assurance in line with God's larger and yet specific plan for Paul's proclamation of the Gospel to Rome (v. 24). Yes, he had appealed to Caesar and was making his way to defend himself by way of trial. Nevertheless, the whole journey was in fact a "missionary journey" for the Gospel to be proclaimed and for the Church to be continually disciplined even into Rome itself (19:21). God's specific plan for Paul could not be thwarted and the favor and protection bestowed on Paul would also ensure the total survival of the travelling party: centurions, prisoners, sailors, et al.

Thirdly, Paul encouraged all 275 people onboard to "take heart" and assured them that the God whom he belonged to and worshipped would make good on his promise and that all will be "exactly" as he had been told (v.25). In contrast to the prevailing Gentile perception of their deities being enigmatic or chaotic, Paul proclaimed his God to be trustworthy. This was a very bold statement to make especially in such dire circumstances, but the outcome was exactly as promised. Despite the attempts of the sailors (v.30)



and soldiers (v.42) to take matters into their own hands. All 276 people (including Paul) were saved (v. 44).

Through Paul's witness, we can see through storms or calamities and gaze upon our saving and generous God who fulfills his word to the "iota." What the Lord has called us to accomplish in his name, he will see it through. We can rest assured in his unfailing love and faithfulness even as we seek first his kingdom. Let us therefore take heart, be bold, and be sent out in the power of the Spirit to live and work to his praise and glory!

PONDER

Our journey with Jesus Christ is never an isolated experience. There will always be the mandate and opportunity to ensure it is shared abundantly to the world at large. We do well not to shirk this privileged responsibility of proclaiming the sovereignty and redeeming work of God through Jesus Christ to the world.

PROMISE

*Through the darkest night, the fiercest storm
Your word O God is saving light, No place too far, no pit too low,
Your Spirit finds us, breathes life and grants us joyous sight.*

Hallelujah, what a Saviour! He is with us to the end!

PRAYER

*Father we thank you that you are always our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in times of trouble. **Amen.***



Reverend Paul Lau is a non-stipendiary minister who preaches and serves the Malaysian Church at large in the area of Christian Education.



Saturday, 9th April

Acts 28:1-31

DON'T MISS THE OPPORTUNITY!

The book of Acts begins with Jesus telling His disciples: ... and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts 1:8). Today, we come to the last chapter of Acts. It ends with Paul in Rome, the heart of the vast and powerful Roman Empire. The last verse of Acts describes Paul's activity in Rome: **He proclaimed the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance!** (v. 31). Throughout his eventful journey and in Rome, Paul took every opportunity to be a witness for Jesus, proclaiming the Kingdom of God boldly in word and deed.

Our passage starts with Paul and his ship-wrecked companions discovering that the island they landed on was Malta. While making a fire, a viper fastened itself on Paul's hand. Paul was able to shake it off and suffer no ill-effects. At first the people thought he was a murderer who was not going to go unpunished but when Paul remained unharmed, they changed their minds and, instead believed he was a god! This belief was further reinforced when Paul healed the chief official's father. So, many took their sick to him and all were healed. Although Paul knew Malta was not his intended destination, while there, he ministered to everyone who came to him.

Sometimes we may be so focused on our goal or destination that we miss the opportunity which opens right in front of us. Paul gave his full attention to whatever opportunity he had in the present. And because of that, Paul's presence on the island was a blessing to the people of Malta.

Months later, when he finally arrived in Rome, Paul welcomed the opportunity to preach to the Jews and anyone else. As in other places that he preached, some of the Jews rejected the message of salvation in Jesus. Paul was aware that hardness of heart prevented sinners from responding in faith to the Gospel (vss. 25-27) but he did not allow their unbelief to deter or discourage him – he just continued sharing the Gospel faithfully with undiminished passion, never missing an opportunity.



As we follow Paul, we see that God opened new channels of influence for him along his journey. Whatever the situation, Paul used every opportunity to be a witness – to proclaim the Kingdom of God and teach about Jesus with *“all boldness and without hindrance”* (v. 31).

PONDER

What about me? Do I use the opportunities- some unexpected - that God gives each day? What stops me from sharing the Good News of the Kingdom of God *“with boldness and without hindrance”* like Paul?

PROMISE

“But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you.”

