



# THE UNITING PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN SOUTHERN AFRICA

## Month of Mission eDevotions

*At our General Assembly a proposal was passed that set October aside as a month of Mission.*

*By "Mission" we mean making God's love and glory known through acts of service, social justice, preaching, sharing our faith and making a difference in His name. It's praying "Your Kingdom come, Your will be done" with our sleeves rolled up.*

*One of a the practical proposals around this mission awareness was a four-fold preaching scheme:*

- 1. The gospel as service*
- 2. The gospel as transformation*
- 3. The gospel as one-to-one*
- 4. The gospel and the next generation.*

*Furthermore, Scripture readings for all 31 days of October were selected in line with the four sub-topics mentioned above.*

*This led to the thought of getting some of my colleagues to help write these 31 eDevs...*

## 2014-10-01 - "Service: Our ultimate example"

*So, here's the first one and it's by ANDRIES COMBRINK who is the minister at Centurion West congregation in Gauteng.*

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*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him. (John13:3-15)*

Jesus sets the ultimate example that the Gospel is about Service.

The Son of God, our Lord and Teacher set a moving example about the fact that being a Christian is not so much about being served, as about being a servant.

Jesus showed us that serving him and our community and our world does not start with huge impressive projects, but that it all begins when we are faithful in doing and being willing to do even the most tedious tasks, if it would result in reaching others in his Name for his service and glory.

Washing feet used to be the work of a slave, but Jesus turns around convention, culture, class and status by washing the feet of his disciples, to teach them the very basic truth about doing their best for God's work - he washed their feet to set us an example to do the same that he had done for us.

The word "whatever" comes to mind. The ultimate example that Jesus gave us, is that we need to do whatever is required in the moment we are in, in the space we live and work and play, to serve and through service bring others to follow Christ unconditionally too.

Forget about your station in society, your successes, your hang-ups and your image - follow the ultimate example of Christ: Be willing to do "whatever", even if it means to wash someone's dirty feet!

## 2014-10-02 - "Healing the whole person"

Today's Dev is by JACKIE BARKER, Assistant Minister at Emmanuel Presby Pretoria.

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*She came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak, and immediately her bleeding stopped. "Who touched me?" Jesus asked. When they all denied it, Peter said, "Master, the people are crowding and pressing against you." But Jesus said, "Someone touched me; I know that power has gone out from me." Then the woman, seeing that she could not go unnoticed, came trembling and fell at his feet. In the presence of all the people, she told why she had touched him and how she had been instantly healed. Then he said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace." (Luke 8:44-48)*

Jesus is on his way to see the daughter of Jarius, a leader of the synagogue as the little one is dying. As they go, the crowds press around him, eager to see what will happen, eager to not be left out of the action. But there is one woman in the crowd with a very different agenda. Having been struggling with bleeding for twelve years, she is at her wits end. No medical cure has helped and in the culture this means she would have been unclean. (Lev 15:25-31)

Unclean for twelve years.

Not allowed to be touched by another person.

Not allowed near the temple.

Unclean.

Excluded.

Alone.

Desperate.

Too humiliated to ask for healing, to ashamed to make a spectacle, she quietly follows Jesus, she dares to believe, and she touches him.

And she is healed.

But the story isn't over!

Jesus knows!

He knows the journey of the last twelve years. He knows the shame and exclusion. He knows the brokenness not just of body but of soul -- and so he stops.

"Who touched me?"

She had been felt.

She has been noticed.

And because of this she has been reached and healed and made whole.

Jesus stopping to acknowledge her allows her to be recognised and accepted back into society as clean. He heals not just the physical, but the spiritual, emotional and social brokenness around her.

Service can be as simple as noticing someone. Including someone. Acknowledging the beauty and the brokenness of each person that you meet.

Jesus uses the opportunity of a physical healing to heal the whole person.

Are there opportunities that we can use to extend grace and healing to those around us?

Are there opportunities that Jesus grace can flow through us, touching those in our families, in our work place, in the schools our kids attend? Could a kind word or a bit of patience, a thank you letter or a phone call heal a piece of someone's soul?

Be open to the Spirit today to hear him prompt you. Be aware of the lives that touch yours today and allow Jesus to do his work.

## 2014-10-03 - "Acts of service earn the right to speak"

Today's Dev is by JACKIE BARKER, Assistant Minister at Emmanuel Presby Pretoria.

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*Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. (Acts3:6-10)*

This first week of devotions is looking at the Gospel as service: The things we do for others can bring them closer to Jesus, can heal broken hearts, and can shine a light in dark places.

Peter and John are on their way to worship God when they are interrupted by a man begging. They could have shrugged their shoulders or pretended not to see him. They could have apologised or even sighed in frustration.

They don't.

It makes me wonder why they stopped here. Did they stop for every beggar? Did they pray for healing for every sick person they encountered?

Nothing in the book of Acts implies that.

But here we see them stop. I believe that Peter heard a whisper, felt a nudge, and became aware of the Spirit being at work here. The confidence with which he instructs the man to walk tells me that he knew Jesus was up to something here. In obeying, not only was the man healed, but a huge opportunity for witness opens up. The Gospel is seen at work and then explained.

This is Jesus.

This is what Jesus does.

This is how you can get to know Him too.

The beauty of the good news is exactly that - it is GOOD news. When people see it in action they will also want to hear of its truth. When we live our faith people will notice. When Jesus uses us to help someone else, to encourage another, to be generous in our giving, to give time to someone when we have little to spare - it will shine and people will notice.

We never know what the outcome of obeying a nudge or a whisper will be. It may be to simply plant a seed of truth, to water that seed, or even joyfully watch a seed grow into something beautiful. We would see people encounter Jesus.

Jesus in us.

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." Gal 2:20  
I pray that as you go through your day today -- people will encounter Christ in you. I pray too that you will hear the whispers, obey them and every opportunity will be taken to share the good news.

## 2014-10-04 - "Doing good displays incomparable riches"

(Written by THEO GROENEVELD, serving at Emmanuel Presby Pretoria.)

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*6 And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, 7 in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- 9 not by works, so that no one can boast. 10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*  
(Ephesians2:6-10)

We're still exploring the idea of Mission as SERVICE...

Paul makes a very very forceful point in v.6-9.

There is absolutely NOTHING we can do to earn our salvation.

- There's not a drop that we can add to the ocean of mercy we get to swim in.
- There's not even a single hair that we comb into the right place to make us more worthy to receive God's love.
- We can't even contribute the wrapping paper that the gift of grace comes in.
- There's no part of the Good News story in our lives that we can claim to have authored.

-Do you get it?

--Do you understand it?

---Has it sunk home yet?

We have received incomparable riches and kindness as a GIFT.

But then Paul talks about good works...

Good works aren't the reason for our salvation, they are the result of our salvation.

When we do good, we're living out the ongoing salvation of God in our lives. We're His workmanship (the Greek word "poiema" implies handiwork, masterpiece, poetry-in-motion). When good deeds (acts of service) are on display in our lives, these good deeds are a signpost that point towards something awesome that has happened in our lives.

When I hand out a cup of cold water because Jesus saved me,  
when I visit a lonely person because Jesus love flows through me,  
when I stand up against injustice because Jesus died unjustly for me,  
then the world will see His incomparable riches!

## 2014-10-05 - "Waiting on tables"

Today's devotion is by CHRISTOPHER JUDELSON who serves at Midrand Presbyterian Church.

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*In those days when the number of disciples was increasing, the Grecian Jews among them complained against the Hebraic Jews because their widows were being overlooked in the daily distribution of food. 2 So the Twelve gathered all the disciples together and said, "It would not be right for us to neglect the ministry of the word of God in order to wait on tables. 3 Brothers, choose seven men from among you who are known to be full of the Spirit and wisdom. We will turn this responsibility over to them 4 and will give our attention to prayer and the ministry of the word."*

*5 This proposal pleased the whole group. They chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit; also Philip, Procorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas from Antioch, a convert to Judaism. 6 They presented these men to the apostles, who prayed and laid their hands on them.*

*7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts6:1-7)*

Although it may seem from this passage that the Apostles felt that caring for the widows or the poor was demeaning work because they had the more important task of praying and preaching the gospel; the fact is that the leaders of the Church realised that part of the mission of God's people, part of God's mission, is to serve the poor. To 'wait on' the widows.