MATTHEW 6:33 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Lord, help me to recognize the opportunities you send each day to share about Your Kingdom. **Amen.***

PAUL’S JOURNEY TO ROME

(PLEASE SCAN QR CODE FOR A LINK TO THIS MAP)



*Ms A. Annamaney is Chairperson of the Diocesan Anglican Care,
and Anglican Alliance Regional Facilitator for East and South-East Asia.
Annam is an active member of St. Paul’s Church, Petaling Jaya.*



Palm Sunday, 10th April

Luke 19:28-40

WHAT KING IS THIS?

Today is Jesus' "Triumphal Entry" into Jerusalem. A day filled with kingly significance. There was an ecstatic welcome and wild excitement, but it would fizzle out shortly. Like a flash mob, it was just a flash in the pan. Why? Because this "king" Jesus was so unkinglike in appearance and action. When expectation is not met, everything turns sour. His kingship was an enigma to everyone including his disciples. Even Pilate asked in puzzle contempt, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (John 18:33). Yes, truly:

- Jesus is born of royalty and **for** royalty but not born **into** royalty so that we may freely approach him at any time without inhibition.
- Jesus is King **of** the people but refused to be made king **by** the people to avoid easy popularism and to fulfil the will of the Father.
- Jesus is the **Chosen** King but he was not the **choice** of the people. Instead, he was scorned and rejected by them.
- Jesus is of royal blood but it was not in his **nature or ambition** to be self-exalting or conceited.
- Jesus chose to reign over the **hearts and minds** and not the **flesh and blood** of the people.

Jesus is perhaps not the king the world expected, but he is the one the world needs. The last Sunday before Advent brings our liturgical calendar to a climax and affirms Christ as King. Yet most other Sundays we explore Christ the "commoner" and rightly so because he makes our common, ordinary lives extraordinary by making us children of God through his redeeming work on the Cross. Palm Sunday marks the entry point into Holy Week where the intensity of temptation and potential for failure is real for everyone. As the crowds jostle each other, can we see the true mission of the king on the donkey?

There is a very simple game called "Checkers". The objective of this game is to reach your opponent's last square. You can only move forward and cannot go backwards to correct a bad move, unlike chess. It is very difficult to reach the end because your pieces get gobbled up. However, if you



manage to reach your objective, your humble, ordinary piece (“man”) can become a king! Also, interesting to note, in Checkers all pieces are engraved with the image of a crown and each piece has the potential to become a king - but it depends entirely on the hand that plays it!

PONDER

We may not often think of ourselves as kings and queens who will rule over creation but that is our destiny. The Apostle Paul outlines the incredible truth that those who persevere in faith are truly united to Christ and will live and reign with Him forever (2 Tim. 2:11–13). Christian, walk in a manner worthy of your calling.

PROMISE

“To the one who conquers, I will grant him to sit with me on my throne, as I also conquered and sat down with my Father on his throne.”

REVELATION 3:21 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Dear Master, we remember that many who claimed you as King on Sunday shouted “Crucify” on Friday. So, confirm our faith today that our love for you will never falter or turn to hatred but will remain constant now and forever. We offer our worship to you, Lord, with all our love. **Amen.***



The Reverend Joshua Ong is Vicar of St. Gabriel’s Church, Kuala Lumpur. He is a talented musician and singer and loves wood work.



Monday, 11th April

John 12:1-11

LIVE A GODLY LIFE

Several characters appear in this passage. The first is Lazarus, resurrected from the dead. While nothing is recorded about what he said or did, many Jews who knew Jesus was there, came not only for Jesus' sake, but to see Lazarus *"resurrected from the dead"* (v.9). As a result, many went back believing in Jesus. Some of these Jews may have been against Jesus before, but now they couldn't deny his deity. The miracle of a resurrected life has been presented to them, and nothing further has to be said or done, to put their trust in the Lord.

The second character is Martha, whose description is very simple: "Martha served" (v2). Martha's gift is to serve the people. She will not sit down but goes about serving to make people comfortable. She was a rational person, less emotional than Mary, but Jesus loved her too. It is not wrong to serve diligently, but one cannot do so to earn the love of Jesus. God's love is abundantly and freely given and not in reciprocation of man's efforts. We must not assume that Jesus will love us more if we are able to perform and behave well.

The third character is Mary. She poured a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume, on Jesus' feet. Perhaps it was her way of showing gratitude to Jesus for bringing Lazarus back to life. Why pour expensive perfume? Mary is an emotional person who knows how to express her heart, and her spiritual feelings are astute. According to Jewish custom, the dead should be anointed with perfume and wrapped in cloth, before being buried. Presumably she felt Jesus was about to die and wished to do the needful. Jesus corroborated by saying: *"It was intended that she should save this perfume for the day of my burial."* (v.7). A pint of true pure nard is worth about thirty-two-pieces of silver, equal to an ordinary worker's salary for a year. It might have cost Mary her life's savings, but she sacrificed this precious bottle of perfume to show her love for the Lord. As a result of her sacrifice, *"the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume."* (v.3).