Mission, amongst other things (as we will discover in the coming weeks), means service to the poor.

And often this service is very practical. In Matt 25 Jesus tells the parable of the sheep and goats in which He emphasises the importance of practical social outreach!

One of the questions we have to ask ourselves as congregations of the UPCSA is this: "If we closed our doors tomorrow, would anyone, besides you and I as members, miss our presence in the community?" If the answer is, "No," then we are not fulfilling God's mission of serving the poor.

And notice the result of the work of the deacons... We are told, the word of God spread, not only through the preaching, but also through action of serving the community. And more and more people began to join this amazing group of sinners who had been saved and transformed, and who had joined God's mission in the world.

Steve Sjogren writes in the book, *Seeing Beyond Church Walls*: "We love, serve and care for others because that is normal behaviour for people who are filled with God's Spirit. We are Christians. Christ was the ultimate servant. We can't help but serve because the Spirit of the Servant has filled our hearts. When we serve we are just being who we naturally are."

Whether you change someone's tyre, make a cup of coffee, offer someone a lift or make a meal for somebody - Serving never gets old.

We are made for this. We are most satisfied and at peace and full of joy, when we offer our lives for others and join God in his mission of transforming and serving society.

Mission is about service.

## 2014-10-06 - "Who are they?"

Today's devotion is by THEO GROENEVELD who serves at Emmanuel Presby, Pretoria.

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*He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. 17 The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, 19 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour." (Luke 4:16-19)*

After His baptism and temptation Jesus began a powerful Spirit-empowered ministry and by the time He returned to His home town, Nazareth, He'd earned quite a reputation. Luke tells us that "everyone praised Him." (Lk.4:15)

Then in His home-town Jesus read this amazing prophecy from Isaiah.

He claimed that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Him:

That:

- The poor would hear Good News
- The prisoners would hear a proclamation of freedom
- The blind would recover their sight
- The oppressed would be released.

The people of Nazareth were amazed, but in a sceptical way.

"We saw this guy grow up among us - there's nothing special about him." "Who does he think he is?"

But in the months that followed Jesus would preach Good News in words and in action (healings, exorcisms, resurrections and feedings). He opened blind eyes and set demon-possessed people free.

John the Baptist was in prison and was filled with doubt, but Jesus comforted him "Go back and report to John what you hear and see: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor."

Who are the poor, the prisoners, the blind, and the oppressed in your circles of influence??? When we begin to serve them it proclaims the year of the Lord's favour. When we begin to love the lonely, care for the wounded, serve the homeless and protect the victimised it will encourage the "doubtful Johns" and silence the "home-town sceptics".

You may say "The task is too big" but we're not asked to finish the task, we're just asked to start!

## 2014-10-07 - "These verses are hard to ignore."

Our devotion is written by BRIAN SMITH who serves at Hillcrest Presby.

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*All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. 34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.' 37 "Then the righteous will answer him, 'Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? 38 When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? 39 When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?' 40 "The King will reply, 'I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.' (Matthew 25:32-40)*

This is such a powerful scripture of our call to make a difference in other people's lives. It gives us a great picture of all the people gathered before God and how all the people will be judged.

This has been a scripture that has challenged me on many an occasion. It has worked so powerfully in my own life that it is written on the front of the book that we use to record what support we give to people from our church. I need to be reminded of the words, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." as I meet people in need.

Often when we meet those who are "one of the least of these" we first employ a series of filters that guide our help. Sentences play in our minds such as, "I am sure they will just use the money I give them to buy alcohol." or "He doesn't look like he is that hungry." or "I am sure plenty of people have given her something today." I am afraid that I also have these words that sometimes try and help me decide who? and how? I should help.

When this happens I remember the words of today's verse, "whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." and I am able to be more generous.

What are we called to do in this verse? We are called to minister to a number of different people in different ways. To feed the hungry. To give something to drink to those who are thirsty. To invite the stranger in. To give clothes to those who need clothes. To visit those in prison.

I was in Atlanta in the USA in 2000 and I visited a Presbyterian Church. It was a week day and the sanctuary was a huge dormitory. This Presbyterian church had wanted to start a soup kitchen for the homeless. They had made soup and gone out and only fed one man. They asked why no one else had come for soup and he had said that they did not need soup but a place to stay. The church now rolls out plastic over their sanctuary carpet. The piano and pulpit are pushed up against the wall and mattresses and totes are brought in for the men with their possessions in them. During the week the men sleep in the church every night. On Sunday mornings everything is changed and church happens. After the service it's back to the dormitory.

"whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me."

What are you doing for the least of these?



## 2014-10-08 - "The Gospel makes new people of us"

*We start week two of our month of Mission: The Gospel as Transformation.*

*Our writer is ANDRIES COMBRINK who serves the congregation at Centurion West, Pretoria.*

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*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God."  
(2Corinthians5:17-20)*

We do not have to wait till the last day, the day of the resurrection when Jesus returns, to become a new creation. It all starts here and now. It starts on the day God reconciles us with Godself. On that day we celebrate by singing and shouting: The old has gone, the new is here!

All this is from God. The Holy Spirit recreates me into someone new. I was born again. The new creation within me does not hide or run away from God anymore. The new creation within me does not oppose God, the Kingdom or the values, the dream and the vision our Lord has for us and for his work or the Church.

No, the new creation in me thirsts for friendship with my God. It longs to walk with God. It prays to work for God. It celebrates that my sins do not count against me anymore. It begs the Lord to make me a change agent for his sake. It urges me on to seek the glory and honour of my God in every aspect of life.

The new creation within me turns me into an ambassador of God - of the King and of the eternal Kingdom! We represent the eternal King on the Father's right hand. We teach what he taught, we bring the message he brought, we testify about his resurrection and his victory. We promise the forgiveness of sin. We live for our King and invite the world to enter and celebrate the everlasting Kingdom of life and love.

Through us God makes the appeal to all who live as enemies of Truth, to make peace with their Creator. Through us God implores all, to on Christ's behalf, through Christ's atonement and in Christ's conquering power, to become new people - transformed by being reconciled with God, filled with the Spirit and creating a new community of love promoting true life.

Ambassador of God, the new person you became is a militant agent of transformation. You are light, salt and yeast. Communities opposing God and suffering the painful consequences, can change to live as God's friends, walking with the Father, working for Christ, seeking his glory in everything and celebrating true life and healing through becoming alive in Jesus by the Spirit's work in us.

The new people we become beg everyone on Christ's behalf: "Be reconciled to God."

## 2014-10-09 - "Thessalonica... Transformed by the Gospel"

Today's devotion is from JACO BESTER who serves St John's Presby in Middleburg.

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*For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction. You know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake. And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything. For they themselves report concerning us the kind of reception we had among you, and how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come. (English Standard Version) (1Thessalonians1:4-10)*

It is toward the end of this brief passage that we are introduced to the 'symptoms of true transformation' that is brought about by the Gospel of Jesus Christ taking root in our lives - "a transformation so powerfully set forth in the example of the Church in Thessalonica. Paul says that the Thessalonians" turned to God from idols" (the transformation) and goes on to explain that this transformation took the shape of "[serving] the living and true God" and "[waiting] for his Son" (the symptoms).

These two symptoms of 'serving' and 'waiting' should always stand as the markers of true transformation. We cannot claim to have been transformed by the Gospel unless we show forth this transformation through our service of the Lord unto his people; and find ourselves always waiting for his guidance and return - our service is for him, in the hope and eager anticipation of his glorious return.

But what is it that motivates our service and waiting? What is it that drives our transformation? It is nothing other than the love of God and the growing awareness, both as faith communities and individuals, that we are loved by God what a glorious thought!

Perhaps the most beautiful turn of phrase in this passage is that of Paul's description of the transformed church in Thessalonica. He addresses them as "brothers loved by God". It was William Barclay who wrote of this very passage when he said, "The phrase beloved by God was a phrase which the Jews applied only to supremely great men like Moses and Solomon, and to the nation of Israel itself... Now the greatest privilege of the greatest men of God's chosen people has been extended to the humblest of the Gentiles."

It must always be kept in mind that the nature of our transformation by the Gospel is to that of "beloved of God". We are literally transformed into those who are loved by God, and have become aware of that great love (Not more loved than any others, just more deeply aware that we are loved). It is God's love, through Christ, that transforms us and motivates our 'service' and 'waiting'.

The very thought that we are loved by God is what serves as the catalyst for true transformation...

## 2014-10-10 - "First called Christians"

*Our devotion is written by JAMES GRAY who serves the United Church Hermanus.*

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*Some of them went to Antioch and began to speak to Greeks also, telling them the good news about the Lord Jesus. The Lord's hand was upon them and great number of people believed and turned to the Lord. . . . And it was at Antioch where the disciples were first called Christians. (Acts11:19-26)*

We probably don't need any reminding that Jesus was not a 'Christian'. The name hadn't been invented in Jesus' day. That only happened some time after He returned to heaven and, even then, it was probably a nickname applied by non-believers in Antioch to this group of people who claimed allegiance to Jesus the Nazarene, much like the old days in Cape Town when we spoke of Moslems as 'Mohammedans.'

It has been suggested that the name 'Christian' means 'little Christs'. That may or may not be correct, but what we can say is that, at its simplest, 'Christian' means 'a follower of Christ'. It suggests we are living according to His example. It says that because Christ dwells in me I try to live my life differently. I won't go with the herd. On the contrary, I hear His voice and command, and the challenge cannot be clearer: 'Follow me!'

In some countries where Christians are under pressure many prefer simply to be known as 'followers of Jesus'.

So let me ask you: Are you a Christian, a follower of Christ? Is Jesus' transforming presence beginning to bear fruit in your life, or have we slipped into a part-time believer's mode, so-called 'followers of Jesus' who sometimes find it an inconvenient label?

'Christian' -- ity began in Antioch. Non-believers observed the followers of Jesus. 'The grace of God was upon them', says Luke. They took Jesus seriously and as a consequence were dubbed 'Christians'. The name stuck.

## 2014-10-11 - "This is what new life looks like."

*Our devotion is written by JAMES GRAY who serves the United Church Hermanus.*

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*...Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator... As God's chosen people clothe yourselves with compassion ... (Colossians3:1-17)*

Apart from some slow-starters down in the Western Cape most readers of this short Saturday reflection are probably dressed and ready for action. How long did it take you to get dressed? Women generally are more thoughtful about such matters than guys who, on a Saturday at least, tend to grab the nearest pair of trousers and a twice-worn shirt and feel they are presentable. The process takes 60 seconds at the most.

Have you ever thought of your growth in Christian virtues and values as in some way like getting dressed in the morning? In the third chapter of Colossians St Paul speaks of 'taking off' your old self and 'putting on' the new self. A few verses later he urges us to 'clothe ourselves' with compassion and kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

If you like, that is our Christian dress code. When we get dressed we should pause for a moment and consciously 'put on' those qualities. Its great to have a cupboard fill of fragrances and aftershaves but if we paid a little more attention to 'putting on', 'clothing ourselves' or 'splashing' ourselves (not Paul's but mine) in the aromas of the gospel then we might find that people begin to take notice of the Christ within us.

There is a great deal to chew on in Colossians 3 but if you want to know what a new life looks like then read it carefully. Having said that, if we were to evaluate our lives by what is written there we might have to admit that we are 'a work in progress'. But at very least, verse 17 might motivate us to aim higher: "And whatever you do, whether in word or in deed, do it all in the name of Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him."

You may remember how Johann Sebastian Bach used to write six letter on his completed musical scores: JSB and SDG. The first set were his own initials, the second stood for Soli Deo Gloria - To the glory of God alone.

Are those letters inscribed over your life?

## 2014-10-12 - "Changed lives!"

*Our devotion today is by BRIAN SMITH who serves at Hillcrest Presby in Durban.*

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*Those who had been scattered preached the word wherever they went. 5 Philip went down to a city in Samaria and proclaimed the Messiah there. 6 When the crowds heard Philip and saw the signs he performed, they all paid close attention to what he said. 7 For with shrieks, impure spirits came out of many, and many who were paralyzed or lame were healed. 8 So there was great joy in that city. (Acts8:4-8)*

I remember having a conversation with a mother who was picking up her child from our last Holiday Club that we ran at our church. It was a conversation about the Holiday Club and how her child had enjoyed it and then this mother said, "I used to come to the youth group at this church." I found out that she had stopped coming to youth and church as her life had become busy.

Is there a huge negativity in society against church and Christians?

I don't think so.

As we come to Acts 8:4-17 we realize that wherever those who had been scattered went they preached the word. Philip proclaimed the Messiah. These early Christian's spoke to people about Christ, they prayed for miracles and signs, prayed for those who had demons and prayed for healing. And the Holy Spirit worked. Again, and the Holy Spirit worked!

Were there people who were against this new message that was being shared? Yes. Go just one chapter back to Acts 7 where Stephen gives a speech to the Sanhedrin. They were not that excited about the message and stoned him!

But that was not true for everyone. As we get to the end of this scripture today we are told what the effects of the sharing of Christ was - "So there was great joy in that city."

As Christ is shared, joy is experienced.

Is there a huge negativity in society against church and Christians?

I don't think so.

There are some who are very closed to Christ and his message of salvation. That is true. But what is equally true is that there are many people, just like the lady I spoke to at our Holiday Club, who are very close to being included in the promises of Christ and getting into church.

I often think we are paralyzed by our own perceptions of how people may respond or what they may say if we begin a discussion about Jesus. More often than not we have not actually experienced this negativity first hand. We have heard only about it.

I believe that we have a role to play in our cities and towns. A role of being bold and sharing Christ and the Good News of his love and grace and salvation. And as we do we will also see what the early church saw, "great joy in that city"

God Bless you.

## 2014-10-13 - "God can transform our fears and doubts"

*Our devotion is by SIBUSISO ZUNGU who serves three congregations in Diepkloof.*

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*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. 8 So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God, 9 who has saved us and called us to holy life -- not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time. (2Timothy1:7-9)*

Paul reminds Timothy that his calling and salvation was planned by God before the beginning of time. He urges Timothy to have no fears and doubts about his calling, instead he is to cultivate a spirit of power, of love and self-discipline: 'power' to counter any appearance of weakness because of his age, 'love' to counter any undeserved criticism, and self-discipline so that the purity of his life will ultimately silence his critics.

In spite of it all, it is comforting to note that God has equipped Timothy for the mission to whom he has been called, and God's spirit will continue to equip him. This is the encouragement to everyone who feels inadequate for the mission God has given.

Paul makes Timothy to comprehend the fact that suffering is the integral part of ministry. As much as Paul suffered, also Timothy will suffer. Paul invites him to follow in his steps in proclaiming the gospel.

Timothy should not be fearful and in doubt because he is counting on the grace and mercy of God and is doing God's work, like we are or have been. Our calling and mission is dependent solely on the work of Christ, which was planned before the beginning of time, and manifested in his earthly life, death and resurrection.

Today as Christians we are privileged to be servants in the kingdom of the Most High God through the redemptive work of Christ Jesus on the cross. We are being reconciled with God while were His enemies due to sin, but today we are called to His service.

Beloved, our calling is costly. Paul emphasises this fact to encourage Timothy to fix his eyes on the Triune God, the One who called him for ministry. Yet the apostle Paul implicitly addresses the challenges facing every Christian, but God's grace is sufficient to carry us through as His children. Therefore we are not supposed to focus our energy on the tribulations that comes with this calling.

Beloved, we should keep in mind that Paul writes this epistle comforting Timothy while he was facing death in prison, but Paul did not allow his circumstances to determine his relationship with God. This what David said in Psalm 23:3-4 "Even though I walk in the shadow of the valley of death I will fear no evil? Thy rod and thy staff comfort me."