Jesus accepted the show of love, but Judas did not appreciate it at all, and he is the fourth character. He thinks it's wasteful, and that it would have



better been used to help the poor. He was not actually concerned about the poor but just greedy for money, because he was a thief.

Judas represents the worldly perspective, having no appreciation of spiritual values. He considers gestures prompted by love a waste. Mary, on the other hand, is pleased to demonstrate her love for Jesus, and is satisfied with Jesus' appreciation and acceptance.

PONDER

Lazarus symbolized the life of the resurrection, and the life of Mary is revealed by sacrifice. "Judas" means "praise", but instead of living a life of praise, his utterances are exclusively complaints and criticisms. People's lives are not gauged by what they say of themselves, but how they act out in love. Does the name "Christian" befit you?

PROMISE

"The Lord protects the foreigners among us. He cares for the orphans and widows, but he frustrates the plans of the wicked."

PSALM 146:9 (NLT)

PRAYER

*Almighty Father, who sent your only Son Jesus Christ to save us from our sin, show me how I can honor you and bring glory to your name, by walking in the way of Jesus. Give me grace and mercy as I try and fail, guidance when I'm not sure which way to go, and wisdom to trust you in all things. For your love brings light and life to all who seek it. May I seek you evermore as I walk with you through this Holy Week and beyond. **Amen.***



The Venerable Stephen Chan Mung Koon is the Archdeacon of the Middle Central Archdeaconry. He is also the Vicar of Kajang Anglican Church and the Acting Vicar of St. Barnabas Church, Klang and the ARCH, Shah Alam.



Tuesday, 12th April

John 12: 20–36

SERVING THE LORD JOYFULLY

When told by Philip that some Greeks wished to see him, Jesus answered: *“Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”* (vv. 25-26 ESV).

As a servant of the Lord for the past 31 years, these words of Jesus have been very real and personal to me. My mother, before she went home to be with the Lord, said to me, “My dear son, the Lord has shown much mercy and grace to you. Serve the Lord joyfully and cheerfully. Do not look back, for great will be your reward in heaven”. Although she told me this more than 25 years ago, her words continue to remind me of my call to serve the Lord diligently.

Serving the Lord in Kelantan, there were many challenges, trials and frustrations in my early years. Jesus said that *“If you love your life, you will lose it and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life”*. Many times, friends and relatives told me, “Don’t overdo it; you must take care of yourself!”. I used to travel some 7,000 km a month to all the places God sent me, I enjoyed reaching out to the many souls the Lord showed me.

Now as the Archdeacon of the Eastern Archdeaconry, I continue to travel far and wide in the East Coast. It is not because I hate my body, but it is my way of giving my life for the extension of God’s Kingdom. Jesus did not literally say hate your body, but to not put your body’s needs above Him. There are many Christians who think that their body can take them to heaven. They spend a lot of their time and money building, shaping and beautifying their body. Many have told me that I should not wear my body out, but my eyes are focused on the eternal reward. One can have a six-pack, and be the most beautiful person around, but that is no guarantee for a place in heaven!



Following and serving the Lord Jesus must be a joy, not a burden. It must be done cheerfully and not through murmuring! Jesus continues to say in v. 26, *“If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honour”*. Today, people want to be honoured by society, but the minute you make a mistake, they dump you. When you serve the Lord joyfully and cheerfully, the Lord, who sees your heart, will surely honour you accordingly.

PONDER

Beloved, in this Holy Week, let us ponder and ask this question, “How serious is my relationship with Jesus? Do I offer my life to Jesus cheerfully and joyfully as I walk through life?”

PROMISE

“If anyone serves me, he must follow me; and where I am, there will my servant be also. If anyone serves me, the Father will honor him.”