## 2014-10-14 - "It's about living a new life"

*Our devotion is by SIBUSISO ZUNGU who serves three congregations in Diepkloof.*

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*Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God -- this is your spiritual act of worship. 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is -- his good, pleasing and perfect will. 3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you. 4 Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, 5 so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. (Romans12:1-5)*

The sacrifice that Paul is referring to, is the same sacrifice used in the Old Testament: it was supposed to be spotless and blameless. As Christians today we are being purified by the precious blood of Jesus to be able to serve in God's missionary calling.

Now Paul encourages us to allow our old self to die and resurrect with Christ as new creation. Our service therefore is a service of thanksgiving, in every aspect giving glory to God. The world cannot only hear about God from word of mouth but by our acts of kindness even to our worst enemies as Christ instructed us (Mt5:43-48)

Beloved we should put our conduct into harmony with the new life found in Christ (Rom6:4). That is the basic rule in Paul's ethics, and it that which is further unfolded in the first two verses of chapter 12.

Paul deals with the practical implications of what he said in previous chapters. But until we are moved by the majesty of God, as Paul has been, we will not be able to understand and live out the consequences of his love for us.

Because of what God has done for us, the best we can give him is ourselves, by presenting our bodies as living sacrifices. The word 'body' in this context represents far more than our belongings or treasures. It means the totality of our life, plans and activities. The offering of ourselves is a spiritual act of worship that we can give to God.

Through our bodies we express what we think, what we have and how we live. Hence, Paul refers to this sacrifice as the renewing of your mind (12:2). This renewal is an internal process, a reorientation of our world view as we seek to live the way Christ lived and to think as he thought. Nothing is left behind to conform to the pattern of this world.

Finally: we are called to live a transformed life in the church and community. We are called to live side by side. However, the first thing we must watch out for is pride (Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall). We are equal before God, no individual or group or class or race can claim to be better than other. We are saved by grace through faith. Pride undermines the unity of the church. We are not called to make unity instead we are called to keep unity as parts of one body.

## 2014-10-15 - "Recognising Jesus - light in our darkness"

*We start week three of our Month of Mission: "It's still one-to-one and one-by-one."*

*Our devotion is by ANDRIES COMBRINK who serves the Centurion West Congregation in Centurion, Pretoria.*

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*He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God --- children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God. The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John1:10-14)*

The true Light of God, the eternal, one and only Son of God, came from his Father's heavenly home to bring the message of the grace and truth of God to those who were God's own. Sadly he was not recognized, he was not received by the leaders of Israel. They chose to rather reject his message and spread lies about his resurrection.

Those who continued to reject him and persecuted his followers would never find the Light, because their darkness remained undefeated.

But the Father sent his Spirit to us and we were, through the Spirit's gracious work, transformed and made into new creations as we were born of God. God's Spirit changed us from enemies into those touched by grace and changed into God's children. And as children of the Father our eyes were opened to recognize Jesus, to believe in his Name and receive the right to walk in the eternal light.

We are given this right when we are adopted by the Father in Christ and are given the privilege to call the almighty Creator "Abba" which means "my Daddy". We are given the power to claim our divine heritage to be children of God.

And we claim this right after we recognize Jesus and are shown his glory. We share in the wonder of childship even as Jesus claimed to be God's Son. One by one the Spirit grants us the faith to recognize Jesus as the Truth and receive the Light!

Celebrate the right to be a child of God today.

Celebrate the gracious life of Jesus that brought you truth and light.

Celebrate the calling to be the instrument used by the Spirit to open the eyes of the blind and call those who are dead, to live.

Celebrate that you have been changed to become the visible and audible word of God who shares this message with people who stumble in darkness:

You too have the right be a child of God.

You too can recognize Jesus and walk in the Light.

You too can see and share the glory of Jesus - now, and forevermore!



## 2014-10-16 - "A decision that everyone must make"

*Unfortunately our Dev-Writer for today has had computer trouble and couldn't get his devotion to me in time. Hope this reflection is helpful....*

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*In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again. "*

*4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!"*

*5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' 8 The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit." (John3:3-8)*

Nicodemus came to Jesus at night... Was he just curious?

Or was he hungry and thirsty for righteousness - desperate for something that the Pharisees and the Jewish Council couldn't give him?

Jesus cuts straight to the point:

Entering God's Kingdom isn't an inherited right or something that happens by loose association. It's not something that comes to us by default if we live good lives. Entering God's Kingdom happens by new birth.

Jesus goes on to explain it with three images:

- It's a SECOND Birth - a new beginning. It is followed by growth and leads toward maturity where we "have children" by leading others to God.
- It's a SPIRITUAL Birth. Blaise Pascal talked about the "God-shaped hole" inside all of us. Being born-again is to invite God's Spirit to fill that hole.
- It's a MYSTERIOUS Birth. You can't see the wind, hold the wind or tell the wind where to blow. Being born again means that we are no longer our own - we belong to Him. We go where the wind blows.

Jesus was announcing the coming of a Kingdom.

Entry into His coming KINGDOM (where His will is done) is initiated by an event or a process (that in my case took a few months) where I had to recognise that:

- This life is not enough and I can't find fulfilment in myself.
- There is a God-shaped hole in me and I need Him
- Being born-again means I throw myself into an amazing voyage where I'm not in charge but His Wind takes me into the life He has prepared for me.

Nicodemus came at night: frightened of what others thought. We meet him again in John 7 - half-heartedly trying to stand up for Jesus. He appears a last time in John 19 carrying an armload of spices to bury Jesus. My picture is of Nicodemus in the "spiritual womb" he's hungry and thirsty and instinctively knows that Jesus holds the answers, but he just won't let go, he doesn't let the birth happen and that's just a great pity.

Do you know someone like that?

## 2014-10-17 - "It's not earned..."

Today's devotion is by LENTIKILE MASHOKO who serves the Mabopane congregation.

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5 Moses describes in this way the righteousness that is by the law: "The man who does these things will live by them." 6 But the righteousness that is by faith says: "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?' " (that is, to bring Christ down) 7 "or 'Who will descend into the deep?' " (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). 8 But what does it say? "The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart," that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: 9 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved. 11 As the Scripture says, "Anyone who trusts in him will never be put to shame." 12 For there is no difference between Jew and Gentile--the same Lord is Lord of all and richly blesses all who call on him, 13 for, "Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." (Romans 10:5-13)

Paul is writing to the Church in Rome, who were predominantly Gentiles with few Jews among them. The book deals with God's plan for salvation for all humankind. Jews and Gentiles alike are sinners and are in need of salvation of God.

This salvation has been provided by God in Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary and through the power of resurrection. The fact of the matter is that salvation is not something we must earn by ourselves. It is not about the good works we are doing, the good works are just the fruits of our faith. We need to understand that there is nothing we can do that will guarantee our salvation outside faith. This provision that God made, must be received only by faith.

Genesis 15:6 says "Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness". Salvation when received by faith, produces the righteousness of God in us. This righteousness makes us bear the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) and change the world. That means our faith must work out in practical ways, both in the church and in the world.

The Word is near us, it is in our mouths and in our hearts. We have what it takes to go out and practice our faith to draw the world to Jesus Christ of Nazareth. We need to confess Jesus Christ of Nazareth as our Lord and Saviour. We need to walk the talk and let the Spirit convince those who are called to this salvation.

It is by faith, not by works that we are saved... but when we are saved, we become righteousness of God and are compelled to proclaim it to the nations, to call unto him those whom he died for on the cross of Calvary. To reach out to those who need our help and open our arms to share his providence.

An American Gospel singer, Shelly Caesar in her song "I remember mama in a happy way" says "It is hard to come into contact with Jesus and still remain the same, I don't care whether you are a chief of sinners, you will never be the same...". Even you; can come and receive Jesus Christ of Nazareth by Faith and be saved. Just believe in him, give him your life, and let him change you.

## 2014-10-18 - "And we can participate..."

*Our devotion is by MUKONDI RAMULONDI who is the Moderator of our General Assembly and serves at St Mungos and Diepsloot.*

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*How can people have faith in the Lord and ask him to save them if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear, unless someone tells them? And how can anyone tell them without being sent by the Lord? The scriptures say it is a beautiful sight to see even the feet of someone coming to preach the Good News.*

*(Romans10:14)*

Paul asks three rhetorical questions, and these questions present four steps that are critical in sharing the Good News.

### 1.COMMISSIONING OF PREACHERS.

God calls Men and Women from among ourselves and expects us to join hands with him in sending out those who are responding to the call. There are many ways of participating in sending out preachers: We may commit ourselves to pray for them and by providing financial resources to them.

### 2.SHARING OF THE GOOD NEWS

Those who are called should preach the Good News. This can be done by almost all of us. Each one of us should be able to share our personal stories of our relationship with the Lord. This can be done in different ways. St Mungo's in Diepsloot touches so many lives in the community through different actions. This includes empowering local persons with life-skills, feeding the hungry, and caring for the sick. Through community action the church is able to restore lost hope and dignity to the people.

### 3.HEARING THE MESSAGE

Faith without works is dead. People will never make sense of our Christian message if it does not translate to their day to day challenges. How we proclaim the gospel is critical.

### 4. THE RESPONSE TO THE PREACHED MESSAGE.

This is about believing in the Lord. It's all about people putting their trust in the Lord. If we do our mission properly those who hear us will put their trust in God and give their lives to him.

### CONCLUSION

William Temple, Arch Bishop of Canterbury described evangelism as; "To evangelize is to present Jesus Christ in the power of the Holy Spirit, that people may come to put their trust in God through him, to accept him as their Saviour and serve him as their King in the fellowship of the church."

We participate in Mission because:

- Jesus asks us to,
- out of love for others,
- because Jesus was and still is committed to the salvation of human kind and growth of the church,
- because the Bible says this will happen before Jesus returns.(Mt24:14)

PRAYER: Dear God, creator and redeemer of the world, thank you that you are interested in us joining hands with you in the sharing of the Good News. Give us strength when we neglect to carry out what you have commissioned us to do. Help us to encourage each other to participate in the sharing of the Good news. Forgive us of our past failures and lead us to new life and hope for the future. Inspire us to be courageous carriers of the Good News. Amen.

## 2014-10-19 - "That beautiful moment of conversion."

*Our devotion is by GEORGE MARCHINKOWSKI who serves at St Mungo's in Bryanston.*

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*The eunuch asked Philip, "Tell me, please, who is the prophet talking about, himself or someone else?" 35 Then Philip began with that very passage of Scripture and told him the good news about Jesus.*

*36 As they traveled along the road, they came to some water and the eunuch said, "Look, here is water. Why shouldn't I be baptized?" 38 And he gave orders to stop the chariot. Then both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water and Philip baptized him. (Acts8:34-38)*

"On my way through adolescence to adulthood, I caught something, and I haven't been able to shake it since. The symptoms developed gradually, so I can't point to a single moment when it began for me... The infection was a good thing, a kind of anti-infection, really, because the worst case of it you had, the better, healthier and more alive you became. (Brian McLaren)

How were you "saved"? Was it a moment you can remember or was it a gradual process of getting to know Jesus, so that his grace slowly changed you? Was it a tragedy that got you thinking about the things that really matter? Can you remember?

The story of Philip on the wilderness road beautifully parallels another "road story": that of Jesus "opening the scriptures" to the two on the road to Emmaus. Now Philip, one of the leaders of the early church, meets a foreign diplomat on a similar quest - he is searching the scriptures to find something. I'm not sure that Ethiopian diplomat knew what he was looking for but he's searching.

Acts describes the man as a "eunuch", a castrated male. Eunuchs were fairly prevalent in the ancient world - they would never marry and therefore give loyalty to a royal court or household. This eunuch had come to Jerusalem "to worship" and is now reading a suffering servant passage from Isaiah. Philip, again a travelling stranger, asks if the eunuch needs help with interpretation. An invitation is given for Philip to travel alongside the eunuch.

The unreported part of the story is that the eunuch, having travelled to Jerusalem to worship, was probably not allowed that privilege. Deuteronomy 23:1 graphically prevents any eunuchs from entry into the temple. The high official of Ethiopia has come a long way only to be prevented from "worshipping" Yahweh. It's likely that his skin colour also made entry into the temple impossible (See Paul in Acts 21:28-29). With Philip, the Eunuch finds an altogether different response - Philip explains as he is able, witnessing to a new dispensation which is open to all who earnestly seek redemption. Jesus saves. Now, all are accepted: Samaritans, Gentiles, Africans and even the "sexually other".

When Philip and the eunuch knelt beside that bit of water and then experienced the Spirit of God making something ordinary into something extraordinary, they experienced the beautiful moment, that moment when heaven and earth didn't seem so far apart, the moment when eternity touched time. The eunuch 'caught something' (a good something) that would change his life. A new friend of Jesus found welcome on the road to Gaza, yet another example of a new reality coming among us.

## 2014-10-20 - "Paul's unquenchable desire for the salvation of others"

*Our devotion is by LUNGILE MPETSHENI who is our newly appointed denominational General Secretary.*

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*But to this very day I have been helped by God, and so I stand here giving my witness to all, to small and great alike. What I say is the very same thing which the prophets and Moses said was going to happen: 23 that the Messiah must suffer and be the first one to rise from death, to announce the light of salvation to the Jews and to the Gentiles... 28 Agrippa said to Paul, "In this short time do you think you will make me a Christian?" 29 "Whether a short time or a long time," Paul answered, "my prayer to God is that you and all the rest of you who are listening to me today might become what I am -- except, of course, for these chains!" (Acts26:22-32)*

As I reflected on this passage, I was overwhelmed by the liberating power of the gospel message. I was also excited by the image of a liberated prisoner. I was further reminded of what my father used to say, "If you speak truth, you speak it once; yet if you lie, you lie many times."

Paul stood as a prisoner before King Agrippa. Normally his space and life would have been so limited and constrained. Being a free man, Paul saw his territory so enlarged. Instead of being ashamed of the situation that people put him in, he celebrated the liberating power of the gospel. He saw and used that moment as an opportunity to proclaim and "give testimony" -- not in the normal court terms but in the heavenly way. He was a prisoner in human terms, but liberated according to the divine plan. God does broaden our territories. We get thrown into situations that we need to capitalise of and proclaim the message. A supposed-to-be situation of shame may become a moment of glory.

Paul could have been threatened by the panoply of royalty (King Agrippa, Queen Bernice and the Governor Festus.) Many preachers change their testimonies when they find out that there are celebrities and/or senior government officials in the crowds that they are to speak to. They like to give messages that are to impress such figures. This we do at the expense of the true gospel message.

Paul knew that he/she who kneels before God can stand before any and every man. Paul was small in stature, but a giant spiritually. He saw the King, with his mastery of the Jews religious practices and his cohorts as spiritual dwarfs. He gave a pure gospel to the King, announcing the light of salvation to the Jews and the Gentiles. Praise God for this bravery. We, preachers of the gospel are called to stand firm and not to compromise the liberating power of the gospel, even if the EMPIRE presents itself as a threat to us. The EMPIRE and its subordinates must hear the gospel and become Christian.

Lastly, Paul presents a seamless continuous message of liberation, which started in the messages of Moses and the Prophets. God has throughout history been in the enterprise of saving humankind. Paul stated this truth to Timothy, thus, God "wants everyone to be saved and to come to know the truth. For there is one God, and there is one who brings God and human beings together, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself to redeem everyone. That was the proof at the right time that God wants everyone to be saved." (1Tim 2: 4-6).

Let all the nations receive salvation through our proclamation.

## 2014-10-21 - "Tell! Bear Witness! Declare!"

*Our devotion is by LUNGILE MPETSHENI who is our newly appointed denominational General Secretary.*

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*We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it, and our hands have touched it. 2 When this life became visible, we saw it; so we speak of it and tell you about the eternal life which was the Father and was made known to us. 3 What we have seen and heard we announce to you also, so that you will join with us in the fellowship that we have with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1John1:1-3 (1John1:1-3)*

The vision of the UPCSA is "To be a reconciled community of Christians exercising a prophetic witness to Christ." John captures this vision lucidly. We are called to join in the fellowship and to tell (witness) about the Word of life and Eternal life.