JOHN 12:26 (ESV)

PRAYER

*O Heavenly and Almighty Father, who sent his only Son Jesus to live and die as one of us, save me. For all wisdom, all strength, and all glory is in you. You are my rock and my redeemer, my shelter in the storm. In you I place my trust, so that I may have hope. Let me walk in your light all my days, seeking only you. I give you my life to love and serve you, following you in all that I do. **Amen.***



*The Venerable Jacob George John is the Archdeacon of the Eastern Archdeaconry.
He is also the Priest of All Souls' Church, Cameron Highlands.*



Wednesday, 13th April

John 13: 21-32

LOVE AND BETRAYAL

"Verily, verily I say unto you, that one of you shall betray me." (v.21) Jesus knew the hour had come for him to be betrayed. At this feast of Passover, Jesus was celebrating the last Supper with his disciples, including Judas, his betrayer.

Tonight's supper is of love and betrayal. These two have always existed side by side. The saddest thing about betrayal is that it never comes from your enemies. Friends and lovers often go through the cycle of love and betrayal. We can only betray those who have given themselves to us. True love always risks betrayal. Love which is sacrificial and unconditional can often be taken for granted. Jesus has given himself to us through his love but so often we betray him through our words and actions. For example, when it comes to being witnesses for him or when it comes to obeying him unreservedly.

In giving Judas the bread, Jesus handed himself over to Judas. Jesus is the Bread of life and this Bread is the Lord's gift of Himself to us. How have we borne the name of Jesus in our lives? In our treatment of the poor and marginalized? In our lack of love for our neighbours? At the supper it was Judas who betrayed him. At the Garden of Gethsemane, it would be Peter. At different times, places, different circumstances it will be someone else. Maybe, even us?

Judas not only betrays Jesus but ultimately betrays himself. In the same way, when we assert our own independence from the Lord, we not only betray him, but we betray ourselves. *"Very truly, I tell you that one of you will betray me."*

PONDER

What are some of the ways where we tend to deny the Lord? The only person we are to deny is ourselves! *"Then Jesus told his disciples, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."* **MATTHEW 16:24 (ESV)**



PROMISE

“But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.”

MATTHEW 10:33 (KJV)

PRAYER

*Jesus, you suffered greatly for our benefit. You walked the hard road through shame, betrayal, persecution, rejection. Yet, you only desired good things for us. You came in glory to save us and redeem us from our sins. You came to offer us light and life, a hope in you that surpasses anything the world can offer. So, why do we too often turn our backs? Why do we give in to questions and disbelief when the road gets hard? Why do we look for easier paths to follow? Lord, lead me in your way, encouraging me to persevere on the hard days, remembering the great hope I have in you. **Amen.***



The Venerable Charles Fraser is the Archdeacon of the Lower Central Archdeaconry and the Acting Archdeacon of the Upper Central Archdeaconry. He is also the Vicar of St. Mark's Church, Seremban.



Maundy Thursday, 14th April

John 13: 1-17, 31B-35

LOVE ONE ANOTHER

Our passage is set the night before Jesus' death. He knows that his time has come, and he is sharing a meal with his disciples. The passage will climax with these words: *A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another* (v.34). But before he gives them this commandment, Jesus shows them, and shows us, what it means.

First, **Jesus washes his disciple's feet to foreshadow how he would serve them the next day** (vv.1-11). He lays aside his garments, girds himself with a towel, and now, dressed like a slave, starts washing his disciples' feet. When Peter objects, Jesus explains he will only understand later (v.7); for after Jesus' death and resurrection, it will become clear that the humble service that Jesus renders Peter here is a shadow of the greater yet even more humble service Jesus will render when he dies for him on the cross in a few hours. Jesus says that Peter is already clean, because the effects of the cross work both forward and backward in time. So, Jesus' washing of his disciples' feet anticipates the real cleansing that comes through the cross.

Secondly, **Jesus calls us, his disciples, to serve one another because he first served them** (vv.13-15). Jesus' humble service of foot washing, and his sacrifice on the cross that it points to, is also a model for his disciples. Jesus says, *"For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you"* (v.15). Jesus is not suggesting they die for each other's sins, but that they should follow his example of humble, loving service.

All this gives substance to the new commandment, *"love one another just as I have loved you"* (v.34). **Jesus loved us** by laying aside his glory, becoming a servant and dying in our place to cleanse us from sin, so that believers can come to the Father with our guilt and shame removed forever. We must always be grateful for that.

As he showed his love for us in that act of humble service, **let us love one another** and express that love in humble service of one another. We may serve one another in different ways – formal or informal, and in different



places - at church, outside or in the home. Let us do so humbly, always seeking each other's good – and especially each other's salvation, because that is what Jesus did for us.

PONDER

What did Jesus mean when he said we, *"also ought to wash one another's feet"* (v.14). What does it mean to wash another's feet?

PROMISE

"No one has ever seen God; if we love one another, God abides in us and his love is perfected in us."