John reiterated what he presented in his gospel that in the Word that became flesh there was life and that the Word existed from the very beginning. In the human form, the Word became visible and tangible. The human senses were activated, so as to qualify the claim that the Word became flesh. This reinforces the call for faith and reason to work together towards a holistic and balanced Christian life. We need to see and feel the presence of Christ among us.

In a situation of chaos, disorder and confusion, there is need for Christianity that brings life to the people. Spiritual death results in the corrosion of the moral fibre in our society. We succumb to the 'prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience'(Eph2:1-4). Human beings have hardened their hearts and are in constant search of that which is carnal. The search of eternal life has been substituted by the search for prosperity and materialism. The testimony of those that have seen this "life that became visible" is more often than not rendered suspect and despised.

Those that inherit the eternal life become 'a reconciled community of Christians'. We join in the fellowship (koinonia) with the Father and the Son. We understand what Jesus means when he says in John 17 that he and the Father are one; therefore praying that we should also be one. The call to fellowship implies closing the gap between people and the destruction of the wall that separates us. The rich and the poor, the oppressor and the oppressed, the powerful and the powerless, women and men, young and old are brought together to the unity of the Father and the Son.

Christianity is an answer to our society. The reconciled community of Christians should 'exercise a prophetic witness to Christ'. John says we write about him, we have seen, we have looked upon him and touched him. Therefore, we TELL/BEAR WITNESS/DECLARE, so that many may come into the fellowship. Christ should be at the centre of the Church life, work and proclamation. The prophetic messages should be healing and liberating to both the rich and poor, oppressor and oppressed.

I urge all Christians not to prophesy anything negative about themselves as a reconciled community (eg "our church has no future"; "I don't know which direction this church goes"; "I don't even know why I go to church"). Let us instead stand together, isolate and neutralise the elements that destroy our hard earned fellowship. Ours is to TELL/BEAR WITNESS/DECLARE 'the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning'. The world will then be a better place for all.

## 2014-10-22 - "Faith Shapers"

*We start the fourth week of our Month of Mission where we concentrate on passing our faith on to the next generation.*

*Today's devotion is from JACO BESTER who serves St John's Presby in Middleburg.*

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*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands...*

*(2Tim3:14-15) ...as for you , continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings..." (2Timothy1:5-6)*

There is an old Spanish proverb that says: "an ounce of mother is worth a ton of priest." This proverb was born not so much out of a disdain for the work of priests, but rather out of an appreciation for the fact that there is none more important, when it comes to the spiritual formation and grounding of a child, than the parent. Our parents, if they fulfil the biblical call made of them, are the ones who form and literally shape our faith.

Let me say from the outset; there is not one model for parenthood, there's no recipe or twelve-step program that will offer a fail-proof system for being a good faith-shaping parent. The challenges faced by parents differ from one family to another. Every parent's context is unique, and so the challenges of parenthood that we face are unique too, and no one can offer us a recipe to deal with those challenges.

But one thing is certain; the one universal truth of parenthood is the fact that we shape the faith of our children -- for better, or for worse -- this is what I like to call the missional dimension of the family. There is a very real sense in which every parent is a missionary (of the most precious kind) to their children.

The first step in celebrating biblical parenthood is to understand and accept (even embrace) the influence we have on our children's spiritual formation. Paul reminds Timothy that his faith is worth fanning into flame because of the fact that it has been handed down to him by his mother and grandmother (chiefly) and also by himself as his spiritual father.

Timothy's faith was no accident; it was the result of the example set by his mother (and grandmother). It arose from the fact that his mother helped to "acquaint" him with the scriptures from childhood and how he "learned" about faith from her (3:14-15).

We are missionaries, faith-shapers, to our children.

A final thought...

When Robert Ingersoll, the notorious sceptic, was in his heyday, two college students went to hear him lecture. As they walked down the street after the lecture, one said to the other, "Well, I guess he knocked the props out from under Christianity, didn't he?" The other said, "No, I don't think he did. Ingersoll did not explain my father's life, and until he can explain my father's life I will stand by my father's God."

Parents, please introduce your children to a God that even the greatest sceptics cannot undermine. Please live lives that show forth the glory of God for the sake of our children, for the sake of their faith, because we are the ones who will shape their faith -- by the grace of God and with his help. Let us be good missionaries, faith-shapers, to our children.

## 2014-10-23 - "Joshua makes the stakes clear"

Today's devotion is by LENTIKILE MASHOKO who serves the Mabopane congregation.

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*Now fear the LORD and serve him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your forefathers worshiped beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD. But if serving the LORD seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your forefathers served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you are living. But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD. (Joshua24:14-15)*

The book of Joshua is a story of how God led and protected the children of Israel who were surrounded by hostile nations. The book is totally Theocratic, in the midst of Monarchy, Aristocracy, Anarchy and so-called Democracy. It is the kingdom of God in its fullness: people depending on and trusting in His power to demonstrate his Love and Mercy. All the battles of Israel, were Yahweh's business, they had a mission to fulfil and God saw them through. It is a story of a commander of the army of Israel (Joshua) taking a role of a political, spiritual and moral leadership.

Joshua trusted in the power beyond himself. He allowed God to use him in His mission (Missio Dei), and he took his family with him.

It is indeed true to say "a family that prays together, stays together". The truth of the matter is that worship is not only a Sunday thing: it continues throughout the week, in our households. A Christian family carries a light, to lighten the world and to make it a better place throughout the week.

Joshua was a leader of the nation but he was also led his family. When he gave the nation a choice, he already knew that his family was with him in serving the Lord. It is obvious there were no debates in his family about this matter, God was the choice of Joshua's family. It is never easy to serve the people of God if our (family) devotional life is not in order.

How can we bring our families to be a family of prayer and devotion to God? The answer might be "we need to serve together as a family to touch lives, so that God will change lives". How do we introduce this? It is not simple, but we may begin to have family devotions and prayers together. This will lead us to serving in our church and community as a family.

My wife, Tumi, and I struggled for a long time with our devotional life together. I always go to bed early and wake up and Tumi is the opposite of that. She has her devotions at night, I have mine in the morning. So we decided to have Saturday evenings as family devotion time. We read the Word, share and pray together. This time has become the most important in the family, and has brought our family close together, for we grow spiritually and can serve God better. In Mission, our devotional life as a family must be a driving force to serve others. Otherwise we become so busy serving the kingdom and forgetting about the Master.

God has a Mission and He wants us and our families in this Mission.

The question is, Are you ready?



## 2014-10-24 - "A Mom and Granny who taught Scripture"

*Our devotion is by GLEN CRAIG who is a retired but still very active minister.*

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*"But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." (2Timothy3:14-15)*

Timothy had a Mom and Granny who taught him Scripture. His Mom was Eunice and his Granny was Lois. (2Tim1:5) Paul urges his protege, Timothy, to continue in his growth in the Spirit that he had inherited from his Granny and his Mom.

Ever since I can remember, I attended Sunday School at Trinity in Grahamstown. I loved Sunday School. I loved the sand trays and the choruses we sang. Quite honestly, I don't really remember much of what I was taught, BUT I well remember that my Sunday School Teachers loved Jesus, and so I learnt to love Him too. My Teachers were Mrs Monica McRobert (the Minister's wife) and my own Mother. I believe that the seeds of faith were sown in my life in those early years.

So Paul writes to Timothy: "continue in what you have learned ... because you KNOW those from whom you learned it." Paul also writes: "I know Him whom I have believed". II Tim 1:12.

There is a big difference between knowing about someone and KNOWing someone. The fundamental importance of Scripture is that Scripture helps us to know God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit: as Father, as Saviour, as Helper.

Even an Atheist can know everything about God from Scripture, but only the Believer - the Christian, will know God. When Paul was writing to Timothy, there was no New Testament. The Scripture he was referring to was the Hebrew Scripture - what we call the Old Testament. It was the only Scripture the early Church had.