1 JOHN 4:12 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Holy God, source of all love,
on the night of his betrayal
Jesus gave his disciples a new commandment,
to love one another as he loved them:
write this commandment on our hearts,
and give us the will to serve others as he was the servant of all.
who gave his life and died for us,
yet is alive and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one God, now and forever. **Amen.***



The Very Reverend Dr Andrew Cheah is Dean of St Mary's Cathedral, Kuala Lumpur and is a member of the Diocesan Standing Committee and the Provincial Synod.



Good Friday, 15th April

John 18:1-19:42

JESUS IS REJECTED

I once sent an email to someone but received a "Message Rejected" response back from Outlook. Later I came to know that the person had actually blocked me from sending messages to him!

Jesus' messages to the world were rejected on many occasions. Here, Jesus' statements to Annas, the Jewish high priest, are extremely powerful. He declares fearlessly: *"I have spoken openly to the world" and "I have said nothing in secret."* (John 18:20). Jesus then challenges Annas to authenticate what he has seen and heard about his words and actions. A guard deems this insolence as intolerable and strikes Jesus across his face. Jesus responds: *"If what I said is wrong, bear witness about the wrong; but if what I said is right, why do you strike me?"* (John 18:23).

Often people retaliate against the truth in a sinful manner because they do not want to hear it or they fear it. An attitude of judgment and hate, laced with evil intentions, will always attack the other and not seek the truth. Do you seek truth? Do you seek to understand or are you quick to judge and retaliate with anger? Paul said, *"Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honourable in the sight of all"* (Romans 12:17). Peter also said to the followers of Christ, *"...but in your hearts honour Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defence to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect"* (1 Peter 3:15). We are to respond with gentleness and respect in all situations so that others might see the hope that we have.

Jesus did not retaliate or fight back in anger. He simply pointed out the truth of the matter. Jesus' truth was not accepted, so he was slapped and sent off to Caiaphas to be dealt with. The Gospels show us what Jesus' witnesses said about him. Indeed, Jesus shared openly and said nothing in secret. This was so everyone could hear the truth and respond appropriately. Jesus said in John 8:32, *"If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."*

Many are rejecting and distorting the oracles (that is, the Bible) inspired by God, just because God's way is different from their way. Even in churches



today many just offer “lip service” to Jesus because they prefer a “mightier” person to one that was crucified and who calls people to bear their cross and follow Him.

When challenged or rejected when sharing the Good News, we are not to retaliate or fight back in anger, but simply to declare the truth with patience and love.

PONDER

“The one who hears you hears me, and the one who rejects you rejects me, and the one who rejects me rejects him who sent me.” **LUKE 10:16 (ESV)**

PROMISE

“And when they bring you before the synagogues and the rulers and the authorities, do not be anxious about how you should defend yourself or what you should say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour what you ought to say.”

LUKE 12:11-12 (ESV)

PRAYER

*Dear Lord, may we be moved to repentance because you sacrificed your life to bring us home. We know that the Lord who bought the church with His precious blood should not be made to weep again for the weakness and decline of the church. Please bring your children into your church where they will truly repent and revive. Show the glory of your resurrection. In the name of the Lord, **Amen!***



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Stephen Soe Chee Cheng is Suffragan Bishop for the northern states of West Malaysia. He is also currently the Vicar of St. Georges Church, Penang.



Holy Saturday, 16th April

Matthew 27:57-66

A SACRED SPACE BETWEEN DEATH AND RESURRECTION

Holy Saturday is usually commemorated as a day when nothing much happens following the hectic and gruesome events of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday. It is considered a day of darkness and mourning. The traditional liturgy of Easter Eve rightly evokes these motifs. But a critical reading of today's text informs us that it is a full day of activity and events: the bold appearance of Joseph of Arimathea before Pilate (vv. 57-58), his taking and wrapping Jesus' body in clean linen cloth (v. 59), placing the body in his own new tomb, and rolling a big stone to close it (v. 60.)

Though liturgical practices make Holy Saturday intentionally stark, it is also the theological nexus between death and resurrection, a sacred space between the agony of Golgotha and the glory of the empty garden tomb. That day was engulfed by the impossibility of imagining life regained. There were no signs of life. Mary and the disciples were without answers.

Shelly Rambo, a North American theologian who has written much on Holy Saturday in her book, "In Spirit and Trauma: A Theology of Remaining," helps us gain an appreciation for the rich theological meaning Holy Saturday holds. She writes:

The narrative of triumphant resurrection can often operate in such a way as to promise a radically new beginning to those who have experienced a devastating event. A linear reading of cross and resurrection places death and life in a continuum; death is behind and life is ahead; life emerges victoriously from death. This way of reading can, at its best, provide a sense of hope and promise for the future. But it can also gloss over the realities of pain and loss, glorify suffering, and justify violence.

Holy Saturday couldn't be more relevant for Christians, especially during this period of a global pandemic. Jesus-followers don't need to rush towards the glory of new life when that is not where we are. COVID-19 has brought us collectively into a Holy Saturday space, a threshold that can become a theological container for our deep uncertainties, incomprehensible losses, and profound anxiety about the future. Will things ever go back to normal? Will COVID-19 ever be contained? Will the jobs lost ever be replaced?



In this time of Holy Saturday, we come face-to-face with questions that do not yet have answers. Like Mary and the disciples, we are experiencing a time of profound bewilderment about what may hold for us and our families, our neighborhoods, our nation, and our world. We sit with our grief, sorrow, and fear. The silent waiting of Saturday beckons us to witness the suffering that exists within and around us, and to be present amidst it all, devoid of easy solutions and quick miracle fixes.

There will be a time when we will gather together in our churches again and the crescendos of praise will drown out all remnants of lament. The goodness and glory will be inescapable.

PONDER

Listen, Lord, to the cries of your poor: break hell's hold, fling wide heaven's door.

(From Common Prayer: A Liturgy for Ordinary Radicals)

PROMISE

"In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also."

JOHN 14:2-3 (ESV)

PRAYER

O God, Creator of Heaven and Earth: Grant that, as the crucified body of your dear Son was laid in the Tomb and rested on this Holy Sabbath, so we may await with Him the coming of the third day, and rise with Him to newness of life; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.



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Easter Sunday, 17th April

John 20:1-18

“DO NOT CLING, BUT GO AND TELL”

What is your favourite bible verse, or passage during this pandemic? Chances are they will be ones that comforted you the most at your point of need. Have you shared this comfort you received with others, or is it carefully preserved and tucked away?

On that first day of the week, Peter and John went into the empty tomb. Both saw the folded linen clothes, but only John believed. In the Jewish custom at a banquet, folded linen clothes mean the one who folded the clothes will come back. Is this a message that Christ is risen and is coming back to fellowship with them? John records that they did not understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead. They went back to their homes. Unlike Mary, they did not encounter the risen Jesus personally and intimately.

Mary Magdalene was agonising in her bereavement, so much so that she did not immediately recognise that Jesus was right in front of her, addressing her lovingly, *“Mary”*. She could not be comforted with Jesus’ earlier repeated message that he will rise again on the third day. When she did recognise it was Jesus, she just wanted to cling on to him. She did not realise that everything had changed, and was going to be transformed drastically, *“...I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.”* (v.17).

However, even in the midst of such an intense and intimate encounter, Mary was able to finally listen and obey Jesus’ command, *“Mary Magdalene went and announced to the disciples, ‘I have seen the Lord’ - and that he had said these things to her.”* (v.18). Mary’s encounter with the risen Jesus changed everything and made all things new. She was the first evangelist to the resurrection. Nothing at all – the chains of her past experiences, emotions, or rationality - could stop her transformation.

Like Mary, I tend to cling on to experiences of answered prayers and allow it to develop a blind-spot to the present hints and clear messages from Scripture and promptings of the Holy Spirit. Like the disciples, I also tend



to just go back to my comfort zone, instead of responding to God's leading. However, God always reaches out to me as he did with Mary and the disciples. This daily encounter with the resurrected Lord through his Word and promptings of the Holy Spirit, equips and empowers me to live my life with the hope in Christ, with victory over sin and death.

PONDER

How has the Resurrection affected you? Let us pray that the Easter message of the Resurrected Christ will fill us with hope, joy and peace, to celebrate and live the present life, and bear witness to a Jesus Shaped Life. Happy and Blessed Easter!

PROMISE

"Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?'"

JOHN 11:25-26 (ESV)

PRAYER

Almighty God, who through your only begotten Son Jesus Christ overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life: Grant that we, who celebrate with joy the day of the Lord's resurrection, may be raised from the death of sin by your life-giving Spirit; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. Amen.



The Rt. Rev. Dr. Steven D. Abbarow is the Bishop of the Diocese of West Malaysia. He is passionate about Church Planting, Discipleship and Leadership Development.

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