I pray that you and I, as we continue to study the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments may continue to grow not only in our knowledge of God, but that through Jesus and the promised help of the Holy Spirit, we may KNOW Him better and grow in our relationship with Him. Thus grow, too, in our relationship with one another and strangely enough, with all His creation.

This means that as Parents, Grandparents, Elders, Ministers, Teachers, Mentors, we can only help those who look to us, if we KNOW Him, in whom we believe.

Someone once said: "I would rather see a sermon than hear one any day." Those, for whom we are responsible, need to see the Lord Jesus Christ in us - not just hear about Him from us. Jesus says: "By their fruits you will know them." James, in his Letter, writes: : "Faith without works is dead."

When we KNOW Him and are blessed by that relationship, we, in turn, become a blessing to our children and grandchildren, that they, too, may KNOW Him.

## 2014-10-25 - "Surround yourself with reminders"

*Our devotion is by GLYNIS GOYNS who serves St Marks in Moregloed and also works for the South African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI).*

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*Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. 6 These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. 7 Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. 8 Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. 9 Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:4-9)*

I'm not sure why, but Deuteronomy 6:4-9 always raises a picture in my mind of God walking with Adam and Eve in the cool of evening, chatting in the beauty of the garden about the joy of the day past, and anticipating the wonder of a new day to come... God present in the most natural way. I have the same sense of wonder about the normal everyday manner in Deuteronomy of bringing our children into God's presence.

An early childhood memory of mine is of my mother, widowed in her thirties, taking my brother, sister and I walking in the veld. She would find a sunny spot with a view, sit us on a rock or tree stump, and put her finger to her lips: "How many silent sounds can you collect?" she would whisper. Eyes alight with a deep sense of mystery, we'd listen for the sound of the wind stirring the grass; a beetle's wings whirring in the heat; a distant bird call; or our own hearts beating. We would hear God's voice shaping His creation as we listened to the hushed tones and long silences of peace in the afternoon. Without realising it, my mother was giving us a precious gift... to listen to the silences, to the meaning behind the sounds, to the unspoken. Such a gift is at the heart of love, the simple willingness in everyday life and ordinary surroundings to slow down, to be still, and to know the mystery and wonder of the Creator God; to hear the unspoken cry of a brother or sister, the dejection in a sagging head, the loneliness of a single tear tracking through the dirt on a grimy cheek, the confusion of a heart unable to express its deepest feelings.

That memory is imprinted in my very being, part of who I am. As we share the teachings of the Almighty and His precious Son with our children in the most ordinary ways as an intrinsic part of everyday life, so those lessons become an integral part of their identity rather than a distant wisdom to which they turn on the odd occasion when they're out of their depth. Children raised on the Word of God as they sit and as they walk along the road, when they lie down and when they get up come to know that this is the very essence of life itself.

Is this not the heart of mission in the home as one generation after another passes on the wondrous ability to "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One" and the understanding that there is no other way but to love Him "with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength"?

## 2014-10-26 - "Think about the next generation"

*Our devotion is by GLYNIS GOYNS who serves St Marks in Moregloed and also works for the South African Faith Communities' Environment Institute (SAFCEI).*

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*I will open my mouth in parables, I will utter hidden things, things from of old--  
3 what we have heard and known, what our fathers have told us.  
4 We will not hide them from their children; we will tell the next generation  
the praiseworthy deeds of the LORD, his power, and the wonders he has done.  
5 He decreed statutes for Jacob and established the law in Israel,  
which he commanded our forefathers to teach their children,  
6 so the next generation would know them, even the children yet to be born,  
and they in turn would tell their children. 7 Then they would put their trust in God  
and would not forget his deeds but would keep his commands. (Psalms78:2-7)*

Ps 78:4 is a commitment not to hide God's power and his amazing actions from their children, not ours. (The "their" is "our fathers") What does this mean? The generation gap and cultural divide are overturned.

The truth is that we're much better at living in the certainties of the present, and looking back to what is known and proven in the past than we are at envisioning and embracing the unexplored in the future. Yet we're called to wrap the message of the gospel, to package the teachings of God's Word so "the next generation" and "even the children yet to be born" will "know them" and, in turn, will "tell their children". Mission isn't only reaching out across geographic space from one nation to another; it's stretching across the vast reaches of time, bringing God's love and justice to all creation.

If we're to be effective ambassadors for God far into the distant reaches of time, we need to be more adventurous about the unknown and the unfamiliar. We need to picture the church in 50 years' time and far beyond. We need to be creative in how we shape the message so it can be received and understood by those who speak a different language and live in a different context, or those who respond to a different style of worship, but without losing the essence of the message spoken by a God who is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow.

I've just completed a three month journey with a group of confirmation candidates, culminating in a weekend camp. The Apostles' Creed formed the solid basis of all we discussed along the way. At the weekend camp, the group was challenged in the words of Eugene Peterson contemplating Jeremiah 12:5 to "run with the horses" as they participated in a horse trail in the Magaliesburg. They then physically explored the nature of faith and journey out of darkness into light as they went on a twilight bat cave adventure at Sterkfontein. Finally, they were challenged to explore their own faith as they wrote a personal, modern creed to explain the essence of their belief to their contemporaries. The Creed-writing was a thought provoking exercise and while some might find issues for theological debate in the content of these personal creeds, this was how they understood their commitment in faith as teenagers ready to share their beliefs with their friends in a modern context.

"Father, help us to be creative in how we pass on your message of hope so our children may be inspired to carry the torch of faith in the darkness with strength and courage, and to engage with the unexplored, passing your teachings on to future generations far into the distant reaches of time as they follow the way of Jesus in the power of the Spirit. Amen

## 2014-10-27 - "Children be open and teachable."

*Our devotion is by GLEN CRAIG who is a retired but still very active minister.*

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*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline. Listen, my son, to your father's instruction and do not forsake your mother's teaching. They will be a garland to grace your head and a chain to adorn your neck. (Proverbs1:7-9)*

Isaiah and then Jesus later on, warns us about those who "hear and hear not, see and see not." (Isa6:9 & Mt.13:13-14) This is not only a problem for children but for all of us who do not listen properly and do not learn from what we hear or see.

In Psalm 2:10 we read: "Therefore, you kings, be wise". There are a number of Hebrew words for be wise. This one implies be teachable. Even kings, even politicians, even Ministers, even parents need to be teachable. Even in our old age, I believe we need to be teachable. And as we who are older remain teachable, so those whom we mentor, whom we train, for whom we are responsible, also become teachable. This means that if our children or grandchildren, or any other young people, are to learn from or through us, we have to be a good example -- a role model of one, who him/herself is teachable. Then, also, if young people are to learn from us, they will need to trust us. We will need to be their friends to whom they can relate.

The Apostle Paul, writing to the Church at Ephesus about children obeying their parents, continues: "Fathers do not exasperate your children but bring them up in the training and instruction of the LORD." Eph 6:4.

The best thing you can be for your children is a friend and role model.

It is also true that as we encourage our children/grandchildren to trust us, so we point them to trust in the Lord Jesus; to trust also in God as their Heavenly Father. It really is a tremendous responsibility, but remember that Jesus said: "Unless you become as a little child, you cannot enter the Kingdom of Heaven", and again when pointing to a little child: "of such is the Kingdom of Heaven." Yes, if we are to teach and be a role model for those younger than ourselves, we (the older folk) must have that trust and wonder of a little child.

I have focussed in this study on Fatherhood; being a Father and Grandad. Let me turn now to the Mother. Our text says: "do not forsake your mother's teaching" Prov 1:8. Of course, the same principles apply. However, the book of Proverbs has a wonderful affirmation for Mothers, who have this relationship with their children. Right at the end Prov 31:28 "Her children arise and call her blessed."

How wonderful for Parents or Grandparents to have the kind of relationship with their children or grandchildren where they honour them and call them blessed, for all they have learnt from them -- not only listening, but also seeing.

## 2014-10-28 - "God blesses families"

*Our devotion is by ALAN MAKER, one of our retired but still very active ministers.*

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*For I will pour water on the thirsty land,  
and streams on the dry ground;*

*I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring,  
and my blessing on your descendants.*

*4 They will spring up like grass in a meadow,  
like poplar trees by flowing streams. (Isaiah44:3-5)*

The symbol of the old South Africa was "separateness". When we became a democracy we had to find new ones -- a new flag and a new national anthem. Desmond Tutu came up with the symbol "a rainbow nation". That can be interpreted as a family of many different colours, opinions, histories, and culture. The "family" is an excellent symbol for our new dispensation.

Some years ago the Presbyterian Church embarked on a two year evangelism programme for which the chosen symbol was "the family". The critics had a field day. The denomination was accused of returning to an exclusivism, separateness.

A true family, however, is open and not closed. We have three daughters. One of the delights over the years has been the people they have brought into our home. Long after they had all left to celebrate their independence, one of our daughters was coming from England to visit us. I bumped into an old friend of hers, told her the news, and her immediate response was, "Please wont you make a potjie as you used to do?" She remembered a warm, welcoming home.

We are families at every level -- our closest kin, a church family, a family of rainbow dimension in our country, and a family of nations in the United Nations.

Families are not perfect. In his book "Reaching Out" Henri Nouwen discusses the movements of the spiritual life. In one section he deals with families in which he makes the point that within families we need to move from hostility to hospitality. We can all testify to hostility within our own families. That is inevitable. The challenge is not to allow the hostility to separate us but to work towards reconciliation. The only reason the prodigal son came home was he knew he could.

God, the Creator, wants us to work for reconciliation, peace, and harmony in all the families to which we belong. St. Paul told us that Jesus broke down the dividing walls of hostility between traditional enemies. We can be sure that any and every effort towards harmony will receive God's blessing.

## 2014-10-29 - "Our Commanding Officer's final instructions"

*We've concluded our thoughts on passing faith on to the next generation...*

*We've looked at Mission as SERVICE, TRANSFORMATION, SHARING and BEQUEATHING.*

*Our last three devotions will focus on the great calls to Mission that we find in Scripture.*

*Our devotion today is by ALAN MAKER, one of our retired (but still very active) ministers.*

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*Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew28:18-20)*

The second Creation Story in Genesis centres God's action in a garden. We spend too much time arguing about whether it happened neglecting to try to extract the meaning. Paradise is the place of what AN Whitehead, the British philosopher, called the "manifold harmonies" -- God at peace with humanity, humanity with nature, and nature with God.

The forbidden tree was the one opening the way to the knowledge of good and evil, a Hebrew idiom for everything. If you know everything, you are God. Humanity, unhappy with being a creature, wants to be the creator. Something very similar is told in the story of the tower of Babel. That desire leads to disharmony. The garden is destroyed. The Bible is the story of God's trying to get humanity back into the garden.

God called Abraham to found a people to be be God's instrument to restore harmony to the world. In Genesis 12:3 we read: "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing". God gave the people a specific task -- to be a blessing to all humanity.

Some within Israel interpreted the blessing as an end in itself. They created an exclusive and nationalistic attitude. Within Israel great souls, the prophets and especially Isaiah, held fast to the wider vision. They saw the larger truth and dared to proclaim it.

Jesus came preaching the kingdom, another word for the garden. In that kingdom God's will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Perfect harmony would be restored. Jesus' teaching so offended the leaders of his time they executed him but God had the last word by raising him from the dead. This gave the assurance good will triumph over evil, justice over injustice, love over hate, and life over death. That is the good news Jesus handed on to the church (his followers) the task of working with God to make that kingdom a reality.

## 2014-10-30 - "We have the power..."

*Our devotion is by BOET VAN SCHALKWYK who is seconded to the International Sailors' Society of Southern Africa.*

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*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth. (Acts1:8)*

Do you remember, and if not, do you remember learning about those amazing speeches that Sir Winston Churchill made during the Second World War - when he encouraged and urged a brave but war weary British nation onwards. The Nazi threat of invasion endangered their continuing existence - challenging their standards and values and principles and all their beliefs.

Do you remember Churchill saying ".....we shall fight with growing confidence and growing strength in the air, we shall defend our island, whatever the cost may be. We shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; ..... we shall never surrender.....!"

It is said that immediately after giving the speech, Churchill put his face into his hands and wept ..... "yes" he said, "we'll fight them in the air and we'll fight them in the streets and we'll fight them everywhere ..... but we have no ammunition to fight them with, except the butt ends of broken beer bottles because that's jolly well all we've got!"

I understand that it was after that, that he penned the now famous signal to the U.S. President.....

"Give us the tools and we'll do the job!"

My dear brother and sister, we the Church of our Lord Jesus Christ hold in the core of our being the greatest Commission of all - see Mt. 28;18-20 ..... and all too often we feel a little overwhelmed and ask "But HOW Lord?" "With WHAT Lord?" "When Lord?" "I don't know if I can Lord!"..... and that calm, sweet voice comes through "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to ME - go therefore.....fear not for I have redeemed you, I have called you by name.... and I AM THE WAY ,THE TRUTH and THE LIFE".

Our response "Give us the tools and we'll do the job!"

And Jesus says "It is Done....."you will receive power when the Holy Spirit [all the Gifts and the Fruit of the Spirit] comes on you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth ....and be assured on my word of honour - I will be with you until the end of the age." [through every 'joy' and every 'challenge']

We have the POWER of the HOLY SPIRIT ....omnipotent omniscient omnipresent all loving eternal God .....to fulfill THE TASK.

Let's join hands and let's Know - Grow - and Go!

## 2014-10-31 - "Salt and Light"

*Our devotion is by BOET VAN SCHALKWYK who is seconded to the International Sailors' Society of Southern Africa.*

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*You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:13-16)*

We're called 'salt' and 'light' for the Glory of God.

Of salt and of light we have heard often - their source, effect, constitution, value and abilities/uses - but what are we to do with the "being salt and light"?

What/who are we? We are created in God's image to be His disciples [the objects of His love and blessings] i.e. He is our source who gives us our value [incredible value], constitution [gifts and the Fruit of the Holy Spirit] and uses [our mission and a task to do].

Who is God? - well we can be elevated into the glorious realms of discovering Alpha and Omega, Abba and YHWH - But.... Who is God to YOU and ME? According to Psalm 121:5 the Lord is your Keeper - "keepers" referred to keepers of the sheep i.e. Shepherds; keepers of the household; keepers of the city gates - all were special people. The keeper of the city gate would be the best Centurion in the Legion - best at battle tactics, best at combat, marksmanship, weaponry and most loyal. He was in the high pay grade category because of his huge responsibilities e.g. If an intruder came into the city on his watch and killed a citizen, the Centurion would pay with his life. So with the best man as their keeper the citizens felt safe.

Yet the Lord said that such a keeper couldn't be good enough when it came to His sons and daughters. Good as that centurion may be, He couldn't risk the well-being of His loved ones to a keeper who may fail. He had to have a more competent keeper One who was omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent and all loving. "Therefore," proclaimed our Lord. "I will be their Keeper".

And what's more any other keeper will one day die, and then what would our lot be? No, as the Psalmist says, "the Lord is your Keeper both now and for ever more".

AND THAT'S MY, AND THAT'S YOUR KEEPER.

Therefore we can "let our light shine before others so that they may see our good deeds and glorify our Father in Heaven". For the chief purpose of mankind is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever. (1 Cor. 10:31, Ps. 73: 24-26, Jn. 17:22-24).

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That brings us to the end of our Month of Mission Devotions. A big thank you to all who have followed this series and A HUGE BIG THANK YOU to Andries Combrink, Jackie Barker, Chris Judelsohn, Brian Smith, Jaco Bester, James Gray, Sibusiso Zungu, Mukondi Ramulondi, George Marchinkowski, Lungile Mpetsheni, Lentikile Mashoko, Glynis Goyns, Glen Craig, Alan Maker and Boet van Schalkwyk who took time out of their busy-ness to bring their thoughtfulness and insights to this journey. I know I have grown in my understanding of Mission and the God who takes us on this adventure with Him.

SOLI DEO GLORIA - To Him alone be all the glory!